

Chapter 10

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.

Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their

minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised). And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your

goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Commentary:

{1} - For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

This verse contains two essential points. The first is a summation of the contrast between the law of Mt. Sinai and the New Testament gospel - the law was merely a shadow, a precursor, of the superior covenant. It was not the substance, and it was not intended to be permanent. The law was designed to point to the object that cast the shadow. The object is Christ, who brings with Himself all the "good things to come."

Paul drew this very comparison in his letter to the church at Colosse. He broke the law down to its basic components - do this, don't do that. And, he declared our freedom from those regulations.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” (Col. 2:16-17)

So, the law was not the "end of the road", it was just a signpost. The destination was Christian liberty.

The second point made in this verse is the inherent weakness of the law. While it was perfectly capable of condemning, it was without the power to save. The demanded repetition of the Old Covenant sacrifices made this patently obvious. But, just in case anyone missed it, the author spelled it out. The Levites' dedicated service and faithful observance of every commanded sacrifice "can

never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.”

This weakness of the Law is all the more obvious when it is compared to the strength exhibited in the previous passage –

“... but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Heb. 9:26b)

And a verse we haven't considered yet –

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Heb. 10:14)

In simplest terms, the contrast is:

“can never ... make the comers thereunto perfect”
versus
“perfected forever them that are sanctified”

Far from being able to save, the long parade of sacrificial animals, the repetitive slicing of throats, and the steady stream of blood were to drive the Jews to the single sacrifice that could offer genuine sanctification and eternal perfection.

{2} - For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

Each of the old covenant sacrifices was commanded on a repetitive basis. Why is that? To make this point - if any one of the sacrificial animals were valuable enough to actually cleanse someone's guilt and sin before God, then it would have been sufficient and there would be no need for additional blood. The offerings would have ceased.

But, every man is victim to his own nagging conscience and his own personal guilt before the law. So, something has to die - either a substitute or ourselves. God demands it and the conscience yearns for it. Loving ourselves, we cry out, "Don't kill me, kill something in my place!" Yet, no amount of sliced, bloody, burned animal carcasses could ever alleviate a man's sense of fearful judgment before God.

And, really, isn't that the heart of the matter? When we boil down the matter of self-sanctification, don't we always arrive at the question, "How much is

enough?" I mean, if our standing before the thrice-holy God was determined by our own merit, how would we know when we had accomplished a sufficient number of righteous works to please Him eternally? At what point could we say, "It is well with my soul"? How many destroyed animals is enough? How many acts of contrition? How many prayers and supplications? What exactly is the maximum number of offerings before we exceed the sufficient number and start wasting our goods on a salvation that's already been paid-off?

You can see the dilemma. If our salvation is up to us and our works of righteousness, then we can never rest. We will never be satisfied. Our conscience will always remind us of one more sin, one more short-falling, one more missed opportunity. And, we will stand ever guilty before the perfection of God.

That's why the single, all-sufficient substitutionary atonement of Christ is the only means by which our conscience can be calmed. Only by faith in His finished work can we rest, knowing that the Father is fully satisfied and will accept us wholly and completely.

"So," you ask, "If they were so completely futile, what was the point of all the dead animals?"

Good question. The author replied -

{3} - *But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.*

The purpose of the continual sacrifices was to point out the continual sin. Every time a man had to slit the neck of a goat, he was reminded of his own sinfulness. Every time the blood spattered on the ground, the man with the knife in his hand was reminded that this should have been his blood. Every time an ox was burned on the altar, the men knew that it was an innocent, perfect, valuable animal that was being destroyed on his account.

The very fact that they had to year-by-year, feast-by-feast, sabbath-by-sabbath remember to kill something forced them to remember that they, themselves, were guilty sinners. The animals were never meant to remove a man's guilt or atone for his sinfulness. It was to remind him that he was guilty and sinful, driving him to despair in his own ability to please God and guiding him toward the promised Messiah.

{4} - *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*

I like the way this guy writes. Plain and simple, eh? It is not possible for animal blood to accomplish sanctification or perfection. It cannot make a man spotless or pure and it cannot even alleviate his guilty conscience. Or, to say it as simply as our author does, it cannot take away sins.

But, that brings us face-to-face with our problem. We are guilty before God. We are sinners. We desperately need a sacrifice that actually DOES take away sins. Fortunately, that's exactly what God provided.

{5} - Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, *Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:*

The blood of bulls and goats flowed out as a reminder of sin's consequences. But, since they were ineffective as payment for sin's debt, Christ came into the world as a man, with a man's body.

Now, the phrase "sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not" begins the author's comments on Psalm 40:6-8 –

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my god; yea, thy law is within my heart."

{6} - *In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.*

That is an essential element in understanding the shift from the old to new covenants. At Sinai, God absolutely required constant sacrificial animals. Every feast, every high day, and every Sabbath, every sin and trespass required blood. But, the Israelites were stiff-necked people who adhered to the rudiments of the law without understanding the message interwoven throughout the legislation and ceremony. They refused to put away their false gods and idol worship. So, God grew weary of the very thing He required. And, it became not only ineffective, but repugnant to Him.

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them." (Isa 1:11-14)

Salvation could never come from the law because it had no ability to change men from within; it could not stoop to help the weary or fallen. And, ultimately God rejected the very sacrificial system that was at the heart of the whole covenant.

So, when Christ came He could not offer God anything that resembled the rejected animals. He could not bring the blood of goats or bulls and expect God to accept it as an adequate propitiation. God required a better body - the body of a perfect man, spotless and without blemish. He needed a better blood - not part of Adam's polluted strain. He needed a more willing sacrifice - not one that was thrust into the fire against its will or slit open as it fought for life.

He needed the willing, obedient Son - and nothing less.

{7} - Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

Notice the united will of the Triune God. Christ spoke of the Father manufacturing and formfitting a body appropriate for Him. By the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived and the child was brought forth. But, the Son was also willing to offer Himself as the final solution. "Lo," said He, "I come to do thy will, O God."

Why did Christ come to earth? What was His primary purpose? To do the Father's will.

