

The Book to the Hebrews

Remember

The purpose of the book is to encourage despondent, weak believers suffering ostracism and denunciation from the Jewish communities, not to drift away from all that they gained in Christ. Or, to get over the “blues” look up to what Christ in His love provided for you!! The Old Testament saint had to long from a shadowed distance and wait for what you and I have been given.

I. The Argument of the Book: The Pre-eminence of Christ in His Person and Work, 1:1-10:18

A. The Superiority of Son to the Angels, 1:1-14, 2:5-18

Parenthesis I: Warning against drifting, 2:1-4

(The path to glory is the way of suffering.)

B. The Superiority of Christ to Moses, 3:1-6

Parenthesis II: Warning against Doubting, 3:7-4:13

(The path to rest is the way of trusting.)

C. The Superiority of Christ to the Aaronic Priesthood, 4:14-10:18

1. Superior because of a better position, vv. 14-16

2. Superior because of better qualifications, 5:1-10

Parenthesis III: Warning against immaturity, 5:11-6:20

(The path to growth is the way of obedience.)

3. Superior because of a better order, 7:1-28

4. Superior because of a better covenant, 8:1-13

5. Superior because of a better sanctuary, 9:1-28

6. Superior because of a better sacrifice, 10:1-18

The passage before us contrasts the Mosaic sacrifices with the single sacrifice of Jesus, which accomplished the complete cleansing of God's people. It also concludes the author's arguments that began in 1:1.

a. The insufficiency of O. T. sacrifices, vv. 1-4

The Mosaic Covenant with its center of worship, tabernacle ritual, and priestly functions could not cleanse the conscience of the sinner (it was never intended to do so). In faith, the OT saint waited to know that his inadequate sacrifice looked forward to the final solution.

- 1) The fact of inadequacy, v. 1

The OT sacrifices were an “anticipatory shadow” of a future, superior cleansing. It was good, but simply surpassed, as God intended, since it was temporal. OT sacrifices did provide comfort, but they were only temporary; every day brought with it an awareness of failure without an immediate remedy.
- 2) The reasons of inadequacy, vv. 2-4
 - a) The failure of ultimate results, vv. 2-3

The fact that sacrifices were repeated demonstrates their inadequacy to deal with the issue those sacrifices addressed, the forgiveness of sin. Repetition was required because they failed in every way, except in the role of anticipation. Sin had a grip on the soul that animal sacrifices could not remediate.

 - (1) The outward evidence, v. 2a

The outward evidence that OT sacrifices were inadequate was their non-continuation. Impermanence and repetition suggest imperfection.
 - (2) The inward evidence, v. 2b-3

The Day of Atonement ritual was more of a “remembrance in hope” than a cleansing; it was a reminder that sin simply did not go away!

 - [a] Stated, v. 2b

The inward evidence is the fact of the continued awareness of sin.
 - [b] Reasoned, v. 3

The sacrificial system left the offerer with an awareness of sin.
 - b) The failure of the sacrifices in themselves, v. 4

Sacrifices suggested that payment for sin is necessary. However, no animal sacrifice was worthy enough for three reasons: it was involuntary (thus the function of the horns of the altar), it was not human, and it was imperfect (God requires what is in perfect consistency with His own character; it must be a perfect sacrifice by a perfect offerer in perfect conformity to God’s will; it must be perfect and human, a substitution). Simply put, moral defilement cannot be removed by material things; it requires a spiritual cleansing. The fruit of the failure is expressed in vv. 1-3; the cause of the failure in v. 4.
- b. The sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice, vv. 5-10
 - 1) The prediction of a superior sacrifice, vv. 5-7

The quotation is from Ps 40:6-8, a poem of David applied by the

writer to David's greater son, the Messiah. (This tells us how the New Testament writers used the Old Covenant writings; they look for Christ in them!).

a) The need, vv. 5-6

David sensed that the sacrifices were not the essence of the worship that God demanded (so much as it was the obedience implied in performing them, the affectionate regard for God in doing them).

b) The solution, v. 7

The importance of the sacrifices was in the willing obedience and the submissive heart to God by the persons that brought them. Actions are not virtuous in themselves; it is the motive that inspires them that determining the quality of actions. The validity of the motive is determined by the purity of the motivation for the action.

2) The fulfillment of the prediction, vv. 8-9

The writer takes David's insights and applies them to Christ, the final fulfillment. The OT sacrifices were ended when one came who was so perfect that He could obey God with perfection. That the sacrifices were endlessly repeated was actually an expression of God's longsuffering and grace. Had they ended without fulfillment, there would be no forgiveness of sin. The fact that God permitted inadequate sacrifices to continue implies that He was willing to wait with imperfection until perfect, true forgiveness, came in a sacrifice so perfect it ended the need for cleansing sacrifices forever.

