
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).

Consider these words uttered from the mouth of Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount-

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48)

Here is the call of Jesus to all those who would be His followers – perfection. This is not a request, nor is it a wish – it is a command, but it is an interesting command. It is written in the future tense, which tells us it is something that is going to happen to us, but it is also in the form of a command, declaring to us that it is something being presently pursued. Both God and His people are to pursue excellence or perfection in the Christian life. Have you ever stopped to think about what is required to be made so perfect – so perfect that you will be able to spend eternity in God’s glorious and most holy presence?

There is certainly one obvious answer to such a question. One would be “believe” – *“believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”* – said Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer. But I would like to delve a bit deeper into what all this means. What does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Let me appeal to J.I. Packer, who asked and answered this same question –

To the further question; what does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?, its reply is: it means knowing oneself to be a sinner, and Christ to have died for sinners; abandoning all self-righteousness and self-confidence, and casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace; and exchanging one’s natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of one’s heart by the Holy [Spirit].

In many ways, Packer’s summary could serve well as a summary of Hebrews 10:1-18. The whole question being addressed in this passage is essentially this, “What does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus?” Or, to ask the question a different way, “What does man need to be perfect, complete and clean before the Lord? What do we need and what must we believe?” Before we look at the final section of Hebrews 10:1-18, specifically verses 15-18, let us consider this question.

Perhaps subtle and seemingly unnoticed is a reoccurring theme throughout the book of Hebrews found especially in Hebrews 9 and 10. The theme is answering the question, “What does man need to be perfect, complete and cleansed before God?” There are four such requirements laid out for us without which no one will ever see God apart from His wrath.

1. He must be cleansed

Let me remind you that the Greek word for “cleansed” as found in Hebrews 9 and 10 speak of something that has been freed from admixture – it is pure, clean. Let us look at the verses that point to this cleansing –

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Hebrews 9:14

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Man must have his sins cleansed and the only agent powerful enough to cleanse or free him from the stains of his sins, is the blood of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 9:23

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Here we learn that the blood of Christ cleanses everything of importance and significance to God.

Hebrews 10:2

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

The sacrifices of the Law would not keep a person clean as does the blood of Christ. For anyone to be able to stand in the presence of God, he must be cleansed, made perfectly free from sin – something that only the blood of Christ can do.

2. He must be completed (made perfect).

The second requirement we find in the book of Hebrews concerning the question of how a man is able to stand in God's presence is that he must be made complete, full or "perfect". The word for "perfect" in Hebrews 10 signals something that has come to its appointed end. It has been filled to the brim and lacks nothing. Notice I said that he must be "made" perfect as perfection is never the result of work of man but rather is the work of God in man.

The best of man's works are truly, as the prophet Isaiah puts it, "a filthy garment" and so nothing we do apart from Christ will merit any blessing from God.

How is it that a person is perfected, filled to the brim – it is by the one and only sufficient offering of Jesus Christ. But let's appreciate the fullness of this completion as it affects three areas of our thinking.

First, Jesus Christ Himself is presented as being perfect and complete. Remember Colossians 2:9 declares that "***in Him all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form.***" Jesus lacks nothing but is truly and fully God. We see this perfection of Jesus taught throughout the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 2:10

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Hebrews 5:9

And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

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Hebrews 7:28

For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

Jesus, in His flesh, was made perfect, fully and completely the God-man, the redeemer and will forever remain as such.

Secondly, something we have already noted, is that the Law had no power to perfect or complete man. This is seen in –

Hebrews 10:1

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

And finally we learn that believers are made perfect and complete, not by their adherence to an external law but rather by the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 10:14

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

Man must be “made perfect” – he must go through the process of salvation that calls him, justifies him, sanctifies him and one day will present him as spotless and blameless in the sight of God. This is the perfection of the saint. This is what man needs, the perfection of Christ applied to him and this is what the perfect Savior does for those who believe in Him.