"And he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." (John 8:29)

When He died, was it some grand fluke of random causes? Or, was it perfectly timed and personally executed by Christ in accordance with His mission? As He approached Calvary, Jesus prayed,

"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour." (John 12:27)

His willing and obedient death was the crowning achievement of His earthly ministry. It was His moment of greatest glory.

"Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (John 12:28)

Purchasing His people, redeeming His kinsmen, washing the sinners, claiming His bride - that is what He set out to accomplish. "I come to do thy will, O God."

But, there is a second point in this verse that we would be remiss to pass over - the parenthetical phrase "in the volume of the book it is written of me."

Christ's willing bodily sacrifice was predicted in the very book that demanded the slain animals. And, it was not simply hinted at in some dark, musty corners. It was declared throughout the volume of the book. Now, "the book" can only refer to the Old Testament books, since the New Testament had not been canonized when the Hebrews author was sending his letter. But, the Messiah is either openly declared, or foreshadowed and prefigured, in every book of the Old Testament. His passion and death were foretold centuries before the baby appeared in Bethlehem. The purpose and function of all God-breathed Scripture is to point to one Person, and in the volume of the book it is written of Him.

Okay, now the author is going to pull a couple quotes from the Psalm and use them to establish his theology.

{8-9} - Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

Follow the logic? If God has declared that He has no more pleasure in the old sacrificial system, offered by the law, but Christ responded to God's displeasure by offering up Himself, then it is obvious that God's acceptance of Christ's atoning work makes the first system completely obsolete. In establishing His covenant of salvation by the single sacrifice, Christ removed the useless system that God abhorred. The second did away with the first. The completely effective erased the totally ineffective.

And, exactly how effective was it?

{10} - By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The phrase "by the which will" is a reference to Christ's statement, "I come to do thy will." So, it is in accordance with the eternal, unchanging will of God that we be saved - sanctified, or set apart for God's exclusive use - by the single, satisfactory offering of the body God prepared for His Son. Now, if that's true (and it is!), then there was never any salvation available through the first covenant. Otherwise, that covenant would have actually saved someone and there would have been no need for the second. But, the second one was the good one, the right one, the true one, the effective one, and the eternally willed one.

By the way, the translator added the last two words of this verse ("for all") and they diminish the contrast the author has set up. He has shown the futility of the multiple, repetitive animal sacrifices and contrasted it to our accomplished redemption - "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once**."

One of the most glorious truths of our salvation is that Christ accomplished His Father's will completely and cried, "It is finished!" He actually did what He came here to do. And, it was of such infinite value that it would never need to be done a second time. Our sanctification - our separation from the world, our forgiveness of sin, and our escape from justifiable damnation - was accomplished mightily. Our salvation is secure; it is not up for debate or subject to the changing whim of men. It was accomplished completely by the Very One who did it - - -

Once!

{11} - *And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:*

Talk about your basic exercise in futility. The Old Covenant priest stood every day in the temple, burning the same type of sacrifice over and over. He cut the goat throats, broke the bird necks, severed the oxen pieces, waved the barley, raised the loaves, spilled the drink offerings --- but all for naught. In the end, God tired of them and they were never of any value in the pursuit of forgiveness or redemption.

But, here comes the contrast again -

{12} - *But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;*

There are several places in the Bible where the word "but" is strategically placed. This is one of those occurrences. The multiple efforts of the whole line of priests were in vain and the men and women of earth were in serious trouble before their Maker --- but!

"But, this man..." The man is Christ, the One who had a body prepared for Him so He could do the Father's will. That's the body that died once, and only once. He will never go through that agony again. The torment of that prepared body was a once-in-all-of-history event. And, it was inestimable, infinite value. Hence, He "offered one sacrifice for sin for ever."

And, having completed His mission, having pleased the Father and having utterly satisfied our sin debt, He sat down. He rose to the place of greatest power and prominence in the universe, the Father's right hand, and He took His position of authority and reward.

{13} - From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

As an indication of how effective and complete His work on earth was, Christ took His seat and waits expectantly for all His enemies to fall one by one until the final consummation of all things. The enemies that we fear most profoundly - death, sickness, pain, separation, punishment - were all defeated at Calvary and they are little more than a place for Christ to rest His feet. They may have bruised His heel, but He has crushed their head.

Men may mock this religion called "Christianity" and shake their fists chanting "we will not have this Christ rule over us." But, as Nebuchadnezzar declared when he rose from his madness –

"And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he (God) doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35)

Christ is sitting enthroned in eternal splendor, long-suffering in His patience, waiting for the moment of the final cataclysm when He will return to this earth in judgment. The two-edged sword from his mouth will slay the enemies and bring them low. And, every naysayer, every rebel, every heathen who would throw off the yolk of Christianity will yield to Him.

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength; even to Him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed." (Isa. 45:22-25)

"For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Rom. 14:12)

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:8-11)

Christ will reign over every enemy and they will all admit to His supreme authority, either willingly or unwillingly. Indeed, every enemy shall be made merely a footstool.

{14} - For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Now we get into the benefits of His single atonement. Let's hang out here for a bit, because this doctrine is at the very heart of the gospel. While the Old Covenant way of approaching God could never gain the slightest acceptance in the Heavenly courts, the New Covenant way totally and completely accomplished not only our redemption, but also our eternal perfection.

See, to take up residence in Heaven two things have to happen. First, our sins have to be paid for and wiped out. Christ most certainly did that. But, if that was all He did, then we are simply "neutral." We are no longer negatively "bad", but we are certainly not positively "good." And, to stand in the presence of God, we are required to be holy, righteous and just. So, the second thing that Christ did at Calvary was to attain the very perfection that we so desperately need. That perfection is imputed to us and we will stand before God accepted and beloved for the Son's sake.

But, that just scratches the surface of what went on up on that cross. Allow me to take a few moments and look at what Scripture says Christ accomplished for us as He hung on that tree.

- 1) He became the ultimate and final substitutionary sacrifice for sin. (Heb. 9:24-26)
- 2) Jesus Christ was a propitiatory sacrifice, offering Himself up to appease the wrath of God Almighty.

