

HONOUR IN THE WORLD TO COME

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Introduction

Christians are constantly torn between this world and the world to come. Often times this struggle is most acute for the believer's identity and sense of self-worth. The values of the broad society of the first century, as with those of the twenty-first century society, are often at odds with those espoused for the Christian community. One's fidelity to Jesus can be a source of contention due to its exclusion of support for other competing social structures and mores. The author of Hebrews does not gloss over these differences but etches a deeper dividing line between them. Hebrews 3:7–4:13 is the first extended paraenesis directly focused on the intended audience. The wilderness generation of Israel at the entrance to the promised land is analogous to the situation of the audience. The audience must not "neglect so great a salvation" from God in order to find honour in this world (2:3 NRSV). Rather, they are to "bear the abuse [Jesus] endured" (13:13) in order to enter God's eschatological rest (4:1–3) and achieve honour in "the [heavenly] city that is to come" (13:14).

The First Century Audience: Pelleus

Pelleus was on his way to his carpentry workshop¹ when his friend, Orpheus, ran towards him with a look of excitement. A letter had arrived from Apollos.² It was to be read that night at their

¹ The first century audience was probably comprised of many who were sufficiently educated to understand the complex Greek used by the author of Hebrews (David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000], 8). Some were also sufficiently wealthy to own land (Heb 10:34; DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 8).

² The authorship of Hebrews remains uncertain. Any conclusion is mere conjecture given the paucity of internal and external evidence. The masculine pronoun in Heb 11:32 at least indicates gender. There is no indication that the author is named in the New Testament. However, if one were to assume he was, there is less difficulty identifying Apollos as the author (Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC 11; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993], 21).

regular gathering of both Gentile and Jewish Christians³ before being shared with the other house churches in Rome.⁴ Pelleus's heart started to pound with anticipation. The community's situation had deteriorated even further since Apollos had left and Pelleus hoped Apollos's words would set their house church on a firm foundation once more.

The house church had started off strong enough. The gospel had come to Rome (Heb 13:24) prior to Claudius's expulsion of the Christian Jews and converts from Rome in 49 CE.⁵ Several house churches were formed which met after synagogue to learn about this Messiah, Jesus. Pelleus had been warned to not take heed of this new teaching. But the possibility of the Messiah having already come was too exceptional of a thought to bypass learning more. And the more Pelleus learned about Jesus, the more he found himself admiring this teacher from Galilee. The miracles and signs were wonderful to behold, validating the claims of the preachers; additionally, the prophecies and teachings resonated with the longing in Pelleus's heart for the renewed heaven and earth, free from his troublesome and oppressive experiences (2:3–4). Shortly thereafter, Pelleus's entire household was baptized, declaring Jesus as their Lord.

At first, the difference in social status of the believers⁶ was somewhat bothersome but had become of less consequence to Pelleus in recent years. After all, everyone was worshiping the same God and holding the same hope of a better future for the entire community. What is more, they all needed each other, for everyone had broken from their past social norms. The

³ It is inappropriate to assume the first century audience was comprised mainly of Hellenistic Jews due to the extensive use of cultic language and Old Testament citations from the Septuagint. Gentile Christians who had been part of the believing community would also have been well versed in the Old Testament and cultic themes (DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 4; see also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 25–26).

⁴ William L. Lane, *Hebrews* (WBC 47; 2 vols.; Dallas, Tex.: Word, Incorporated, 1991), liii. Any conclusion on the destination of Hebrews is tenuous, but the best evidence points to Rome, especially Heb 13:24 and the points of contact between Hebrews and Clement of Rome (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 29; Lane, *Hebrews*, lviii).

⁵ Lane, *Hebrews*, lviii, lxvi.

⁶ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 9.