3) The vindication of the prediction, v. 10

The proof of the end of the sacrificial system is the coming of Jesus, the final sacrifice. Jesus is the proof of its end and, since it has ended, He must be the final sacrifice. Cleansing was accomplished in Jesus; cleansing was the purpose of the sacrifices in the first place. If the end of sacrifices was accomplished, the need for sacrifices has ended.

Notice that our text reads (v. 10), "We have been made holy..."

The tense is perfect passive; it is a completed action done by another for us. Also, the recipients of the letter must have been Jesus-followers for such a statement to be made of them in a book without errors! The finality of Christ's sacrifice, vv. 11-18

1) The finality rehearsed, vv. 11-14

a) The failure of OT priests: stated, v. 11

That the work of the priests was never done is proof that their

work was never adequate.

b) The complete victory of Jesus: stated, vv. 12-13

(1) The fact, v. 12

“But” is a wonderful word suggesting comparison or contrast. The metaphor of “sitting” suggests that a task has been completed. Jesus is described as doing what no Levitical priest ever did in his service; He finished it. The verse, and the following, alludes to Ps 110:1.

(2) The anticipation, v. 13

Jesus now waits for a future time when all the earth will recognize His sovereignty and acquiesce to it, both friend and foe, both in the physical and nonphysical realms (heaven, earth, and hell).

c) The complete victory of Jesus: reasoned, v. 14

The victory over sin was completed by one sacrifice. This is made clear by the ending of the Mosaic codes, the sacrificial laws. Jesus has fulfilled the perfection demanded by the law and He, therefore, is able to bring us to perfection (sanctification) in Himself before God (to cleanse our conscience from sin). By the sacrifice of Jesus:

- The conscience has been cleansed from the guilt of sin.
- We have been made adequate to approach God as accepted worshippers.
- We have experienced what the old age only anticipated.

d) The complete victory of Jesus: confirmed, vv. 15-18

(1) The witness of the holy writings, vv. 15-17

The writer quotes once more from Jeremiah 31:31-34, the New Covenant (see 8:8-12).

(2) The conclusion: the finality of Jesus' sacrifice, v. 18

Here is the writer's grand crescendo. Since forgiveness has come, we have proof that sacrifices have ended forever!

II. The Application: The Implication of the Pre-eminence of Christ because of His Life and Work, 10:19-13:19

A. Exhortation to Devotion, 10:19-25

Verses 19-25 are a single Greek sentence that has been restricted, divided, by our translators for ease of understanding.

1. The ground of the exhortation, vv. 19-21

The word “therefore” indicates an inference. The writer is about to shift the focus to the issues of moral implications. “Since” indicates the basis of the implications that follow.

The fact is we can now enter into the very presence of God; Access has been made available to us. The basis of the applications to follow is two-fold. First, what Jesus has accomplished for us (v. 19) and, second, His continuing work for us in that He is a royal high priest (v. 20).

“Through (by means of) His flesh” (v. 19) is an interesting shift for the writer. From the results of his sacrifice (symbolized in the rending the curtain of the temple), he shifts to emphasize the sacrifice itself as the means of tearing the curtain of the temple from top to bottom (suggestive of the end of exclusion from the presence of God for His people [Matt. 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45]). Jesus’ body was broken so that we could have access to God’s presence. Our priest is our substitute! Notice that the verbs are present tense; he *is* our priest today!

2. The nature of the exhortation, vv. 22-25

The exhortations here are three, the three great Christian virtues (faith, hope, and love [I Cor. 13]).

a) To devotion of heart and compliance of will, v. 22

The command is to draw near to the Lord with affectionate embrace and delight. The reason to do so is two-fold (“since”). First, using the OT analogy of “sprinkling,” we have been internally cleansed (something sprinkling cannot do since it only reaches the flesh). Second, we have been cleansed outwardly. The heart has been cleansed and the conscience made pure (8:10; 9:9, 14; 10:2, 16). You cannot have the second cleansing, the conscience, without the cleansing of the first, the heart.

b) To steadfastness in hope, v. 23

The command is to unwavering hope and confidence; the reason for such confidence is that God’s promises are based on the truthfulness of His character. God cannot deceive us or be proven to have failed in his intentions.

c) To encourage one another in love, vv. 24-25

The qualifying statement that follows it defines the command. “Love and good deeds” has to do with the gathering of the saints in fellowship, mutuality of helping, and worship. Some have apparently grown weary in doing this. The basis of the exhortation is that a day (I Cor.3: 13) is coming when Jesus will come as our judge, not as a compassionate and redeeming priest.

Parenthesis IV: The Warning against Rejection, 10:26-39
(The path to reward is the way of endurance.)

This is the fourth parenthesis in the book, applications within sermon presentations. It is drawn from the writer's comment in v. 25 that our activity will not go without scrutiny.