3. He must be consecrated (sanctified)

The third requirement for man to be right before God is that he must be consecrated which is another way of saying sanctified. Remember that the word “sanctified” simply means “to set apart; or to make holy.” Again, this is the work of God in the believer’s life. Are we finding ourselves more and more consecrated, set apart, of use to God? Let us consider first of all that God, not man, does this sanctifying work –

Hebrews 2:10-11

**10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.
11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,**

Additionally it is the will of God that we be sanctified –

Hebrews 10:10

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

And finally, this is the believer’s goal – to be set apart, by the power of God because of the cleansing power of the blood as we read in Hebrews 10:14

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

This is truly and only the work of Christ. For Hebrews 13:12 declares:

12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

4. He must be changed (have his sins taken away).

Last but not least on this list of needed items that man needs to be right with God, something that encapsulates the previous three we have looked at, is that man must be changed, something of his nature corrected, namely, he needs to have his sins taken away. Sins must truly be removed from this body of flesh – something that the flesh of sacrificed animals could not accomplish. For consider –

Hebrews 10:4

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

In addition to animals being unable to atone for a person's sin, even the priests under the law, because they themselves were sinful, could not offer a complete and satisfying sacrifice to God on behalf of other. We read of this in Hebrews 10:11

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

So we might ask the question, "What can wash away my sins?" And truly the answer is, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus!" Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" But what exactly is meant by the phrase "take away"? This verb literally means, "to cut off, or to remove utterly" We find a most graphic example of the meaning of this word in Matthew 26 – the scene is the Garden, just hours before the crucifixion of Christ and an angry mob of people come out to arrest Jesus. At this point, Peter, the impulsive and rash one of the group is determined to defend his master. We pick up his action in Matthew 26:51

And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off [took away] his ear.

Now, we know that Jesus miraculously healed that ear, but beloved, do you not know that Jesus died for your sins, burying them in the grave, not so that you would pick them up again, but rather so they would stay separated from you. That you would no longer seek to serve sin, but rather now God. By the blood of Christ, our sins are removed, taken away, cut off. Now, in the power of God we are enabled to serve God, to live for Him and according to His ways.

These then are the four necessary elements man needs to be right with God – He needs to be cleansed (freed from admixture); he needs to be perfected/completed in Christ and Christ alone; he needs to be sanctified (set apart) for God's usage; and he needs to have

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his “sins taken away” (cut off, removed). These are the blessings of being “in Christ” – of trusting “in Christ”. This then is what it means to believe “in Christ.”

And now, what does all this have to do with Hebrews 10:15-18? Remember that we have looking at the pursuit of excellence and have noted that such 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)

In these final verses of this section we are reminded that of that Christ did, He did in accordance with will of God and He did it as a part of a special promise – that promise being called the New Covenant as prophesized about Jeremiah and recorded in the book that bears his name, 31:31-34. We have already discussed the New Covenant as the author used in Hebrews 8. So let make some observations and then some applications from these verses.

First, I would have you note that like all the biblical writers, this author believed in the inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. He clearly states that the Holy Spirit was the one who “testified” - literally one who “witnessed” the truthfulness and inauguration of the promises of the New Covenant. So then we read in verses 15-18–

And the also Holy Spirit testifies to us; for after saying, “THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,” He then says, “AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.” Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Having already exposed these first readers to the New Covenant, here the author of Hebrews reiterates the essence of the New Covenant blessings identifying them as those things which Christ applies to the believer through His all-sufficient, once-for-all death. After stating the special promise of the New Covenant in the first part of 10:16, we can find beginning in the last half of 10:16 through the end at least three elements of the application of New Covenant, this special promise, that we might key in on this morning.

1. A Regenerated Life

“I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them” (10:16b)

To understand the greatness of this statement, one must first come to grips with the reality of the human heart. The problem was never with the Law of God, but rather with the hearts of the people – people who are trying to appease God on their own terms and in some external fashion. At times they were doing the right things outward, yet inwardly their hearts were far from God. They had the Law written on stones, but God’s special promise was a regenerate life. It was easy for them to turn away from the commands of God since their hearts were bent in rebellion. But, this is not so with the new covenant – as God promises! ***“I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them.”*** Because of the work of Christ, the will of God has come to be the very center of the believer's life. Does

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pursuing the will of God delight you? Does it excite you? It has been well said that a regenerate believer is one who possesses, “an inner impulse that both delights in knowing [God’s] law and doing His will” [Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 2, 24-25]. When God imparts His law inwardly on the believer, his mind is so affected with truth and his heart is so bent in a new direction that he now delights to do the will of God.