Gentiles had rejected the pagan gods and institutions in favour of this Jewish Messiah.⁷ And the Jewish believers had rejected the synagogue's doubts of Jesus's claims to be the Son of God and, even worse, had acquiesced to commune with the Gentiles. The social backlash led to reproach, loss of status, imprisonment, shame, and loss of property (10:32–34).⁸ It was especially harsh for those returning to Rome after the expulsion who had to rebuild their lives with what few possessions they had remaining. The believers needed one another, particularly those in prison, often for daily sustenance.⁹

Pelleus had once owned his own carpentry shop with two slaves to support his business. But he had been labelled a subversive element of the community and business died off; eventually the rulers found an excuse to appropriate his assets. But the severest blow for Pelleus was the honour and status he lost in the broader society. After Pelleus had been imprisoned on false charges, many of his friends and business acquaintances left him to protect their own honour.¹⁰ They could not bear the vicarious shame of remaining in a relationship with a former convict. The house churches continued to be “the target of society's deviancy-control techniques, most notably shaming, which aimed at coercing the believers to return to a lifestyle that demonstrated their allegiance to the society's values and commitments.”¹¹ But the church had endured. Although his family was struggling to survive, Pelleus was thankful that he had been able to restart his carpentry business, even without the slaves he had to sell.

⁷ Since religious, social and political institutions were intertwined, denying the religious institutions “would have been considered antisocial and even subversive” (DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 12).

⁸ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 11–12.

⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰ B. M. Rapske, “Prison, Prisoner,” DNTB, electronic ed.

¹¹ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 13.

Now in the mid-60s,¹² however, a greater crisis had emerged and the commitment of many had started to wane. The potential for death, not just loss of status, was looming on the horizon for Pelleus and his community.¹³ After being expelled from the synagogues, some denied the Messiah in order to return since Judaism was offered some measure of tolerance and protection by the civic rulers that Christianity was not.¹⁴ Others were too closely tied with the pagan temple institutions in their day-to-day business and social affairs to ever completely let go and eventually returned to regain their status and wealth.¹⁵ Every deserter from the faith further undermined Pelleus's resolve to follow Jesus. Doubts about receiving the promised inheritance of the righteous had also crept into Pelleus's mind. He had given up much in hopes of gaining a better standing in God's kingdom.¹⁶ However that time had not yet come and he sometimes

¹² The dating of Hebrews is problematic. The lower limit is usually thought to be around 60 CE since the audience had been believers for a while (Heb 5:12; Lane, *Hebrews*, lxii). And, if the community lived in Rome, Claudius's edict of 49 CE is believed to be the trial the believers suffered early on (Heb 10:32–34; Lane, *Hebrews*, lxiv). Determining the upper level is more contentious. The fact that the author uses present tenses for the cultus is inconclusive to infer the priesthood was still functioning (Lane, *Hebrews*, lxiii). However, that the author does not mention the destruction of the temple in 70 CE is a noticeable gap given the emphasis on the earthly cultus (e.g. Heb 7:1–10:18; DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 20). Nonetheless, even this is inconclusive since the author is more concerned with the tabernacle in his exegesis of the Torah as the copy and shadow of the heavenly temple (Heb 8:5–6 quoting Exod 25:40). Although extremely tenuous, the use of Hebrews by Clement of Rome provides an upper limit of 96 CE (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 29).

¹³ “Reference to enslavement through the fear of death (2:15), to loss of heart (12:3), and to the fact that the audience had *not yet* contended to the point of bloodshed (12:4), climaxing a section summarizing the experience of men and women of faith who endured torture, flogging, banishment, chains, and execution (11:35–12:3), suggests that the situation now facing the community is more serious than the earlier one under Claudius” (Lane, *Hebrews*, lxvi).

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 9; DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 17.

¹⁵ J. R. C. Cousland, “Temples, Greco-Roman,” DNTB, electronic ed.

¹⁶ DeSilva does not see external persecution or internal subversion (either passive or active) as the main cause of the crisis; in DeSilva's more conservative estimation, the emphasis is on the loss of status (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 18). “Neither the threat of violent persecution nor a new attraction to Judaism motivates this apostasy, but rather the more pedestrian inability to live within the lower status that Christian associations had forced upon them, the less-than-dramatic (yet potent) desire once more to enjoy the goods and esteem of their society. The price was now more on their minds than the prize. In the eyes of society, and perhaps increasingly in the eyes of some believers, renouncing the ‘confession’ that had first alienated them from the dominant culture might be a step toward ‘recovery’” (Ibid., 19). In the final analysis, “[w]hether the root of the problem was the delay of the Parousia (10:25, 35–39), social ostracism and impending persecution (12:4; 13:13–14), or a general waning of enthusiasm and erosion of confidence (3:14; 10:35) is a matter for debate” (Lane, *Hebrews*, lxii).

wondered if it ever would.¹⁷ These doubts made Pelleus all the more eager to hear the letter from Apollos.

