

A Study in Hebrews

Study Seven

Hebrews 9:25-10:23

Day One

25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.

26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

vs. 25&26 – Here were the choices for the people of Jesus day. They could either subscribe to a system of regular animal sacrifices, which could never really give them a sense of cleansing, or they could put their trust in Jesus and His once-and-for-all sacrifice of Himself, which would give them an eternal reward and knowledge that their sins had been forgiven. It is hard to imagine that some choose the former, but they did. And now some, having chosen Jesus, were considering going back to the sacrificial system. Remarkable indeed!

Yet the temptation is there for anyone to face the option of turning back. I remember when I first met the Lord; I had the expectation, as silly as it sounds, that I would never have car trouble again now that I had the Lord in my life. Isn't that silly? The first time my car broke down after that was a tough time for me. Yet I have talked to many people who have similar unrealistic expectations about what it means to follow the Lord, about what may or may not happen as one follows Jesus. Jesus Himself addressed this when He said:

“And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Matthew 11:6).

When Jesus said that His followers would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood, the results were surprising:

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him (John 6:60-66).

vs. 27&28 – Buddhists and Hindus believe in reincarnation. This one verse addresses that error directly. We all get one life and then there is judgment. I was surprised to learn recently, however, that reincarnation is to be avoided for both groups and is not a good thing. Enlightenment and freedom from suffering and imperfection are their goals, which of course can only be achieved through the Second Coming of Jesus. Jesus is the answer for every problem and the end of every spiritual quest.

Day Two

10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins,

4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

v. 1 – Here is the word shadow or type again. The Law was not the reality, but only a shadow, a general outline, of the things that were to come in Christ. Make sure that you are worshipping Jesus and not things that talk about Jesus, like your doctrine or beliefs.

v. 2 – The Old Testament system was a futile system. There was nothing romantic or religious about it. It was dirty business, with the smell of animals, living and dead, filling the air around the altar. It is hard to imagine anyone settling for that system when they could have Jesus. But it is hard to imagine anyone settling for *any* system that doesn't have Jesus as its central focus. But people do all the time; don't be among them.

vs. 3-4 – Jesus Himself declared that He came to forgive sins; if Jesus has forgiven you, you are forgiven indeed:

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .” (Mark 2:10).

I hope that you are not still holding your past sins against yourself, because Jesus certainly is not. If He isn't, why should you?

Day Three

5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;

6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

7 Then I said, 'Here I am-it is written about me in the scroll- I have come to do your will, O God.'"

vs. 5-7 – The writer quoted from one of the psalms in this passage:

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced ; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:6-8).

It is of note that the writer left out one portion of the verse, which states: "but my ears you have pierced." The literal word for pierced here is "bore" or "dug out." God didn't want a lot of animal sacrifices. Rather He wanted a people who would listen to Him and then do His will.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:16-17).

We need God's help in order to hear Him. He needs to do a work in my life and heart or else I will continue to do what I *think* He wants me to do instead of what He is directing me to do. Consider the following Messianic passage from Isaiah:

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting (Isaiah 50:4-6).

Part of the reason why Jesus gave His life was for you and me. But another part of the reason was that the Father asked Him to do it.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:8).

What a Savior! What a Lord! And now He asks that we do the same thing: Listen and do the will of God, whatever it may cost. And we should do this will not because we *have* to do it but because we are *privileged* to do it.

Day Four

8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made).

9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second.

10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

v. 8 – Israel should have been eager to abandon the sacrificial system, but instead they worked to perpetuate it, even killing God’s Son so that their religious way of life could be maintained. There are still people like that today. They would rather perform all manner of sacrifices and religious acts than follow the Spirit to their own cross.

v. 9 – This phrase, “Here I am,” is an important one. When God speaks, that is what we should say. “Here I am” signifies that we are ready to do what God wants before we know what it is. We aren’t saying, “Yeah?” or “What do You want?” We are indicating that we have a ready heart to do whatever it is that we are about to hear. Go look at Genesis 22:1, 7, 11; Genesis 31:11; Genesis 46:2; Exodus 3:4; and 1 Samuel 3:4. There you have other examples of those who said, “Here I am!” Now you know what to say when you think God may be calling your name!

v. 10 – We have been made holy—set apart for God—through the sacrifice of Jesus’ life. There is nothing additional that needs to be done or that can be done to make that more of a reality. You are God’s because Jesus died for you. Why not worship Jesus today because of the wonderful thing He has done for you?

Day Five

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool,

14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

vs. 11&12 – Today Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. Our brother, with a body like ours (except that it is glorified), is seated in heaven. He understands us and is interceding for us at God’s right hand. Jesus sat down in heaven because there was no other sacrifice that needed to be made, but that doesn’t mean that Jesus is idle in heaven. He is still seeking and saving the lost through the Holy Spirit and He is praying for us. Heaven will not be a place where we do nothing. If Jesus is working in heaven, then you will too.

By the way, do you know what your purpose in life is? There is a good chance to you will be fulfilling your purpose for all eternity, so it would be good to know what it is.

vs. 13&14 – Jesus has finished His work of redemption. There is nothing else that needs to be done on His part. It is now up to men and women to put their faith in the work that Jesus did and they can become holy to God. But Jesus’ work in that regard is finished.

But Jesus is now waiting until all those who oppose His work and His role are made His footstool. Jesus will put His feet on those who refused to put their feet on Him, the Rock. That will include all those who preferred a religious system to faith in Christ. Those people, no matter how innocent they may appear, are enemies of Jesus and the Church.

