

LOOKING BACK TO CALVARY

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

The great preacher, J. Vernon McGee once said, "If you want to know if God hates sin, look at the cross. If you want to know if God will punish sin, look at the Darling of His heart enduring the tortures of its penalty." The author of Hebrews simply cannot get enough of the cross of Jesus. On every page He alludes in some way to the dying Savior. Early on, he concluded the dangerous absurdity you and I embrace if we hope to escape Divine judgment by neglecting so great a salvation in Jesus (2:3). Calvary's cross became an altar where we behold the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. Looking back to a skull-shaped hill, we see Jesus dying for everybody else—dying for you and me.

Hebrews 10 opens with the author speaking about the forever sacrifice Jesus Christ became (vv. 1-18) and ends with an exhortation to believers that there is no turning back (vv. 32-39). As we explore this section of Hebrews, let's follow the outline below:

- I. **The Provision of Christ's Death is Eternal (vv. 1-18)**
- II. **The Passageway to God's Presence is Open (vv. 19-25)**
- III. **The Problem of our Sin Remains (vv. 26-31)**
- IV. **The Perseverance of Believers is Promised (vv. 32-39)**

I. The Provision of Christ's Death is Eternal (vv. 1-18)

Our salvation depends upon the finished work of Christ. In Jesus Christ, we have a better provision established upon better promises. The author of Hebrews contrasts the Old Testament sacrifices with Christ's sacrifice. In fact, the Old Testament sacrificial system anticipated the New Covenant sacrifice of Calvary.

First, the idea of one sacrifice was *expected*. The author writes, "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" (vv. 1-4). The

Reflection Connection

One significant difference between our understanding of the Lord's Supper and the Roman Catholic Mass concerns the sacrifice of Christ. Ask your pastor to lead a short session on this crucial distinction.

author speaks of the law being a "shadow of good things to come" but not the "image." The Greek word translated "shadow" is *skia*, and refers to an outline cast by an object on which light is directed. It is not the object itself but merely reflects the reality of the object. The author notes the "image" (Greek, *eikónos*) is the reality. Hence, the law which called for the sacrifices of animals to atone for sin was never the reality of the sin sacrifice. Rather the sacrifices were only shadows of the real sacrifice—Jesus Christ.

In addition, because the Old Testament sacrifices only pointed to the true sacrifice for sin in Christ, it stands to reason the sacrifices would be repeated; that is, they were offered "year by year continually." At best, the sacrifices



served as a provisional Band-Aid for sin but could never stop the flow of bloody unrighteousness. Or, in the words of the author, the multitude of animal sacrifices “can never...make the comers thereunto perfect.” In fact, the opposite effect took place. By repeating the sacrifice for sins, the guilt of sin was at best only reprieved not relinquished.

Therefore, the one sacrifice Christ offered *established* the vicarious offering God would accept as payment for sin (vv. 5-10). He writes, “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

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will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (vv. 9-10). Quoting from Psalm 40, the author clearly reveals the mind of the eternal Christ coming into the world by taking a human body. And, through His coming, we are sanctified (that is, “set apart”) forever—“once for all.”

Moreover, the complete revelation was written in a book, a book we know as the Bible (vv. 7-9). In other words, the Scripture offers God’s *explanation* of His sacrifice (vv. 11-18). He sets before us the finished work of the Savior (vv. 11-14) as well as the faithful witness of the Spirit (vv. 15-18). Concerning the Spirit’s role, there is a three-fold witness. He witnesses directly to us through *facts* (v. 15), in us through *faith* (1 John 5:10), and with us through *feelings* (Rom. 8:16). Our mind, will, and heart are all affected by His participation in our lives. We are assured our sins are forgiven and remembered no more (v. 17). We have an eternal provision in Jesus Christ.