Several decades ago (5:12), Apollos had also heard the gospel from the same apostolic community that visited Pelleus's church (2:3). He had even spent a significant time with those following Paul.¹⁸ As the community started to meet, Apollos came when he was in Rome and would sometimes teach. He was an amazing orator, excelling at rhetoric. And his facility with Greek was astonishing to hear, even for someone who had always lived in the diaspora.¹⁹ It would have been no surprise if Apollos had studied in a gymnasium.²⁰ The community greatly admired and respected Apollos. It was with these thoughts in mind that Pelleus entered the upper room to hear Apollos's letter, hoping to find a resolution to the tension he felt between living as a citizen of an unseen heavenly kingdom and the earthly Rome.

Transformation of the First Century Audience

Jesus is the focus of the author of Hebrews from the beginning of his epistle. Using *synkrisis*, Jesus as son of God is greater than the angels (1:4) and Moses (3:3–6). These well respected figures in Scripture emphasize the greater honour and glory obtained by Jesus. Because of this, the audience is to continue in faith and take heed of the warning not to fall away from salvation (2:1–4). To shun Jesus's salvation (vv. 5–18) is a terrible insult given the position of honour Jesus holds. Positively, the audience shares in Jesus's inheritance should the audience accept his salvation, even though it is not currently experienced (3:6).

¹⁷ L. J. Kreitzer, "Parousia," DLNTD, electronic ed.

¹⁸ The author is not Paul based on the superior Greek (Lane, *Hebrews*, xlix). However, the concepts are so closely related to those in Paul's letters that it is likely the author was exposed to Paul's teachings in some manner (cf. Heb 13:23; DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 39; Lane, *Hebrews*, xlix), even though the rhetorical devices and arguments are not exactly the same.

¹⁹ Lane, *Hebrews*, xlix.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, l.

The passage under review, 3:7–4:13, follows with the author quoting Ps 95:7–11 (Heb 3:7–11) as a negative type to the first century audience.²¹ The audience should not follow the example of the generation of Israel which died in the wilderness due to their unbelief in God and his promise to lead them into the promised land (vv. 12–19). The consequence was that this generation was unable to realize God’s blessing. To avoid a similar fate, the first century audience must support one another to persevere in faith so as to enter in to God’s blessing at the end times (vv. 13–14). Through questions and answers (in the form of rhetorical questions), the author emphasizes that the wilderness generation rebelled and sinned against God, ultimately leading to God’s wrath and their destruction due to their unbelief (vv. 15–19). The first century audience is in a similar situation. They have also heard the good news like the wilderness generation (4:2)²² and now stand before God’s rest (the proverbial promised land; v. 1). Whereas the wilderness generation made the wrong choice and rebelled against God, the author’s audience has yet to decide how to proceed. As with the wilderness generation, it is only those who believe who receive God’s blessing (v. 3).

Rhetorically, it is expedient of and impactful for the author to compare his audience with an account of an historical people group in an analogous situation.²³ The first century audience was quite aware of the fate of the wilderness generation and the dishonour that generation bore. No one would want to bear such shame. The understanding the audience is to adopt is a strong negative view of the wilderness generation especially in light of the patronal relationship with God and the high esteem they are to place in Jesus and his office. Those God wished to bless

²¹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 215.

²² The object of the gospel preached may be the Messiah as far as that concept would have been understood by the wilderness generation (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 241). In any event, having faith that God would lead them to the promised blessings of the land and Mosaic covenant has parallels with having faith in the Messiah (i.e. the promised inheritance of God’s kingdom and new covenant).

²³ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 141.

rejected and scorned his offer by disbelieving his sincerity and ability. Should the first century audience have the same response to the blessing of Jesus’s salvation, the shame the audience is currently bearing by the pagan and non-believing Jewish communities would be insignificant compared to the shame they would have to endure in front of God’s judgment seat after the parousia. The thought of bearing the shame of the wilderness generation would be real for the first century audience once they realized that they are at the same crossroads, “[standing] at the very threshold of their inheritance.”²⁴ They would do whatever necessary to avoid such a fate.