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” (Rom. 3:25)

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

- 3) Christ "redeemed" fallen sinners in His death. The Greek word translated "redemption" is "exagorazo" meaning "to buy out." It had the particular implication of buying a slave in order to set him free. The Greek word "lutro"

- translated "to redeem" – means, "to release in receipt of ransom" with the emphasis on the actual release of the slave, since his price was paid.

The Justice of God was not simply done away with when Christ died. God's Holy justice had to be satisfied. Meanwhile, sinners were bondslaves on the market of sin (John 8:34) and only the blood sacrifice of one who was valuable enough could purchase sinners and set them free. Then, God "might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

So, with the price of His own blood in His hand, Christ stood before the Justice and Righteousness of God and bought the guilty slaves - redeeming them.

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”
(Romans 3:23,24)

“Neither the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”
(Hebrews 9:12)

Notice, by the way, that the redemption Christ purchased was eternal redemption. Therefore, the redeemed one can never again be enslaved.

- 4) Christ was the ransom for guilty sinners. The ransom was the price actually paid to release someone from a debt. Dead sinners owed a debt they were incapable of paying. But, Christ was the sufficient price to pay that debt and buy back the property that was seized in the debt foreclosure.

“Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mat. 20:28)

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (1 Tim. 2:5-6)

- 5) Christ was on the cross making "reconciliation" between God and Man. He was bringing together two sides that had previously been at odds with each other. Not that God needed to be reconciled to man, but men were doomed to destruction if they were not reconciled to God.

“Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” (Heb. 2:17)

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. 5:18,19)

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His son, much more, being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.” (Rom. 5:10)

- 6) His death justified guilty sinners. That's a legal, or judicial, term used to indicate that a person has been declared righteous. It does not mean that the elect are necessarily made perfect in-and-of themselves. In other words, sinners are not made personally holy so that they may be accepted before the high court of Heaven. Instead, they are judicially "imputed" a righteousness they gained from Christ finished work. They are declared to be sinless despite their lives and obvious guilt. God looks on them as though they had never sinned because Christ bore their sins for them.

“He [God] shall see of the travail of His [Christ's] soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities.” (Isa. 53:11)

“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38-39)

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:23-24)

- 7) Christ sanctified these justified ones; meaning that He "set them apart" for the private use of a Holy God. The Greek term translated "sanctified" is "*hagiazō*," from the root "*hagios*," which is usually translated "holy." They both have the same central idea, which is to be "set apart" or "separated" by God for His exclusive purpose.

“By the which will [God's will] we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once (for all).” (Heb. 10:10)

“For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” (Heb. 2:11)

“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11)

8) And finally, in sanctifying these people, He perfected them, or made them complete, enabling them to stand before the righteous, holy God.

“For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”
(Heb. 10:14)

Now, if Christ has perfected forever those He separated unto God, then they can never again be held guilty!

Again, this is an imputed perfection. God held Christ as personally, legally guilty for the sins of the people for whom He was the vicarious sacrifice. God poured out His wrath for sin on His Son, instead of on the sinners who deserved it. Then, God held the redeemed sinners as personally, legally innocent! He sees them as sanctified and holy, completed and perfect, as a result of Christ's atoning work.

So, Scripture tells us that, on the cross, Christ:

- 1) Was the final substitutionary **sacrifice** for sin
- 2) Was the **propitiation** that satisfied the wrath of God
- 3) Paid the **redemption** price to purchase guilty sinners
- 4) Was the **ransom** price that was paid
- 5) Made **reconciliation** between God and man
- 6) **Justified** guilty sinners, satisfying God's Holy Justice
- 7) **Sanctified** those people, or set them apart as holy
- 8) **Perfected forever** those whom He bought, justified and sanctified.

And, by Christ's own declaration on the cross, "It is finished!" He actually accomplished all these things in his death and resurrection. No one can hinder or halt the ongoing effects of His work.

That, my friends, is what it is to be "saved." He saved us and we are the recipients of his astounding grace. Now, with that complete redemption in mind, let's return to the text at hand.

{ 15a } - Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us:

Another undeniable proof of Christ's superiority lays in the advent of the Holy Spirit. If it had not been for Christ's work, the Spirit would never have come to take up residence in individual people (John 7:39, 16:7). The very fact that the Spirit has indwelt us, evidenced by our faith and hope in Christ, proves that God

accepted His work. God responded to Christ's prayer and sent the comforter. The once uninhabitable tabernacles of flesh have become the living home of the Spirit of God. We have been cleansed from our unrighteousness and the stronger man has thrown out the enemies that once controlled us (Luke 11:21-22).

That indwelling Spirit draws us to the things of God and quickens our minds and hearts to respond to the commands of our Creator. That powerful conversion, and the Spirit that would drive it, was promised back in Jeremiah 31, which the writer referred to yet again.

{15b-17} - ... for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Unlike the tablets of stone that stood unbending before the conscience of men but could not affect any inward change, God promised Jeremiah that when the New Covenant was implemented He would write His words and will inside His redeemed people, creating change from the depths of their inner being. He would write it on their minds so that they would remember it, study it and obey it, but He also would write it on their hearts that they would learn to love it.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit. But, it's also necessary to ask the question, "Wait, Jim. Isn't this a bit of a dichotomy? Isn't God writing the very law into us that He says was superceded by the New Covenant?"

Good question. Thanks for asking.

Actually, Jesus answered that question for us. Is it the Sinaitic law that the Holy Ghost will remind us of? Is that the "law of God" which is written on our hearts and minds? Or, is it a newer, higher standard in keeping with the Covenant and sacrifice that brought it about in the first place? Jesus responded -

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)

There's our first clue. The Holy Spirit will remind us of Christ's words and Christ's teachings. He shall operate in Christ's authority ("in my name"), not in the power of Sinai. But wait, there's more -

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:" (John 15:26)

The Spirit of God will testify of Christ and His finished work of redemption. It will not drive us back to the Old Covenant or the law that could not redeem. After all, the Spirit of truth will only speak of Christ - Who is the truth.

Keep going, we're not done yet –

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” (John 16:13-14)

The Holy Spirit will serve to glorify Christ. And, he will not speak of Himself – under His own inspiration. He will receive from the bounty of Christ and reveal it to the redeemed.