That is why the writer was spending so much time trying to dissuade anyone from abandoning their faith in favor of a sacrificial system. We would do well to heed his warning today.

Day Six

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

v. 15 – The writers of Scripture had no problem recognizing that the Holy Spirit speaks to men. Here the writer stated, “First he says.” I cannot quite understand the debate on whether the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God. While I think we must recognize that there are probably some minor errors in the manuscripts that have been handed down to us for millennia, there can be no room for a believer to deny that the Scriptures are the work and word of God. I just finished a book entitled *The Scripture Principle* by Clark Pinnock. I would recommend this book if you are interested in learning more about the debate that has been going on between those who believe the Bible to be God’s word and those who believe it to be a collection of myths and human stories.

v. 16 – The writer quoted Jeremiah 31:33-34 here and acknowledged that the Holy Spirit was speaking to Jeremiah. This new covenant was not the idea of men but the institution of God. No one, therefore, can change it. The new covenant transitioned from a covenant with external effects to one that worked on the internal or the heart. The old covenant could not change men’s hearts; it could only convince them that their heart needed help in order to serve God.

v. 17 – Many people agonize over their sins and whether or not they are truly forgiven. But forgiveness of our sins isn’t based on anything we can do. Forgiveness is part of the new covenant, the new promise of God. Forgiveness of my sins is based on God’s promise, and doesn’t depend on the magnitude or quantity of my sins. I can go to God for forgiveness and He will extend it to me because of His promise in the new covenant. Are you struggling whether or not you are forgiven? Are you concerned that your sins are too grievous for God to forget? Well, you can rest today, for God’s promise, His covenant to you, is that He will remember your sins no more. Ask for forgiveness and leave your sins with Him. If He forgets them, why can’t you? Are you holier or more righteous than God?

v. 18 – Once God has forgotten your sin, you would do well not to mention it to Him again. There is no need to apply the sacrifice of Jesus to your sins any longer; once is enough. Not only was this a more righteous system than the Law provided, it was a more efficient system! Jesus paid the price once and for all so that our sins could be forgiven.

That is why sinful people felt so comfortable being with Him when He walked the earth. And since He is the same today as He was then, sinners like you and me should feel just as comfortable. Remember what John wrote:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives (1 John 1:5-10).

Day Seven

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,
20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,
21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.
23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

v. 19 – I heard a teacher say one time, “When you see a therefore in the Bible, find out what it’s there for!” Finally, the writer has cut to the chase, so to speak. Having spent a lot of time pointing out that the new covenant in Jesus is superior to the old covenant of the Law, the writer went on to explain what the implications are for the believer in Christ.

The first implication is that we have confidence to approach God. This confidence is in Jesus and not our own works or abilities. I heard another teacher say one time, “When you sin, that’s not the time to run *from* God but to run *to* God!”

v. 20 – We can now enter “behind the curtain” of the heavenly Holy Place. That is the symbolism behind what happened when Jesus died on the cross:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split (Matthew 27:50-52).

The way to God was opened through the body of Jesus. The curtain has been torn and anyone can come to God in the Most Holy Place, not just the high priest.

v. 21 – Jesus is alive and seated in heaven to insure that His sacrifice is effectual forever. He is our high priest. I approach God not on my own merits but relying on what Jesus did for me.

v. 22 – We can approach God with the assurance of faith, not an assurance that we have made every sacrifice or performed every ritual that enables us to come into His presence. When the priest approached the Holy Place in the old covenant, this is what he had to do:

"This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting. While he watches, the heifer is to be burned — its hide, flesh, blood and offal. The priest is to take some cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool and throw them onto the burning heifer. After that, the priest must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water. He may then come into the camp, but he will be ceremonially unclean till evening. The man who burns it must also wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he too will be unclean till evening. "A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin. The man who gathers up the ashes of the heifer must also wash his clothes, and he too will be unclean till evening. This will be a lasting ordinance both for the Israelites and for the aliens living among them (Numbers 19:2-10).

Contrast this futile ritual with the beauty of putting faith in the sacrifice that Jesus made. How could anyone who knew of Jesus consider going back to rituals like the one described above. In addition, the one above was a type or shadow of Jesus, the red heifer who was to come. Jesus replaced this ritual, for no one today performs its rites.

Notice also that the priest had to bathe his body when he approached the holy place:

He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on (Leviticus 16:4).

I think that the writer may have been referring to the waters of baptism, which are a once-and-for-all ritual that believers must perform. But even if he isn't, he paints a wonderful picture of the benefits of approaching God on the merits of faith in Jesus. He cleanses us inside and out.

v. 23 – The writer urged the reader to hold to the confession of hope “unswervingly.” That indicates that things and situations will come trying to make us swerve to avoid a collision. But I am to stay the course and trust the Lord, no matter what happens.

I have been facing recently just how shallow my faith can be. I am not unswerving in my trust. I let circumstances shake my confidence too often and I feel like the Lord is trying to work more faith and trust into my life. When there is little money in my bank account, my trust swerves. When someone is upset with me or questions what I teach or do, my hope swerves. When I have computer problems that I don't understand how to fix, I get uptight and allow my trust and hope to swerve. I guess I am basically an uptight person and God is working in my life to fix this problem, for He truly is faithful and I can put my full confidence in Him.

Where are you at in regards to this issue? How firm is your confidence? Do you approach God with full assurance, even when things aren't going well for you? I hope that this study will help you as it is helping me. May God reveal to us today the greatness of His love and faithfulness and then may we learn to rely on that faithfulness in good times and in bad.