Before exhorting his audience to persevere in their faith to enter God’s rest (v. 11), the author demonstrates that God’s rest is indeed still available for his audience (vv. 3–10). Using *gězērā šāwā*, the author links ἔργον of Ps 95:9 (94:9 LXX; Heb 3:9) and κατάπαυσις of Ps 95:11 (94:11 LXX; Heb 3:11; 4:3, 5) with ἔργον and καταπαύω of Gen 2:2 (LXX; Heb 4:4).²⁵

Although the wilderness generation was offered God’s rest at one point in time, it was always available from the beginning of creation. God’s rest also continues to be available for the first century audience. Since David exhorts his audience in Ps 95 to persevere in faith and obedience (vv. 7–8; Heb 3:7–8, 15; 4:7)—implying they will enter God’s rest in contrast to the wilderness generation (Ps 95:11; Heb 3:11; 4:3, 5)—after Joshua already led the nation of Israel into the promised land (Heb 4:8), God’s rest remains for the first century audience if they endure in faith (v. 9). In fact, God’s rest remains open in the perpetual “Today” until the eschaton (cf. 3:13–14).

What exactly is God’s rest? The author is consistent in his concept of what is being entered (εἰσερχομαι in 3:11, 18–19; 4:1, 3, 5–6, 10–11; 6:19–20; 9:12, 24).²⁶ The experience of

²⁴ Ibid., 147.

²⁵ Ibid., 165.

²⁶ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 162–163. Ellingworth identifies the debate among scholars that the author of Hebrews does not tie his uses of εἰσερχομαι so closely together so as to draw parallels between the object being entered; however, Ellingworth believes that the theological use is the same (*Hebrews*, 234–235). Gleason argues that God’s rest is drawing near to God to worship him and enjoy his blessings in contrast to being saved (Randall C.

this rest includes the glory (2:10) and perfection (10:14) to which Jesus brings the believer.²⁷

Although not yet fully experienced by believers, Jesus has entered as a forerunner on their behalf (6:20) into the Holy of Holies in heaven (9:11–12, 24). Currently unseen, the believer’s hope is also entering behind the curtain (6:19). The heavenly Holy of Holies is equivalent to the heavenly Jerusalem to which the believer comes (12:22; cf. 11:10, 16; 12:23–24). This rest is already a reality for God and those in the heavenly realm, yet it is only when the unshakable kingdom is revealed at the eschaton and all that does not belong in God’s kingdom is removed (12:27–28) when the believer actually enters God’s rest.²⁸

The author also emphasizes the immediacy and urgency of entering God’s rest (4:3). It would be a great waste should his audience fall away from God’s blessing since they are already entering God’s salvific rest.²⁹ All that is required is that they endure for just a little while longer

Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:11,” *BSac* 157 [2000]: 281–303). He notes that the wilderness generation repented afterwards and Moses was similarly punished for the same nature of sin, concluding that neither the wilderness generation nor Moses were excluded from salvation (*Ibid.*, 286–294). They were only excluded from worshiping God and experiencing his blessings in the promised land. Be that as it may, Gleason fails to account for the author’s use of *qal wāḥômer* (e.g. 2:1–4; 9:18–23; 10:28–29; 12:25) and that this analogy must not necessarily provide absolute equivalency. The situation and concept of ‘rest’ are similar, but the rest faced by the first century audience is of greater import. Even if the wilderness generation was not excluded from salvation, the first century audience may still very well face this more severe exclusion.

²⁷ Although the concept and meaning of τελειώσις and its verbal form, τελειόω, is context-dependent (Kenneth L. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Setting of the Sacrifice* [New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 69–70), in Hebrews it more often refers to obtaining the status required of one’s position (*Ibid.*, 66). In the case of Jesus, he obtains and perfectly fulfills his role as the savior of believers (2:10; 5:9; 7:28). Perfection for the believer entails having one’s conscience cleansed from sin and being fully sanctified as a worshiper and child of God (9:9, 14; 10:10, 14, 22; Lane, *Hebrews*, 200).