However thunderous and foreboding the exhortation may appear, remember that this is Jewish preaching. Jewish rhetoric is "in your face" without qualification. Remember, also, that the writer is addressing believers.

a. The Warning, vv. 26-31

1. The declaration, vv. 26-27

Though the passage sounds frightening, it must be read slowly to hear what the writer is saying. The issue is not loss of salvation, but a "sacrifice" by Christ to atone for it. Jesus did not die for the foolishness of denial, something these people are appearing to do; it would require another sacrifice and Jesus has put an end to them (6:6). The foolish act of backsliding is revealed by what it would take to correct it; the absurd solution should help us see the folly of the action. This has to be a hypothetical situation because Jesus died for all sins forever, including the sin of temporary apostasy.

The reference to "fury" is an allusion to Zeph. 1:18; "enemies" is an allusion to Is. 26:11.

2. The confirmation, vv. 28-30

To verify the seriousness of disobedience, the writer appeals to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures.

a) The citation, v. 28

The quotation is from Deut. 17:6; there was capital punishment in Israel, but it required a legal procedure. If a serious crime was committed the perpetrator could flee to a City of Refuge, a Levitical city, where the possibility of a fair hearing took place avoiding familial retribution without warrant.

b) The rhetorical question, v. 29

The question is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If sinning against mankind brings just judgment, would not sinning against someone greater bring greater peril? The severity of the judgment merits the degree of punishment based upon the one sinned against. All sin against God is infinite because God is infinite.

c) The reaffirmation, v. 30

The writer cites Deut. 32:35-36. The context is a stern warning to Israel as they were about to enter the land about the implications of disobedience.

3. The conclusion, v. 31

b. The Encouragement, vv. 32-34

From warning, the writer turns to comforting.

1. Their former actions, vv. 32-34a

These people had a glorious past of devotion and sacrifice, but something threatened to turn them away from it; something the writer knows will not succeed. Four things are said of these people.

They endured harsh suffering (physical).

They endured abuse (verbal).

They identified with the suffering.

They lost possessions.

Their attitude for doing so was one of joy (Acts 5:29).

2. Their former reason, v. 34b

What a wonderful statement of Christian hope.

c. The Appeal, vv. 35-39

1. The exhortation, v. 35

The “so” indicates that the writer is drawing an implication.

2. The need, v. 36

Here is the theme of the book, the need for endurance (13:22).

3. The motivation, vv. 37-38

The first two quotations highlight the nearness of Jesus’ coming (Isa. 26:20 and Hab. 2:3) and third the importance of faith (Hab. 2:4). The coming in question is a coming in judgment. It could be the Roman destruction of Jerusalem or it could be, and more likely is, the end of the age. The point of the quotations is to show that God will fulfill His purpose in due time though He may seem to linger.

4. The confirmation, v. 39

These are wavering saints. That’s all!

Applications

1. The greatest of all Christian virtues are faith, hope, and love. Faith looks to God with trust and confidence; hope focuses in reliance of the promises of God as sure though yet future; love is our respect to God and how we treat others. May we all abound in these virtues.
2. We should not miss the fact that the writer tells us that we have a great priest. A priest is a representative of the people, one whose function is to bring them into the presence of God. Jesus did this through becoming incarnate and, being incarnate, he assumed our debt before a holy God. Accordingly, He has brought us to God. Have you paused to ponder this lately?
3. It is a sobering fact that you and I will stand before our heavenly Father someday to render an account of the conduct of our lives. We have a God who is knowledgeable of the smallest of our life’s details. This should cause pause and evaluation; it should not frighten us since God loves us more than

we will ever grasp. We have all experienced the wrath of God for our foolishness and it is not pleasant.

4. The “gathering together” of Christians does not merely mean that we are to meet periodically. It carries the connotation of caring and providing for each other in our needs (vv. 32-34). Is that what we are doing as a class? This tells us that the worship gathering of the early church was more than sitting to hear a pastor. It was making our needs known in a loving community (not among strangers) where mutual love is expressed in listening, praying, and deeds of mercy.
5. It would be a pity if as a class, or as individuals in the class, that our best days, in comparison to the current one, are in the past. What God says of these people, that is so wonderful, is in the past tense. May that not be true of us. Let us covenant that our best days of service to God are ahead.
6. The Old Testament saint lived by faith and hope just as we today; however, his/her faith was that the repetitious sacrifices would someday ending in a final, once-for-ending sacrifice of a coming “Messiah.” Our faith does not differ from them in essence (trust, reliance, and hope), but the object of faith has been altered. “Messiah” has come; the end of sacrifice consummated in the one sacrifice of and by Jesus. We wait in hope of His second coming when He will bring to fruition the ultimate implication of His sacrifice, the ultimate, final, complete redemption for all who have, do, and will hope in Christ. The Old Testament saint saw the two events (comings) as one with not separating gulf of the centuries; we now see them as separated by centuries of time, yet just as sure. He/she saw the coming redeemer-figure as a geo-political person combining the offices of prophet, priest, and king. We understand that he came in the capacity of all three offices, though the realm of His kingship-rule awaits a time when His enemies will be put under His feet.