Let me pull all these points together. The Hebrews author reached back into Jeremiah and pointed to the promise of an inward possession of God's words and law. He concluded that the Holy Spirit, given in response to Christ's sacrifice, was the fulfillment of that promise. The very fact that the promised result has occurred - the advent of the Spirit - proves that the rest of the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah has also come into effect, pushing the Old Covenant out of the way.

And, I contend on the basis of Christ's words that the law that is written on our hearts is not the law spelled out at Sinai, but the law of Christ, based in love and not methodical performance. Inasmuch as Jesus is God, it is most assuredly God's law written within us. After all, isn't that Paul's whole point in Galatians 3:2-3?

“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”

If the works of the law never brought the Spirit to Israel, but the faith of Christ did, then it's folly to think that the selfsame Spirit would lead believers to keep the old law that requires empty, ineffective acts of the flesh.

No, we are not made perfect by the flesh. We are perfected in the one sacrifice of our Lord who perfected us forever. His righteousness is credited to our account and our sinfulness is remitted.

An Israelological nugget – The New Covenant, with its attendant blessings, was first promised to Israel (Jer. 31). Christ ushered in the New Covenant by His death and resurrection. The believing remnant of Israel received the promised indwelling of the Spirit of God at Pentecost. Soon after, the promised Spirit drew out Gentiles and brought them under the covenant's blessing.

However, those facts do not preclude a future national restoration of Israel and the forgiveness of Israel's sin and rebellion - the complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises God swore on Himself. Just as the New Covenant was originally Israel's, based on the promises God made to the forefathers, the fulfillment of the covenant will only be complete when Israel receives every last detail. Then truly, Jeremiah's words will come to fruition in the people who were the original recipients of the promise –

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

{ 18 } - Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

And, that's why we can no longer return to the weak, beggarly elements of the law. They require continual sacrifice. But, such fleshly effort is of no value. Once our sins are done away with, cast as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103;12), there is no need for further cleansing. Any attempt to sacrifice more, or pay some additional price, is tantamount to saying that Christ's work was ineffectual or of limited value.

It was done once. There is no necessity for further payment. The debt is paid in full and our redemption is eternally secure.

{ 19-20 } - Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh:

This is a powerful statement. It pulled the rug out from under 1400 years of Old Covenant teaching about approaching God. To briefly review what we've studied in previous verses, the average Israelite was never, never allowed to enter the tabernacle where the Levites served day and night. And, none of the Levites were ever allowed into the Holiest Place where only the high priest could enter. As well, the high priest could not go into God's presence whenever he felt like it. He could only enter on the Feast of Atonement, he had to be dressed in the full priestly regalia and he had to have a blood sacrifice in his hand. Any other man who entered any other way at any other time would be killed instantly. The common people waited outside, hoping that God would accept this year's offering and bless them (or, at very least not kill them) for another year.

So, for the Hebrews' author to declare that we should enter, not just timidly or haltingly, but boldly (!) into the Holiest Place was a startling admonition! The way had been opened and established by the blood of Christ.

But, notice yet another contrast. Where the Old Covenant priests had to enter with death on their hands (the blood of destroyed animals), the true pathway into God's presence was inaugurated by the resurrection and eternal life of our High Priest. Where the death of goats and bulls could never atone for sin and would only lead to judgment and separation under the law, the death and new life of Christ has "perfected forever" those whom He redeemed and leads to eternal life in the light of God's glory.

Countless, continuous deaths only accomplished death. But, one life has accomplished eternal life for millions.

The Holiest Place was separated from the rest of the tabernacle by a heavy curtain, or veil, which only the High Priest was allowed to pass through –

“And thou shalt rear up the tabernacle according to the fashion thereof which was shewed thee in the mount. And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testimony: and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy.” (Ex.26:30-33)

This beautiful curtain, covered with angelic images, stood intact for hundreds of years, keeping the Ark of Covenant, where God's glory descended, separate from the rest of the Holy Place. When Solomon's temple was erected, he formed another veil after the same pattern and hung before the Holiest Place (2 Chron. 3:14). That veil was hanging in the rebuilt temple of Herod when Jesus was nailed to the cross. I'll let Matthew recount what happened next –

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;” (Mat.27:50-51)

When the Spirit of Christ exited His mortal tabernacle, the veil that had always separated common folk from the place where God communed with men was ripped in half from the top to the bottom. So, the Hebrews' author interpreted that parallel to mean that the temple veil was a symbol of Christ's flesh, which stood between God and men. When God tore His flesh as punishment for our sins, the way into the Holiest Place of Heaven - of which the Holiest Place in the tabernacle was a type - was made manifest for all that enter in by faith in Christ.

By the single, substitutionary death of Christ we are "*perfected forever*," consecrated and set apart for God's exclusive use, and the way into our

Heavenly destiny is laid out before us. We, therefore, are invited to walk boldly into the throne room of Heaven to stand before the Eternal Father.

{21,22} - And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Since we are confident that we who are released from the bondage of the law still have a high priest who intercedes on our behalf, we are invited to enter God's presence with confidence. That's a difficult proposition for anyone who has truly faced his own unworthiness. We know we are sinners and we know we deserve to be cast aside. But, the way into "the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16) is ours by faith. Our personal value, self-esteem, or deeds of righteousness will only get us condemned. But, faith in the finished work of Christ grants us "full assurance."

Just as the high priest would consecrate the vessels and furniture that were used in the temple by sprinkling them with sacrificial blood, the shed blood of Calvary has consecrated our hearts and minds. And, just as the priests who served in the temple were required to first stop at the brass laver and clean themselves before they approached the altar (Exod. 30:18), our bodies are cleansed by the water that flowed from His side.

Ya' know, we who believe in the Sovereign Grace of God are often misunderstood by outsiders who haven't embraced this doctrine. I've been accused several times of being "brainwashed." Actually, I don't disagree with my detractors. I have been brainwashed. And, friends, I need my brain washed regularly with the Word of Life. I need my evil conscience sprinkled and consecrated by the blood of the Lamb. I need my sinful body washed in the water of new life. If it weren't for the cleansing God offers, I would die in my pollution. So, my prayer continues to be, "Lord, wash my brain. Cleanse my heart. Scrub my conscience. Raise this body to the resurrection of new life in Christ. Amen."