²⁸ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 162–163, 167. The author, quoting Hag 2:6, states that that which does not belong in God’s eschatological kingdom (i.e. sin and opposition to God’s sovereignty; Lane, *Hebrews*, 483) will be removed (Heb 12:27). This is the final and soteriological fulfillment of Haggai’s prophecy when God “will fill this house [his temple] with splendor” (2:7) and the “latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former...and in this place [God] will give prosperity” (v. 9).

²⁹ There is disagreement as to whether the present tense, εἰσερχόμεθα, should be taken as a true present (e.g. Lane, *Hebrews*, 99) or a future. It is the imperfective aspect of the present tense that should be emphasized in 4:3, balancing the audience’s present (i.e. the inaugurated new covenant) and future (i.e. God’s unshakable kingdom) realities (cf. vv. 11, 14; DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 155). Ellingworth essentially agrees, stating that the present tense should be considered “an emphatic equivalent of the future tense” which is common of verbs of movement (*Hebrews*, 246). This perspective is in accord with the analogy in Hebrews between the wilderness generation and the first century audience. The first century audience is still in a position to make a choice to enter God’s rest. This means that they are at the threshold of God’s rest just as the wilderness generation was at the

in order to actually enter (6:11–12; 10:23, 37). The author returns several times to the theme of enduring in faith for God’s promised blessing, praising such examples as Abraham (6:13–15) and other great leaders (chap. 11). The author also continues to highlight the certainty of God’s promise (4:14–16; 6:16–20; 10:19–22; 12:1–2). However, God’s wrath and judgment are equally certain (2:2–3; 6:4–8; 10:26–31; 12:25, 29).

The reason (γάρ in 4:12) to endure so that one may enter God’s rest and avoid falling short through disobedience (v. 11) is because no one is able to gain access through subterfuge. God sees and knows every aspect of a person’s being, especially the inmost nature revealed by the heart, which is the seat of one’s will and desires (v. 12; cf. 3:8, 10, 12, 15; 4:7; 8:10; 10:16, 22).³⁰ The author uses “soul from spirit” and “joints from marrow” as merisms to refer to the entire person and that God’s word reveals the inmost part of an individual.³¹ It is impossible for any person to hide a rebellious heart from God in order to illegally appropriate the blessing of the faithful. There are no aliens in God’s kingdom, only true citizens.

Although the author throughout his epistle moves between exhortation to achieve God’s blessings (e.g. 6:13–20)³² and warnings to avoid punishment (e.g. 6:1–12), the focus in 3:7–4:13 is on the latter. Poignantly, the author ends this section with a description of God’s power to investigate matters (4:12–13), instilling fear in his audience (cf. φοβέω in v. 1).³³ The shame of

threshold of the promised land before their rebellion. Neither had entered and fully realized God’s blessing at that point in time. Although there is an aspect of the ‘already and not yet’ in entering God’s rest (George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Nottingham, U.K.: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007], 959), the emphasis here is on the future ‘not yet.’

³⁰ S. H. Travis, “Psychology,” DLNTD, electronic ed.

³¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 113.

³² Avoiding shame is not the only motivator the author emphasizes. The first century audience has the opportunity to share in Jesus’s glory and honour, which far exceeds any honour received from their earthly society (3:14).

³³ God’s wrath is not so much in focus, although likely in the back of the author’s mind (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 261).

being “naked and laid bare” before God’s gaze as a violator of his law is itself distressing (v. 13).³⁴ But to then be found unfaithful to Jesus and condemned is unbearable.

The author stresses one particular strategy to maintain fidelity to Jesus: communal support (3:13). Living against the norms of society requires adoption of an alternate group identity; communal support is essential in order to reinforce and maintain a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs at odds with another community attempting to enforce their own.³⁵ The ‘honour and shame’ paradigm of the first century audience must shift from that of the broader society to that of the more insular Christian community.

The court of reputation must be limited to group members, who will support the group values in their grants of honor and censure (Plato *Cri.* 46C-47D). Including some suprasocial entity in this group (e.g., God, reason or nature) offsets the minority (and therefore deviant) status of the group’s opinion. The opinion of one’s fellow group members is thus fortified by and anchored in a higher court of reputation, whose judgments are of greater importance and more lasting consequence than the opinion of the disapproving majority or the dominant culture (Plato *Gorg.* 526D-527A; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.30.1; Sir 2:15–17; 23:18–19; Wis 2:12–3:5; 4:16–5:8; 4 Macc 13:3, 17; 17:5).³⁶

If the audience is able to view fidelity to Jesus as honourable and infidelity as shameful, they will not be tempted to reject their faith in order to adhere to an opposing definition of what is honourable.

