

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Cleansing Power of Christ (Hebrews 10:1-18 – Part 3)

“For by one offering He [Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14).

Someone once defined excellence like this – *“excellence is doing a common thing in an uncommon way.”* On the surface, this seems true and reasonable. Consider a ball player who excels in his position. There may be forty other players who play shortstop but, but once in a while one comes along who takes the common play of a shortstop and does so extraordinary well, so uncommonly different, that people take notice. Or, let’s take the example of singing. Most of you here this morning love to sing praise to God. It is a common thing for us to sing and lift our voices. Most of us would consider our ability to sing nothing more than common at best. But what happens when we hear someone that sings beautifully? When such a person takes that common practice of singing and does it in such an uncommon way that it makes our hearts melt? We would say that such a person excels in singing.

But when we consider spiritual matters – questions of man’s salvation, or of loving and serving the living God, I wonder if this statement, *“excellence is doing a common thing in an uncommon way”* is actually correct. For I would submit to you that there is nothing common, or ordinary about salvation – about a person’s being delivered from the pains of eternal separation from his Creator into the glorious bliss of being in the Creator’s eternal presence. There is nothing common or conventional about serving the living God. I would say that such things are absolutely uncommon, that they are exceptional and wondrous in and of themselves. So perhaps it would be better to say, at least as it concerns spiritual matters, that *“excellence is doing an uncommon thing in a common way.”* In other words, the pursuit of the genuine and devoted believer in Jesus Christ is to live out the extraordinary, the spectacular and abundant life of Jesus Christ before others as though it was but second nature. True prayer, communion with the living God is certainly an uncommon thing to people, but for the believer, it ought to be so common, so practice, so enjoyed that it is as natural as breathing. Our giving public testimony and praise to the greatness of God and salvation in Jesus Christ is not to be seen as some uncommon spectacle that only few are capable of, but rather the common practice of God’s people in every setting. When the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:8, ***“Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension...”*** he pleads for the uncommon practice of prayerful fellowship to take place without men fighting, arguing, complaining and

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grumbling. It is common for men to be so inclined to take offense and dispute with one another. It is an uncommon thing, a holy and God-given attitude that allows men to so pray and worship together.

In our Hebrews 10 text, we have been looking at this topic of pursuing excellence – of “excelling or pursuing the highest standard or level of completion.” Thus far we have seen that the pursuit of excellence is not found in a person’s performing some **sacred practices**. In Hebrews 10:1-4, we see that even the God-sanctioned practices of the Law could never make a person perfect or complete. Truly the hymnist articulated it correctly when he wrote –

*Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole.
Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.*

Horatius Bonar, 1861

In addition to the truth that it was never God’s intention that man should save himself via his own efforts, we learned in Hebrews 10:5-10 that salvation is founded only in a single person – the person of Jesus Christ, who willingly, and joyously came as God in bodily form to do for man what man could not do for himself – to perform the will of God, this will being that God would sanctify, or set apart to Himself all those for whom Jesus offering His body on the cross once for all (10:10). Again, the hymnist so aptly describes it –

*Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within.
Thy love to me, O God, not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest, And set my spirit free.*

Horatius Bonar, 1861

This brings us then to the third of four considerations in this matter of how we pursue excellence in the Christian life – the pursuit of excellence is...

- I. Not founded in Sacred Practices (10:1-4)
- II. Founded in Single Person (10:5-10)
- III. Founded on Specific Purpose (10:11-14)
- IV. Founded on a Special Promise (10:15-18)

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This morning we look at the truth expounded upon in Hebrews 10:11-14 that that pursuit of excellence is founded upon a specific purpose – that specific purpose being defined and revealed by God Himself. And what is this specific purpose of God? The author of Hebrews builds up to it in verses 11-13 and then states it unequivocally in verse 14 saying –

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

In other words, the specific purpose of God is to declare those who drawn near to Him through following Jesus absolutely perfect, complete, made full, restored, reclaimed and redeemed. This is a statement of position. But the further purpose of this position is that God intends to bring them into the fullness of this position through a process called sanctification – the process of being made holy, of daily being made more and more like Christ. But here I am jumping ahead of myself. Let us go back and see this progression, this building up of the author to this point beginning back in verse 11 where we see - .