But, the author's point is "draw near." C'mon in! The way is open and you've been made ready. Draw near to your "Abba-Father."

{23} - Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).

The author is going to have more to say about faith in Chapter 11, but he wants us to know that faith is the key to our acceptance before God. And, our faith must be firm, rigorous, unbending. That's not always easy, is it? I know I don't

always feel particularly confident. My faith slips a bit around the edges. I need a firm hook to fasten my faith to and let me know it's going to be all right, even when I'm not all right.

"He is faithful that promised." That's the hook! I am not being saved on the basis of my ability to hang on to God. I am being saved based on God's ability to hang on to me! All the promises He decreed for His people will end up in hands of the ones He promised them to. Otherwise, God is not faithful. But, even if the whole world were to deny Him, it would not change the character of God.

"If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." (2 Tim. 2:13)

So, knowing that the One who provided His Son as a ransom is faithful to complete every word that He ever uttered, I can have confidence that I will be saved through that spilled blood. I can have faith that I will make it all the way to my eternal destination. I can believe every Word that Christ spoke, confident that the One who spoke it cannot deny Himself.

"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19)

In short, have faith in the faithful One.

{24} - *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:*

I can almost hear James speaking –

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." (Jam. 2:17)

Complete Christianity not only emphasizes our personal, individual salvation, but it is also concerned with the welfare of the whole body of Christ. After all, sacrificial love for each other is the hallmark of Christians.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love (agape) one to another." (John 13:35)

And, as this earthly pilgrimage gets tougher, we are to think of one another, consider each other's lives and needs, and encourage one another to keep up "the good fight."

Of course, those things can only take place if we commune together on a regular basis –

{25} - Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

We are spoiled these days. The early church gathered under the banner of Christ at risk of their own lives. They were torn apart by horses, thrown to hungry lions, and burned on stakes. They met in underground dungeons, catacombs of the dead, and secret rooms to avoid being killed. It would have been easy for them to decide that the risk was too great and quit meeting together. But, Christians long for fellowship. We desire the company of fellow believers so that we can build each other up, and have our faith rejuvenated. If anyone ever had a good excuse for skipping meetings, the early church did. But, the church grew and thrived under persecution. God had His Sovereign hand on them and stored up rewards in Heaven for every martyr.

Today, there are preachers on TV, people proclaiming Christ on radio, and gospel tracts littering the streets. We can pick up a Bible in every hotel room in the country. It's easier to take Christianity for granted. So, the admonition in this verse still stands. Though some give up and quit gathering in Christ's name, we should not be counted among them. We need each other. We need to lift each other and give each other strength. We need to exhort one another in the Word, and hold each other accountable to the faith.

And, rather than decrease the frequency and intensity of such exhortation, we need to increase it "as ye see the day approaching". Now, there's a phrase that will get people's eschatological blood boiling.

The Hebrews author did not spell out any particular eschatological view. But, "The Day of the Lord", the return of Christ and the wrath of God on all unrighteousness, is a very common Biblical concept. The New Testament writers lived with an expectation of Christ's return, and it permeated their writing. While they were not certain when He would return, they were confident that He would. They hoped, and wrote as if, it would be very soon, even in their lifetimes. That hope of Christ's return served as inspiration to live as Christians despite every opposition. Likewise, the author used their common knowledge of Christ's promised return as inspiration to continue their assemblies and not discount their importance.

Further evidence that the author is referring to the final Day of Judgment with the words "that day" is found in the next verse. As well, by establishing the consequences of "that day", the author began to set his next contrast.

{26} - For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

This is an interesting, and potentially confusing, verse. Unfortunately, it's also one of those out-of-context verses that the more judgmental sect of "holiness" preachers likes to scare their congregations with. According to their interpretation, a person can achieve a state of such personal sanctification that, even though their past sins were washed away at the point of conversion, they are ever-after responsible to live a life of holy perfection. One slip, one sin can negate the whole deal and, as we all know, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins".

Such errant theology leads to confusion. Either the congregants are deceived into thinking that their state of perfection, and hence their acceptance in Heaven, is up to them, or they recognize their own inability to be good enough and fall into an egocentric, hypocritical series of face-saving lies to cover their imperfections and gain acceptance from the church. Either way, big trouble awaits them.

Clearly, that is not what the Hebrews' author intended for this verse. Let's dissect it a bit.

The word "if" at the beginning indicates that it's a hypothetical statement. In other words, it isn't declaring a fact; it's positing a situation that, if true, would lead to definite consequences. The declarative version of this verse would read more like, "We WILL sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth". Fortunately, the sentence is not constructed that way.

The word "sin" appears twice in this verse. The first time, it is the Greek word "Hamartano," in the present participle tense. In other words, it's a repeated action. It means, "to continually miss the mark, not understanding the true end or scope of our lives, which is God." The second occurrence is the plural "sins", which is the Greek word "Hamartia." It has the meaning of an offense against God with the emphasis on the guilt of the offender.

So, if a person were to hear and comprehend the word of truth, but remain unchanged by it - constantly, continuously sinning without regard to the offense against God - the substitutionary death of Christ would not cover those sins. For those of you versed in the TULIP doctrines, this is proof of "Limited Atonement."

Nor, since Christ died once and once only for the sins of His people, will there be any additional sacrifice for those sins. The rebellious sinner can neither plead the blood of Calvary, nor can he expect some future reparation to cleanse and sanctify him.

Now, let's consider the "if." The author has used this form of argument before in this letter. He argues from the negative to establish the positive. Remember Hebrews 6:6? In light of his use of hypothetical statements, I don't believe the warning in this verse ought to be used to formulate any doctrine that teaches that men may receive a genuine understanding of the truth of God and yet continue

their rebellion. Inasmuch as true enlightenment comes only through the Spirit that indwells us - which the author insinuates by admitting that we "receive" knowledge of the truth - it would be antithetical to say that Spirit-filled men are in danger of rebellious sin.