II. The Passageway to God’s Presence is Open (vv. 19-25)

Not only are our sins forgiven through the sacrifice Christ made for us, a door leading straight into the holy of holies has been opened wide for us to *enter*. God’s presence is no longer restricted to a priestly class. Through Jesus, we are all welcome to come into the very presence of God. The author writes, “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” (vv. 19-20). Indeed the author insists we must *enter* into His presence. But how is this entry possible? Because of a *new provision* (vv. 19-20) and a *new priest* (v. 21). We approach God on the basis of Jesus’ blood. Not our righteousness, but His, wins the Father’s approval and acceptance.

In addition, we are exhorted to *pursue* this privileged relationship, taking advantage of the spiritual opportunity our forefathers did not enjoy. He writes, “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” (v. 22). Whereas the priests had to prepare themselves by a ritual washing (cp. Lev. 16), we are purified once for all through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Second, once we *enter* into the holy of holies—that is, God’s presence—we are to *endure* in the holy of holies. Note the author’s words, “Let us hold fast



the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised" (v. 23). The Greek term translated "without wavering" is *aklinēs*, which means "firm" and "unswerving." No leaning backwards toward the temple sacrifices is allowed. One who has trusted in Christ must endure in Christ. Doubt must be swallowed up in the victory of faithfulness.

Third, believers not only *enter* God's presence and *endure* there, they also are exhorted to *encourage* one another. The author writes, "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" (vv. 24-25). Whereas before, our lives were wrapped up in ourselves, now that our eyes are on Jesus, we must also consider Jesus' people. How does the author suggest we proceed?

First, we proceed through *personal stimulation* (v. 24). We "provoke" one another to love. We stir up affections among the body of Christ (cp. Acts 15:39). We arouse them toward good works and specific acts of kindness and love. Second, we proceed through *public celebration* (v. 25). As the body of Christ comes together for corporate worship, we abandon the world while we cling to Christ and His people. How sad to see some who abandon the church. Today we have many who proclaim, "I love Jesus but I hate the church." However, one has no option but to love what Jesus loves. And, if Jesus loves the church and gave Himself for it, we have no spiritual right to reject what He embraces (Acts 20:28). It is within the church we are exhorted to "exhort one another." In other words, we stir each other up; we encourage one another; we cling to one another; and we even correct one another.

Reflection Connection

What is meant by "enduring" in the presence of God? Do you think "enduring" suggests our salvation is maintained by good works? Explain.

III. The Problem of our Sin Remains (vv. 26-31)

If Jesus provided for our sin through His own sacrifice, established our eternal relationship with God forever, and sealed us for eternity as His children, does not that mean sin is no longer an issue? Or, another way to ask it is, do Christians still sin, and if so, do they get by with it? Some seem to think so. Indeed they use grace as if it were a buffer to shield them from the guilt of wrong-doing. Jude had these people in mind when he warned against those who "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4).

The author of Hebrews issues several warnings to Christians, exhorting them to press on to maturity. In chapter 10 he writes, "For if we sin willfully 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" (vv. 26-27). A Christian who willfully sins is indicative of a stark contrast from what it means to be a Biblical follower of Jesus Christ.

First, sinning willfully is a disturbing matter (vv. 26-27). In fact, the author indicates there is "no more sacrifice for sins." In the Old Testament, it was called "presumptuous sin" (cp. Ex. 21:12-14; Num. 15:30). Christ made only one, eternal sacrifice for sin. However, it does not mean we cannot sin anymore;



rather it means we have the power not to sin. Hence, when the believer sins, he or she is repudiating the power of Jesus Christ. And, since those who sin repudiate Christ, it follows a “fearful looking” for the “indignation” of God is the result. Christians who sin against God should expect judgment from God.

Second, sinning willfully is a damaging matter (vv. 28-29). Under the Old Testament, deliberate sin was a very serious act (cp. Deut. 17:1-7). The Law clearly revealed God’s holiness and subsequent hatred for sin. And, while the New Testament revealed God’s grace and mercy toward sinners through the death of God’s Son, His hatred for sin never changed and never will. In fact deliberate sin *repudiates God’s Son* by “trodden under foot” the blood of Jesus. In addition, it also *rejects God’s sacrifice* making His blood “unholy.” Finally, deliberate sin *ridicules God’s Spirit* by doing “despite unto the Spirit of grace” (v. 29).