While the author is concerned about individuals, his primary focus is on the community and the impact one subversive can have on the whole (e.g. 12:15).³⁷ Nevertheless, as opposed to society’s deviancy-control techniques, such as shaming, the church is to positively encourage each other in order to help individual’s maintain their fidelity to Jesus. Striving to enter God’s

³⁴ “[T]he term τετραηλισμένα, usually translated ‘laid bare’ or ‘exposed,’ refers more fully to the condemned criminal whose throat is exposed to the executioner’s blade” (DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 171).

³⁵ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 149.

³⁶ D. A. DeSilva, “Honor and Shame,” DNTB, electronic ed.

³⁷ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 221.

rest is a communal activity where members maintain their minority identity through mutual encouragement, worship (10:24–25) and acts of love and support (6:9–10; 13:3).³⁸

Pelleus

When Pelleus heard Ps 95, his mind immediately turned to the liturgy of the Sabbath synagogue services.³⁹ He did not want to be like that wilderness generation at Kadesh who, through unbelief, were unable to enter the promised land. Pelleus felt their shame as he thought about their abortive mission to conquer the promised land after God had denied entrance following their continuous rebellion (Num 14; cf. Heb 3:19). As Apollos described God's rest, Pelleus's heart quickened as he realized that his community was in the same position as the wilderness generation, possibly about to make their greatest error and rebel against God. How could he be unfaithful to one who is due greater honour than Moses? Jesus was the only one able to bring him into God's rest. The sense of shame became Pelleus's own as he played with the idea of what would happen should he return to his former life and no longer maintain fidelity to Jesus and be a part of the Christian community. As the shame welled up, the shame from the persecutors against the church shifted to marks of honour. Pelleus would gladly bear further reproach if it meant everlasting honour in God's kingdom.

As Pelleus continued to project himself in the position of the unfaithful, fear gripped his heart as he viewed the eschaton when he would have to give an accounting of his actions to God. The all-seeing eyes of God were too much to bear. Pelleus had been struck many times in prison and the sword was a ready tool of torture and persecution. Yet that did not compare with God's tool of justice, his word that penetrates to the heart and discerns the intent of every person.

³⁸ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 168–169.

³⁹ Lane, *Hebrews*, 85.

Pelleus's doubts about the parousia vanished as Apollos's letter was read and he remembered his first encounters with Jesus and the powerful signs that accompanied them.

The following day, Pelleus could still sense his renewed commitment to Jesus and the church. The community was meeting again in two days and Pelleus ensured that he and his family would be available to attend for prayer and worship. He also became more attentive as to who was in the crowds around him. Whenever he saw another Christian, he would ensure to greet them. Through these discussions, Pelleus would often be told of troubles throughout the community and the ongoing persecution. Pelleus would discuss these needs of other believers at the church gatherings. Often times, a collection was taken to help those in need. When Orpheus was imprisoned and had barely any food, Pelleus was able to bring food and greetings from the community and visit several times to sing hymns and study Scripture. Life was still difficult. The persecution did not cease but was increasing in severity. However, the sense of community within the church was palpable and the love Pelleus showed and was shown strengthened the bonds within the community. These opportunities to serve were constant reminders of Jesus's love and sacrifice for them. As time went on, Pelleus's commitment to Jesus strengthened, along with the other believers, and he knew God would give them honour and rest when Jesus returned.

Transformation of the Twenty-First Century Audience

As with Pelleus, my journey of faith has commenced strongly. I also rejected my past life as an unbeliever for the salvation which Jesus offers. In university, when I decided to focus on integrating with the Christian community, I lost the social support of my unbelieving friends with whom I would no longer go 'clubbing.' I became more isolated in my program while I spent more time within my small group, studying the Bible, helping the community, and socializing with other Christians.