Nevertheless, the point is valid and the warning instructive. God's word expects and demands a change of character and nature, away from self-willed acts of rebellion toward a life of obedience and sanctification. It becomes an axiomatic truth - IF we receive the knowledge of the truth and are yet capable of continuous offense before God, there is no sacrifice, past or future, which will expiate our guilt.

What would happen to such a person?

{27} - But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

That imagery - the fiery judgment against the enemies of God - is synonymous with "Day of the Lord" passages throughout Scripture. And, any person who would - or, could - reject the word of truth will fall into the judgment that is reserved for God's enemies.

Notice, by the way, that these continuous sinners who have ignored the word of truth are not deemed "fallen saints" or "forfeited elect," or any such language. They are counted among "the adversaries." They are enemies against the Holiness of God. Again, such language is never used of the redeemed elect. Hence, the hypothetical warning is instructional to the saints, but not a threat to their stability in Christ. It describes God's adversaries, not His chosen. Notice, as well, how closely these last two verses parallel the sentiments of Isaiah –

“Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.” (Isa. 26:10-11)

God has always seen humanity in two camps, saved and unsaved; redeemed and sinners; justified and guilty; the eternally joyful residents of Heaven and the enemies who will burn in the fiery indignation. There's no gray area and no middle ground.

Okay, back to "the day of the Lord." To get a sense of that "day," consider these verses:

“Thus saith the Lord GOD, An evil, an only evil, behold is come. An end is come, the end is come; it watcheth for thee, behold it is come...Now

will I shortly pour out My fury upon thee and accomplish Mine anger upon thee; and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity... and ye shall know that I am the LORD that smiteth... Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness; none of them shall remain, nor of their multitude, nor of any of theirs, neither shall there be wailing for them... They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready, but none goeth to the battle; for My wrath is upon all the multitude thereof... The sword is without and the pestilence and the famine within; he that is in the field shall die with the sword; and he that is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him. But, they that escape of them shall escape and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for iniquity. All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak as water. They shall also gird themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads. They shall cast their silver in the streets and their gold shall be removed; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD.” (Ezek. 7:5-19)

“Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests. Howl, ye ministers of the altar. Come lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God; for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God. Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD. Alas for the day of the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.” (Joel 1:13-15)

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble. For the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand. A day of darkness and of gloominess. A day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong. There hath not been ever the like, neither shall be anymore after it even to the years of many generations.” (Joel 2:1-2)

“Neither shall one thrust another, they shall walk every one in his path, and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city, they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses, they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them. The heavens shall tremble. The sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. And, the LORD shall utter His voice before His army; for His camp is very great; for He is strong that executeth His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible, and who can abide it?” (Joel 2:7-11)

“Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus, Wailing shall be in all streets and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! Alas! And they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skillful of lamentation to wailing. And in all vineyards shall be wailing; for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD. Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! To what end is it for you? The day of the LORD is darkness and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him. Or, went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:16-20)

“The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath, but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy; for He shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.” (Zeph.11:14-18)

Are you getting a feel for this? There are also references to that day in Zechariah, and Malachai. They reflect a similar message. The Day of the Lord is the day when God unleashes His anger and His wrath on the sinful people of this planet. He starts with Israel for their hardhearted refusal to follow Him, but His punishment encompasses all the inhabitants of this world for their mistreatment of His chosen and their unending perniciousness. It's a time of darkness, distress, fear and anguish. It's a time of torment at the hand of God. It's a time of judgment and punishment.

The New Testament picks up this theme-

“And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.” (Acts 2:19-20, quoting Joel 2:30)

John also saw this specific moment in his vision, but he added one crucial element to the mix. John not only saw the men of earth running to hide from the wrath of God, but –

“And I beheld when he (the angel) had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake. And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair,

and the moon became as blood. And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And, the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:12-17)

Jesus, the Lamb, takes part in this vengeful wrath. Take note of how complete the list of terrorized people is - kings, great men, rich men, chief captains, mighty men, every servant, every free man. That's a very extensive list, and it's most certainly John's intention to make sure that no one is left out. Absolutely everyone living on earth at this juncture in time will fall under the wrath not only of God, but of Christ, Himself.

"Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:34-36)

All of that was in the Hebrews author's mind when he warned of "the day approaching." The knowledge of God's impending judgment ought to inspire the body of Christ to meet, exhort, uphold and help one another, demonstrating the "fruit of the Spirit," which is "the earnest of our inheritance" –

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thes. 5:9)

Now, some will say, "How horrible! How can God, loving and merciful, execute such tremendous punishment on His people? I mean, they are His people, right? He made them, didn't He? And, they didn't know any better, did they? How can they be held accountable to stand before such a brutal outpouring of wrath?"

So, anticipating the objection, the author pointed out that God broadcast this same message for as long as He has dealt with mankind. For instance –

{28} - He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

That's right. It's in the Sinaitic law, black and white –

“At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.” (Deut. 17:6)

Any practicing Hebrew would know that law. And, the Proverbs clearly state –

“He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.” (Prov. 19:16)

And,

“Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.” (Prov. 13:13)

That's what I call "fair warning" - despise God's word and you'll die. Death under the Mosaic economy could be accomplished by the testimony of two or three other sinful men. That's all it took. Two or three other guys ganging up against you to tell of your evil deeds could get you stoned.

But, what if the witness against you wasn't a fallible man? What if it was One who knew your every thought and deed; every intention and every motive; every word and every missed opportunity. How guilty could that witness for the prosecution make you look? And what if the law you broke, the standard you rejected, and the person against whom you rebelled was God's own Son? How much worse is that offense than picking up sticks on the Sabbath?

{29} - *Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*

Notice the volatile language employed here. To rebel against the truth of God and ignore the one sacrifice for sin is to stomp God's only beloved Son into the ground under your pugnacious foot. It is tantamount to declaring that the blood of God, shed for the eternal cleansing of sinners, is itself a polluted, filthy, ineffective liquid of equal value with the slime of dead carcasses. Oh, but that's not all! To ignore and discount the death of Christ and the word of salvation is to hold the Holy Spirit in contempt. And, that, says Christ, is unforgivable.