Third, sinning willfully is a distressing matter. The author writes, “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” (vv. 30-31). God indicates He will not tolerate rebellion. The Bible does not teach a Christian loses his or her salvation by sinning. On the other hand, it never teaches a Christian man sins with immunity from judgment. Why? For one thing, God’s judgment is always *faithful* (v. 30; cp. Deut. 32:35). Even more significantly, God’s judgment is always *fearful* (v. 31; cp. Deut. 32:36). God may not always take the life of a rebellious believer; but God will always deal with a rebellious believer. To accept anything less is unscriptural.

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IV. The Perseverance of Believers is Promised (vv. 32-39)

Finally, the perseverance of Christians is promised in the Word of God. Were our salvation left up to us even after we are born again, we would surely fail. All of us would end up in hell! God never leaves nor forsakes His own. He promises to remain with us. And, even when He judges us for sin, He remains a faithful, caring Father to us. We are His children.

For Christians, there is no turning back. Jesus said it like this, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). The only direction a believer may travel is forward toward maturity. Our encouragement to move toward maturity is three-fold.

First, we move forward toward maturity because of our past victories (vv. 32-33). The author encourages us to “call to remembrance” (v. 32). From our past we find



Reflection Connection

Take a few moments to meditate on the past spiritual successes you have obtained. Do your successes motivate you to continue on in faithfulness? Explain.

Golden Greek Nugget

The author exhorts the believers, “let us hold fast the profession of our faith” (v. 23). The phrase translated “let us hold fast” is only one word in the Greek—*katecho*. It means “to hold fast,” “to retain,” “to hold down,” or even “to suppress.” He uses it three times in Hebrews (here, 3:6,14). The clear point the author has in mind is to grab onto one’s testimony of faith and not let go no matter the trials or circumstances coming one’s way.

inspiration and illumination from the struggles we endured. He calls them our “great fight of afflictions.” Like an athlete in rigorous training, the believer trains for his or her decathlon of life. We suffer the pain of practice. Our philosophy remains, “no pain, no gain.” Our goal-post is toward heaven where there is a better, “more enduring substance.”

Second, we move forward toward maturity because of our present necessities. He writes, “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” (vv. 35-36). The secret of victory is faith and patience. As a follower of Jesus Christ, we need our daily dose of confidence (v. 35) as well as endurance (v. 36). For the believer it is not acceptable to lack either of these. Confidence cannot be “cast away.” Remember the author is not referencing our salvation but our rewards. The danger is not that we will lose our salvation but that we will lose our *assurance*.

Third, we move forward toward maturity because of our prospective realities (vv. 37-39). Our future is bright not because we have so much ability in ourselves. The believer’s future is bright because He has a magnificent Savior! And, Christ’s soon return is ever before the believer’s heart. The author writes: “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (v. 37). In short, He will not delay. All will take place in the blinking of an eye. Until then, the just will continue to live by faith (v. 38a; cp. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11).

Even so, a final warning is graciously offered, “but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (v. 38b). The term translated “draw back” means to cringe in fear. Nothing good can come from a believer’s rebellion, only misery, pain, and a stiff judgment from God. No wonder the author thought better things of the Hebrews: “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (v. 39). By faith we are moving forward to maturity now and anticipating a wonderful reward then.

Wrap Up

In this study, we began with the once-for-all sacrifice Jesus offered when He died on the cross. If a person will not accept Christ, the ugly reality is, no sacrifice can be obtained for his or her sin. Consequently, one stands before a holy God with only a hand full of meager “good” deeds to offer in exchange for eternal life. The Bible is clear, by the works of the law no man will be justified. The only destiny a person has who rejects Christ is the fearful judgment of God’s wrath in an eternal hell. Should not this be a grand motivation to share your faith with everyone you can before it is eternally too late?