1. The Futility of Ruined man (10:11)

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

Remember that we noted Hebrews 10:1-18 is really a summation of the doctrinal teaching of the first nine chapters. Here the author is wrapping up what he has been emphasizing throughout the book as he then prepares to make a transition into the practical application for his readers beginning in Hebrews 10:19 and flowing on through to the end of the book. So, the author once again bombards us with the futility of any man-made efforts to appease God. The point of verse 11 here is to remind us that even when man attempts to be right with God by trying to do what God has asked him, he will always come up short. Even when the priest of God offered their daily sacrifices, these, we are told, ***can never take away sins.***

Now the verb “can” there in verse 11 is the root to the Greek noun – “dunamis” from which we get our English word “dynamite” – which is truly an expression of power, of great power. In other words, the best efforts of man in trying to make himself right before God are powerless to take away sins. It is impossible for man to be right with God of his own accord. The price is too high. Brother Ben taught the Wednesday night youth group this past week and he offered a fitting illustration to them that is appropriate for us this morning. Have you ever gone to the store to buy a snack or a drink only to get up to the counter

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to have the cashier ring it up and then to realize that you did not have enough money to pay for the item. Maybe you are a just a few to several cents off but however you figure it, you have come up short. You may have had ever intention of being able to cover the cost, but after searching through all your pockets, you must confess that you simply do not have what is needed. Beloved, that is what we are seeing in Hebrews 10:11, even with the best intentions of the priests and the willingness of the people to come to these earthly priests, the reality are that all their efforts will leave them short and will never take away sins. The best works of men, even according to the Law of God, have no power to take away, or remove the anchor of sin. Turn with me to that familiar exchange between Jesus and His disciples as found in Matthew 19:23-26. Jesus begins with the statement –

23 ...“Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” 25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” [if such an influential man cannot be saved, then who can?] 26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible [what is impossible, a camel to go through the eye of a needle? No, it is impossible for man to save himself by or with any of his own efforts, he will always come up short], but with God all things are possible.”

Beloved, it was never God’s purpose for man to depend upon anything of himself but rather solely upon God. This is a constant theme of Scripture as we read in Jeremiah 9:23-24 –

23 Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD.

Or, to see this in its New Testament context let us look at 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 which adamantly declares -

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30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

Man must see the futility of his own efforts and come to realize that something more, something better, something more excellent is needed. What is needed? Man must learn to depend completely upon God for both life and salvation. I like the way Jonathan Edwards put it –

“God is glorified in the work of redemption in this, that there appears in it so absolute and universal a dependence of the redeemed on Him”

J. Edwards, July 1731

This then is the pursuit of excellence, our utter dependence upon Him who redeemed us. This is doing the uncommon [dependence upon Him] in a common way [as our joy and delight]. But this leads us to our the second thought -

2. The Finality of the Redeemer’s work (10:12-13)

12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

Having seen then the futility of man’s best efforts, we are pointed to the finality of the Redeemer’s work in Hebrews 10:12-13. Again, these are repeated ideas we have already been exposed to in the study of this book. Jesus, in contrast or unlike the priest of the Law, need only offer **“one sacrifice for sins for all time...”** While I know that the great majority of you agree with this idea of Jesus offering one, final and complete sacrifice, at least in theory, it is another thing altogether to practice the reality of this. So tempted we are to depend upon something in ourselves. “I can pray!” “I can read the Bible!” I can sacrifice my time for service to God!” If we are not careful, we get far too much of ourselves involved and rob God of His glory. We ought to say, “Lord, teach us to pray!” “Lord, open my eyes that I may see the truth of Your Word.” Or, to say with the psalmist, “Lord, my times are in Your hand...let me serve You.” **For all time** the sacrifice of Jesus stands singularly as the only means of being right with God.

To further illustrate the finality of the Redeemer’s work, the author reminds us again that Jesus did what no other earthly priest did while in the presence of

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God. Jesus **“sat down at the right hand of God.”** We must learn to praise God for this as this means all that Jesus did was accepted and final before God. Additionally we are reminded that with the salvation of men having been secured by Jesus, all that awaits is the second coming of Jesus when all of His enemies will finally be subdued and sentenced, when they are **“made a footstool for His feet.”** And this brings us to the final of our points this morning...

3. The Fullness of the Redeemed life (10:14)

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

This is truly a phenomenal verse wherein we are presented and we must see the fullness of the redeemed life. We are presented here again with the absolute emphasis of the person and work of the Redeemer in the lives of His people. Here is answered for us the question – “How is a person altogether, exclusively, exhaustively and comprehensively made right, perfect, without defect before God?” And the simple, yet profound answer is this – **“He [that is Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”** I would have you notice here two key thoughts from this verse.