“And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.” (Luke 12:10)

So, asked the author, how sore a punishment does such a person deserve? Is the wrath of God too much? Or, is it the only appropriate, inevitable response of

a Holy, Righteous, and Just God? God will defend His Son, His Word and His Spirit against every rebel who refuses to bend the knee.

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”
(Ps. 2:12)

And, that's how He's always been...

{30} - For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

The author reached back to the frightening words of Deuteronomy 32:35-43 –

“To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection. See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.” (Deut. 32:35-43)

The judgment of God is sure and certain. It is coming, said the author, and it ought to inspire believers to good works. But, no rebel will escape. No unrepentant sinner will be held guiltless before the consuming fire of God. "That day" is coming. It was coming when the author was writing, and it is coming still. God's worldwide fiery assault on the unbelieving rebels has yet to occur.

So, there's time - - - time for Christian charity; time to exhort and build up; time to meet and encourage the saints; time to tell the truth of the Gospel of grace; time to plead with sinners to repent and believe; time to declare with unwavering confidence the grace and severity of our God.

{31} - It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

I couldn't have said it better.

You are either securely in the hands of Christ, who is securely in the hands of His loving Father (John 10:29), or you are about to fall into the hands of the God who will not die just because you insist on trying to kill him. And, that is a very dangerous, very frightening place to be.

"So," you inquire, "what's the best way to feel secure and know that we're on the right side in all of this?"

{32} - But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.

In contrast to "the day approaching," the author inserted one of the most precious words any sinner has ever read - - - but! From this point, the author leaned over to the other side of his treatise and reassured his faithful audience that such a fate did not await them. He gave them words of encouragement, drawn from their own history of trial and testing.

He called his first century Hebrew/Christian converts to remember what happened to them on account of their profession of Christ. The key phrase here is, "after ye were illuminated." It stands in contrast to the rebels of verse 26, who sinned willfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth.

Two groups - - - one truth.

One group is said to have "received the knowledge of the truth." The other group is described as "illuminated." One group is said to have rebelled and fallen away into judgment. But, the other group is described as undergoing trial and persecution - "a great fight of afflictions" - yet without fainting.

{33} - Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

None of them remained untouched by the fight. Either they were castigated openly and made the subject of mocking and ridicule, or they were engaged in helping and ensuring others who underwent such persecution. Early church history is replete with stories of saints who went through torture and even death rather than recant their testimony. They were used for sport in the Roman arenas, fed to lions, torn apart by horses, beaten with rods and whips, had their skin peeled off, were burned on stakes and nailed to trees. But, the harder the

enemies of the faith persecuted the church, the stronger the church grew. The most devious tortures invented by evil men could not bury the truth of Christ and the perseverance of faithful men and women.

{34} - For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

This is one of the few autobiographical details included in the Hebrews text. Inasmuch as the author never identified himself, this reference to being in bonds has raised speculation that the apostle Paul wrote the letter. He may have written it in Hebrew and someone like Luke may have translated it into polished Greek. That was the position of Clement of Alexandria in the 2nd Century, as well as Eusebius (263-339?).

Martin Luther held that the author was Apollos because, according to Acts 18:24-28, he was a well-read Hellenistic Jew from Alexandria in Egypt. On the other hand, Tertullian (150-230) said that Barnabas was the writer. Barnabas' original name was Joses, but he was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles. His name means "the son of consolation." He was a Levite, familiar with all the Jewish rites and rituals, but he was out of Cyprus so he would have had a Greek vocabulary (Acts 4:36). After Saul's conversion, when he sought to meet with the disciples, they were afraid of him. It was Barnabas, true to his name, who brought Saul, renamed Paul, to the apostles and told the story of the miraculous events and bold preaching which had occurred in Damascus (Acts 9:26-27). Paul and Barnabas undertook missionary journeys together, based out of Antioch, where the disciples were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas was perhaps Paul's closest companion, despite their dispute over John Mark. So, it stands to reason, if he were the author, that Paul's theology would be obvious and prevalent.

In any case, the author recalled a time when he was in bonds and the church sent aid to him. They rejoiced in the "spoiling of your goods." That, by the way, is another hallmark of Christianity. It's one of the great proofs of the indwelling Spirit. Fleshly men crave the riches of this world and they will defend their wealth against every predator. But, Christians are wont to give of their substance. And, true Christians seek opportunity to help the brethren, even to the plundering of their goods.

While Biblical giving is not our direct subject, allow me to introduce a fundamental principle. Sacrificial giving is one fruit of the Spirit that the unconverted cannot fake. While a marginal believer may be able to participate in our worship services, raise his hands, sing the songs, greet us with a warm hug, and give every outward indication of genuine conversion, he will balk at the idea

of the consistent, sacrificial outlay of his goods. Without the Holy Spirit driving a man, Paul could never have said –

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7)

That is one of the few verses in the Bible where God eulogizes men - He loves hilarious givers. But, my point is that allowing every man to give according to his own heart would bankrupt the church in a single generation if not for the overwhelming power of the Spirit.

To put it another way, God gave His Son. The Son gave His Life. That sacrifice gave us the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to believe that once that Spirit indwells a person, the giving stops. On the contrary, the Spirit drives us to give not only our goods, but also our very selves..."that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1)

Okay, back to the text. The author also had a secondary meaning here. The world had also stolen and undermined the earthly belongings of the early church. But, even that was not enough to ruin their testimony. They counted it all joy!

How? "Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance."

That's why Christians do not cling to the things of this earth. They don't endure. But, heavenly substance, the stuff of eternal life, cannot be taken or destroyed.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Mat. 6:19-21)

"Where?" Jesus seemed to be asking, "Where is your heart?"

{35} - Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

Don't give up, don't give in. The author built their hope as he guaranteed them that God was well aware of their earthly poverty and trials, but the reward for such faithfulness was beyond measure.