A case in point is the apostle Paul. Once Saul of Tarsus, he was brought up deeply grounded in all the ways of Judaism, practicing every tradition, holding firm to every belief. So saturated with Judaism, he was rebellious and hostile to the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. He had no delight in God’s revealed means of man being made right with God. Until that day when Christ literally blinded him with the truth. At this event, Paul was regenerated and delighted to pursue Christ. Once a persecutor of the faith, Paul now proclaimed that faith with fire and fervor. O that we would desire to be so changed.

2. A Real Pardon

“And their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more” (10:17).

Moving on to 10:17 we see the second of the key elements of the New Covenant expressed – namely, a real pardon. Unlike the temporary pardon experienced under the Old Covenant, God promises those who trust in the work of His Son, real and eternal pardon saying of their sins, **“I will remember no more.”** What an awesome thought – is it not? Can we comprehend how great this is? Let’s put this in some kind of tangible format.

How many of you have wronged someone you love? When we see that we have truly wronged someone we care for, our hearts are filled with grief and hurt as we long to hear those three simple words, “I forgive you.” A restored relationship with a loved one is like the removal of a great weight from our shoulders. Life and joy return. If there were a way to multiply this feeling some one million times over it would not come close to how a sinful soul ought to rejoice upon the knowledge that God has taken not just one offense, not just an occasional slip of the tongue, but notice in verse 17, all our sins and lawless deeds, each one of which wronged our Creator and through Christ has said, “I forgive you. Your sins I will no longer remember. I will no longer hold your sins to your account or bear them in mind.” Think about the ways you wronged your Creator even this week – have you experienced the great “I forgive you”? Or do you still bear the weight of your sins? We must remember that because of the blood of Christ, our debt of sin has been satisfied, God has declared the one who trusts in Jesus forgiven and remembers your sins no more. Does the reality of forgiven sin bring joy to your heart and a longing to commune ever closer to the Lord? This is real pardon and it is the privilege of everyone who walks with Jesus. Are you so walking?

3. A Reformed Practice

“Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.”

For the one who is experiencing the regenerate life and real pardon there remains for him a reformed practice - a new way of living for God. Wrapping up his argument, the author of Hebrews reminds his readers that if real forgiveness has been granted by God to those who trust in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, if they are drawing near to God through Jesus Christ

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and His righteous blood, then what else remains to be done? I ask you - what can be added to these things? To put it another way, if you are forgiven, then why do you keep seeking forgiveness through other means? If you had a large debt paid off but you kept trying to pay that cleared debt, you would be wasting your money, time, and sanity. The debt has been paid. Full pardon belongs to you. Now you can live in the freedom of this truth and practice following the Lord Jesus Christ out of love and in joy rather than in dread and fear of death. The way of the cross delivers you from the miserable scramble to find new ways to merit forgiveness. The new covenant is the new way, a reformed practice, one that declares the believer forgiven forever and gives him a new heart and mind to obediently follow after the Lord. Are you living by this New Covenant?

If the truth be told, much of how we live is all about us. If we were to come face to face with our own motives and actions we might be saddened to see that we are more concerned with our well-being than with God's glory. When confronted with our own self-centeredness we simply justify it as good and proper regardless of what the Bible says.

The special purpose of the New Covenant, with its imparting of God's law on the heart and full forgiveness of sin, was to declare the glorious and gracious power of God in salvation. Under the Old Covenant, man ruined this picture, turning God-given salvation into a man-merited one. The New Covenant reveals the glory of God – not the glory of man. We must remember that God's priority, whether in the Old or New Testaments, is His glory. Under the Old Covenant, man thought that he was doing something to earn God's merits. In other words, man was glorified. In the New Covenant, man is shown that forgiveness of sin is God's doing and therefore He is to receive all the glory.

What lies before us then is an old way and new way living for God; an old practice and a reformed practice. The old way focuses upon self, "what I can do" and draws upon abilities that everyone has be they Christian or not. The new way is focused upon God and what He has done. Living this way requires resources found only in Christ. The old way depends upon moral principles to work and reduces morality to pragmatism. The new way depends solely upon the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to cleanse, perfect, sanctify us by taking away our sins. The new way offers the indwelling of the Spirit of God to empower us to enjoy God as our greatest joy and to boldly reveal the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are you living by this new way? Is this what you believe about the Lord Jesus Christ?

Soli Deo Gloria

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