First, notice the explanation of position. This text says that Jesus, by His work, His effort **“has perfected”** the redeemed. Now we have already considered this word perfected back in verse 1. It is a word that means to be brought to a state of completion, of fullness, of absolute correctness and rightness. We cannot be perfected by our own adherence to the Law of God. Rather, it is Jesus who “has perfected” imperfect sinners. The very verb tense and mood point to the Jesus and His work as the only means by which we gain access to God. The verb here is in the perfect tense, meaning that this perfection of sinners was achieved at some point in the past [i.e. the cross] and the results of this action are certain and positive. This is not a hopeful wish. This is a real position for every believer in Christ. Jesus has perfected, made complete and right before God as they are “in Him.” We see a wonderful example this in the letter to the Colossians. Turn to Colossians 2:9-10 –

9 For in Him all the fullness [all the completeness, all the very essence] of Deity dwells in bodily form, [a statement of the divinity of Jesus]...10 and in Him you have been made complete [full, right, positive standing before God]...

This is our blessed position in Christ. This is the right of every believer. Their state before God is one of perfection because Jesus has perfected them

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and notice that He has so perfected the **“for all time”** or forever. This status cannot change because of the individual redeemed, for he has done nothing to perfect himself, but is wholly dependent upon Christ for this. This is God’s purpose for the redeemed in Christ, that they be perfect. This is what believers are by Christ’s doing. But this leads us to the second key thought of this verse and is important because while it may be easy to say that we are perfect in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, we must assuredly recognize that our experience of life included just about everything but perfection. Our sin comes creeping through whenever it has the chance. So notice that not only has God perfected us by the work of Christ, but this position is something that He is also bringing us to as this position of perfection results in the *practice* of sanctification.

Now, our NASB text reads a bit awkward here saying that “He has perfected...those who are sanctified.” The phrase, “are sanctified” sounds a bit finished, like sanctification is also a positional work of God. But let me tell you, there is such a thing as positional sanctification, that determination by God at our salvation that we should be made holy, that is set apart for God’s uncommon use; sanctified. When God looks at His redeemed in Christ, He sees them as holy. In fact, Hebrews 10:10 says this very thing –

By this will [the will of God in salvation] we have been [past tense, once for all] sanctified [made holy] by the offering of the body of Christ.

This is our position, we are now saints, a word which means those who are sanctified. But the statement in Hebrews 10:14 reads differently. It does not say that “we have been sanctified” rather it literally reads, “those who are being sanctified.” It is in the present tense, meaning it is something that is currently taking place in the life of every believer. We are being set apart, being made perfect. I would also have you know that the Greek of this text points out that it is not the believer who sets himself apart, but rather he is being set apart by God. This is God’s purpose, to set you apart and conform you day by day to the image of His Son.

Now some may feel there is a contradiction here. At the beginning of this verse we are declared once and for all perfect and complete in Christ. And now, at the end of this verse we are told that God is taking us through a process, a process called sanctification, by which we arrive at Christlikeness or perfection. So which is it? I say to you – it is both. We are justly and rightly declared perfect in Christ. This is our status. And now, day by day, God is working in us the reality of our position, making us more and more like Christ, if indeed we have

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been perfected. You see, God's special purpose for the redeemed is to chose and then save those who once had no care or concern to love and serve Him. Since Christ's greatest desire was to glorify the Father, if we have been perfected in Christ, then our greatest desire become to glorify the Father. Our salvation does not call us to be passive, but rather to live passionately in accordance to the position to which we have been called. Therefore we ought to aggressively and energetically serve the Lord as this reveals that we are being sanctified and as we are sanctified, the reality of our perfection comes through.

By way of example, we might speak of people who have naturally born talents. They may be good at sports, or music, or math – more so than most people. They then have this reputation or position of being gifted in such things. But even with this giftedness comes the need to practice. No child progeny of the piano ever continued to wow audiences without practice. We have been gifted by God with the position and reputation of being perfect in Christ and now we labor to see God work in us the reality of our salvation.

This is excellence, the doing of that which is uncommon, that is of being sanctified, living holy unto Jesus so as to demonstrate that He has perfected us and doing this as part of our normal, everyday, common lifestyle. This is excellence, not that we would trust in ourselves but rather we would trust in God; not that we would depend upon our own abilities, but rather that we would depend upon God's ability; not that we would glory in ourselves, but rather that we would glory in God alone through Christ. This is God's purpose for us. Are you living in that purpose?

Soli Deo Gloria

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