Although I have never considered leaving Christianity, I have had friends who have denied Jesus as the Son of God in order to convert to Judaism. This has made me question and re-evaluate the foundations of my beliefs. In addition, temptations to compromise my faith have come up as time has gone by. Do I pay cash to avoid paying taxes? (The more money I have, the more successful and valuable I will appear to my friends and family.) Do I withhold facts when providing disclosure to the union so that the probability of winning my case at arbitration increases? (The more cases I win, the more competent my superiors in the government will believe me to be.) Do I plagiarize other scholars' ideas as my own in order to appear insightful and wise in front of my church and seminary peers?

Even without the explicit backlash and deviancy-control techniques experienced by Pelleus, Christians may still work for status and honour as the world defines it in opposition to the honour God provides to the faithful. When we disobey God's standards in order to gain status through wealth or prestige so that we are lauded by the world, we are trading God's honour for the world's and shame in front of Jesus. "If we allow ourselves to be drawn into grounding our self-respect in, and asking for acknowledgment of our worth based on, [*sic*] possessions, finances, or any other worldly criteria, we will drift into double-mindedness and be hobbled in efforts to walk after Christ."⁴⁰

When we ground our honour in Jesus, we will also need to respond to the world's reaction. Although imprisonment and death for Christians is a real outcome in other parts of the world, Christians living in Western societies are not often faced with this consequence. Nevertheless, even in Western societies, discrimination based on our religion still exists. My family moved to Austria in order to plant an evangelical Christian church in a predominantly

⁴⁰ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 176.

superstitious Roman Catholic district. When my parents were searching for a place to live, no one would rent an apartment to my family since we were Christians; they thought my father was involved in witchcraft as a church pastor. As an example of the love and support the author of Hebrews exhorts, a fellow believer who had the monetary resources purchased a house in the district in which we were to live and rented it to us. This fellow believer was not concerned with what the surrounding district thought about him by associating with us, but loved us enough to meet our needs. This is the example Pelleus shows when he visits Orpheus in prison, bringing him food and encouragement. The shame of associating with a prisoner is overcome by the love Pelleus feels and shows towards a fellow believer in need.

I too am called to focus my efforts on meeting God's standards and expectations—supporting my church through serving the junior youth fellowship and Sunday school classes, teaching Bible studies in my small group, working with integrity regardless of the impacts to my cases at arbitration, paying taxes due the government rather than stealing from them—even when it hampers my ability to increase my status and honour in the eyes of the world. I am more fearful of the shame I would bear in front of God. I am also persuaded more by the honour God will bestow on me as a faithful servant.

As I face these challenges, I am reminded of the wilderness generation and their rebellion against God. I have also heard the gospel and stand at the threshold of God's promised rest. I realize that I must endure every day and choose to follow God in order to finally enter God's rest in the eschaton. I must view being shamed before God for unbelief as worse than any other shame I may experience in this life. In addition, I am to fear being found in contempt of God's salvation, knowing that I cannot hide an unbelieving heart. These truths pierce my heart and mind as I contemplate Hebrews 3:7–4:13.

Yet this message is not meant just for me as an individual. The Christian community plays an essential role in supporting the believer's faith. In order to endure in our Christian walk, we must continue to reinforce the Christian community's mores in contrast to the world's. We must continue to meet in community for worship, to encourage one another with love, and practically meet each other's needs. These activities are critical in maintaining our minority identity and ultimately to enter God's rest. "The essential point is to value these experiences of God's power, presence, or voice so that they do not drift from our memories, and so that their impact does not fade over time. As we read the Scriptures, listen in prayer, participate in worship, or converse with fellow seekers of God, God's voice speaks inwardly to us."⁴¹ The "cultural lie that 'religion is a private matter'" must be dispelled.⁴² Believers function necessarily as a community in order to foster spiritual growth and discipleship. It is also the accountability believers experience in community that reinforces to whom we are ultimately accountable, the one and only God.

Conclusion

Fidelity to Jesus is the superordinate goal for all believers. Differences must be put aside in order to support and maintain the Christian community's mores. Future honour for the faithful—according to God's expectations—outshines any shame currently borne from the world. The failure of the wilderness generation is an example for all generations that unbelief in God, leading to the inability to enter his rest, is the ultimate shame we are to avoid. There is no fraudulent means of entering God's rest; we must all endure in genuine obedience and faith.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 177.

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