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (1 Cor. 2:9-10)

{36} - For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

There's an interesting little addendum. Unlike today's modern Evangelicalism, which stresses what Jesus will do for you right now, at this moment, Johnny-on-the-spot, the author assured the persecuted church that they would need patience. Deliverance may not be around the corner. The struggle may last (and did last) for their lifetimes. But, the trials of this life are for that purpose –

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:3-5)

The promise remains of an eternal reward and substance that cannot be taken or destroyed. The trials of this life teach us to be patient under affliction. That patience adds experience to our lives. And, after we've endured a myriad of experiences, we will face each successive trial with hope and confidence, knowing that God has taken us successfully through each and every hardship, and He's not about to give up now. And, that hope - the hope that God will see us all the way through to the end - will not end up causing us shame or embarrassment. It will result in eternal reward.

“That, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”

And, just so there was no confusion, the author told us exactly what "the promise" was –

{37} - For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

That phrase can refer to nothing else but the promised return of Christ. One of the basic tenets of Christian theology is that Christ died, rose, ascended to Heaven and promised to return to earth.

However, the phrase "yet a little while" has caused no small debate as the years have rolled by. It is obvious that the author was encouraging the first century readers with the hope of Christ's imminent return. But, it has been nearly 2,000 years and Christians are still awaiting that epochal event. So, we are forced to ask, “Was the author wrong?” The answer to that question separates whole sects of believers from one another.

Either answer, yes or no, has its pitfalls.

Preterist theologians would say that the author was 100% accurate. After all, they would argue, how could the Holy Spirit inspire an inaccurate statement? If we say that the author was wrong in his statement of Christ's "a little while" return, we run the risk of becoming the arbiters of what is and is not accurate in Scripture. And, that's certainly more responsibility than any of us could live up to.

So, is there an answer to this conundrum? Well, yes.

There is no inaccuracy in the Scripture as it faithfully, unflinchingly recounted the author's genuine belief. However, his conviction was based on hope, not any firm declaration from Christ, Himself. As such, he was not wrong to be so hopeful, but he did not know that Christ's return would be a long way off, relatively speaking. Paul shared a similar belief, as did John. But, the day and hour were not revealed to them, so they wrote of their genuine, hopeful belief that Christ would return in their own lifetimes. The Scripture, meanwhile, always true to itself, tells of their honest conviction.

"Are you saying that the Apostles were wrong, Jim?"

Well, let's answer this way. Peter dissembled from the Gentiles when the James crowd came around. Paul withstood him to his face, "because he was to be blamed." (Gal. 2:11) Was Peter wrong? Yep. Does that make the Scripture wrong? Nope. It makes the Scriptures unerringly accurate, because they tell us the truth about these men, warts and all.

Paul and Barnabas got in such a heated argument over John Mark that they could no longer travel together (Acts 15:39). Is that how Christians ought to act? Nope. Were they wrong? Yeh, probably. Does that make Scripture wrong? Nope. It makes Scripture brutally honest.

So, the author believed that Christ would return in just a little while. He had no Scripture or quotes from Christ to base his assertion on. He did not declare his statement to be any type of revelation or "mystery", unrevealed or hidden truth. He simply wanted to lift up his beloved brethren and give them hope to make it through their trials. And, in the midst of that exhortation he reminded them of Christ's promised return. Though He was currently "tarrying", the day was (and is) coming when He would wait no longer and burst back onto the stage of human history.

The author hoped it would be soon. I hope it is soon. We are both right in our hope. We both run the risk of being wrong in the timing. Does that make the Spirit within us any less God? Nope.

One last concept: The very Holy Spirit who inspired the Scripture is the same Holy Spirit who indwells every elect believer, today. There is no other. That Holy

Spirit brings the words of Scripture to life in our minds and hearts. Just as He is the inspired author, He is also the inspired interpreter. The two thousand year gap between the inception and our reception of these words means nothing to the Eternal Spirit. Right?

Okay, are any of us 100% accurate in our eschatology? Nope.

Does that make us any less Christian, or our faith any less inspired? Nope.

So, why hasn't the Holy Spirit revealed all the final, accurate answers to us? For the same reason He didn't reveal them to the original authors. It's not time. We share the same hope, we share the same faith, and we share the same lack of concrete answers about His timing.

That's how it is, has been, and will be until He returns - because that's the way God planned it. So, I agree, and say with all confidence and hopeful conviction, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

And finally, notice the contrast the author has constructed around the eschatological return of Christ. To the unbeliever it is a time of terror and judgment, but for the saint it's a time of comfort and "blessed hope."

{38} - Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

That's the heart of New Covenant thinking. We are not justified in the High Court of Heaven by our merit, our works, or our ability to satisfy God's righteous standard. It is by faith, and faith alone, that we stand uncondemned in His presence. And, it's not a new idea.

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. The simple act of believing God's word of promise was accredited to Abraham as though he had lived a sinless life. Even the prophet Habakkuk declared, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:4) That phrase became Martin Luther's battle cry after he comprehended Paul's argument –

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16-17)

Or, Paul again in to the church at Galatia –

“But, that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.” (Gal. 3:11)

So, the author repeated this poignant truth, preparing his audience for the treatise on faith that was forthcoming. But, he added the negative side of this truth, as well. Just as this whole section has been a contrast between enlightened people who rebel and enlightened people who press on under affliction, he distilled the whole argument down to this one statement. The justified ones shall live eternally through their faith in Christ's finished work, but any man who starts this Christian journey and turns back again will draw His ire.

Either live by faith, or die by unbelief.

Again, this is one of the verses Arminian theologians pluck from its context and use to defend their position that Christians can embrace the true faith and later fall into apostasy. But, the context of the author's argument puts such thinking to rest.

Look out - - - here comes that great word again - - - but!

{39} - But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

I love that part. But, we - we Christians, we elect, we indwelt believers, we who were once enlightened, we who have received the knowledge of the truth - are not the type to put our hand to the plow and look back. We press ever forward toward the mark of the high calling of our Lord. While the threat of perdition for the unfaithful exists, it is no threat to us.

We are those (don't you just love the confidence with which this is spoken?) "that believe to the saving of the soul."

That word "believe" is the Greek "*pistis*," translated "faith" in most instances. The force of that statement, "we are...of them that have faith to the saving of the soul" will be more fully understood as we move into Chapter 11, perhaps the most extensive exposition of the value and history of faith anywhere in Scripture.

See you there!