

GOD WITH US

Part 11: LATER LETTERS

Message 6 – Hebrews The Supremacy of Christ Hebrews 4:14 – 10:39

Introduction

In the first section of this letter, the author emphasized the key theme: Jesus is superior . . . to the O.T. prophets, to angels and to Moses; thus, we are called to persevere in our faith, to hold fast to our confession without wavering. In the second section, the discussion moves to Jesus being the superior High Priest. This will involve not only His position as the Father's supremely appointed High Priest, but also His mediatorial work of both offering the perfect sacrifice for sins and mediating the relationship between God and humanity by His intercession on behalf of believers.

I. The Superior High Priest of our Confession: 4:14 – 10:39

In terms of the religious life of Israel, the High Priest was the most important person, for he mediated the relationship between the people and God. For a detailed description of his role, refer to the consecration of Aaron, the first High Priest, and his sons (Leviticus 8). His most important assignment was to offer the sacrifice for the sins of the nation on the annual Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). In this long central section of the letter, the author will stress that the O.T. High Priest and the entire ritual system was intended to prefigure Christ, the supreme and true High Priest and His perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins.

A. His Priesthood Explained: 4:14 – 5:10

- Keep bringing your needs to our GREAT High Priest: 4:14-16

The passage below serves as both a conclusion to the opening section, emphasizing the superiority of Christ and our need to keep clinging to Him, as well as an introduction to the next section, emphasizing the superiority of Christ as a *Great High Priest*.

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let’s hold firmly to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let’s approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help

at the time of our need.”

Note: The name JESUS- “Savior” identifies Him with humanity and His ministry on earth, especially as our Savior who died for us. The title SON OF GOD points to His deity.

We should “hold firmly” not only because Jesus is *superior*, but also because He is *sympathetic* in His role as our Great High Priest. He can sympathize with our weaknesses, thus, we should draw near with confidence (not fear) to His throne of grace, to receive the mercy and grace we so desperately need in times of vulnerability and trial.

MERCY refers to God with-holding from us what we deserve. GRACE refers to God giving us what we don't deserve. Jesus Christ invites us to approach His throne, because of His MERCY – since our sins have been paid in full and we can stand before Him forgiven. We can have confidence to approach Christ because He is eager to GRACE US with His amazing love; to bring us comfort, hope, and the ability to persevere, holding on to our confession of faith, even when we don't see the answers to our prayers.

- Jesus met two important qualifications: 5:1-10

Two qualifications are mentioned in what follows. First, the High Priest had to be *appointed* by God. Second, he had to be able to *deal gently with sinners*. Jesus met both of these qualifications. Verses 1-6 deal with His divine appointment, and verses 7-10 deal with His ability to sympathize with frail human beings. First, His divine appointment:

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of people in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is clothed in weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins for himself, as well as for the people. And no one takes the honor for himself, but receives it when he is called by God, just as Aaron also was. So too Christ did not glorify Himself in becoming a high priest, but it was He who said to Him, ‘You are My Son, today I have become your Father’; just as He also says in another passage, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (5:1-6).

The incarnation (becoming human) of Jesus is emphasized in Hebrews, as His humanity was necessary for His role as the High Priest for the human race. In Hebrews, Jesus is presented as the eternal Son of God who, in becoming human and experiencing what humans experience, *became our great High Priest*. His priesthood was not according to the

traditional line of Aaron from whom all the High Priests descended, but rather, from the line of the mysterious O.T. king/priest named Melchizedek. The author will come back to Melchizedek later in the letter. Here, he continues by showing how the sufferings of Jesus equipped Him to be able to deal gently with those He represents as our ultimate earthly great High Priest.

“In the days of His humanity, He offered up both prayers and pleas with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His devout behavior. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey Him, being designated by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (5:7-10).

Verse 7 refers to the agonizing prayers, “with loud crying and tears,” Jesus made in the Garden of Gethsemane. His prayer was to be saved “out from the midst of death,” not simply “from death.” The resurrection, after Christ’s death by crucifixion, was the Father’s answer to this prayer. **Verse 8** indicates that even as the Son of God, Jesus had to ‘learn’ the obedience of a human being. Yes, He was naturally inclined to obey His Father; but at the same time, He had to learn submission and obedience in a new way, as indicated by the later phrase: He “endured the cross, despising the shame” (12:2). He brought His human will into submission to the divine will. **Verse 9** refers to Jesus being made “perfect” not in His essential being, rather, in His function as our merciful and sympathetic High priest (see similarly 2:10, 5:9 and 7:28).

Life on earth is full of loss, grief and suffering. These are often without answers. In these experiences, I remind myself of my God-the Lord Jesus Christ. He too experienced life and suffering as a human being. HE GETS US. This can often be our ONLY ANSWER IN TIMES OF LOSS. In times of our own suffering, temptation and trials, we need to move toward Jesus, our sympathetic High Priest, not away from Him. He cares for us, understands us from His own earthly experience, and invites us to come to Him for help. Do you have unanswered grief and loss? Do you have needs to bring to His throne of mercy and grace today?

B. His Priesthood Ignored: 5:11 – 6:20

This section is parenthetical, as discussion of the High Priestly role of Jesus will resume at 7:1. This is a warning passage like many others in Hebrews; but with a stronger tone. Some had left the church and turned

away from Christ. Others were tempted to do so.

- Failure to Mature in the Knowledge of Christ: 5:11-14

Sufficient time had passed for these people to mature spiritually to the level of “teachers;” but they were slipping back instead of going forward. This stagnation in growth was a concerning sign, because we are never just staying still. We are either growing in maturity, or we are sliding backwards in our faith.

“Concerning him we have much to say, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become poor listeners. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil” (5:11-14).

Any parent will be concerned if their child isn't eating foods that are appropriate to their age and stage of life. Similarly, spiritual food intake, learning God's Word, is a sign of spiritual health, or lack thereof. How would you rate your food intake at this time? Are you eating “solid food” fit for maturing believers? Or, are you still needing milk (the beginning teachings of the Bible)? The way to increase your appetite for deeper Bible truths - “solid food” is to begin prioritizing studying God's unchanging Word. And ch. 10:25 exhorts believers to not do it alone. What can you do to increase your intake of God's “solid food?” You can read through the whole Bible, relisten to the messages on line, and read the commentary.

- Exhortation to Press On to maturity: 6:1-3

Hebrews is full of strong exhortations. The author includes himself with the audience (note the use of “us”) as he encourages them to press on in their walk with Christ. He does not want them to go back to the “A-B-Cs” of faith; rather, to press on to maturity.

“Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let US press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits” (6:1-3).

As noted above (5:11-14), these believers were not moving forward in

their spiritual understanding and pressing on toward maturity, rather they were believing that they should go back again to steps they had presumably done: Egs. Repenting from their works-based efforts (that didn't bring them spiritual life); placing their faith in Christ; being instructed about life in the congregation ('washings' or baptism); sharing in some blessing or being set apart for ministry by the 'laying on of hands'; learning about the future resurrection of all people, and God's final judgment. These were the 'elementary teachings' in the early Christian church.

- The Impossibility of Starting Over: 6:4-8

The writer of Hebrews was addressing a mixed audience. There were strong believers who were enduring in their faith; weaker believers who were not maturing; doubting ones who were considering abandoning their faith; and those who had already left and publicly renounced their "professed" faith in Christ. The passage below is addressed to all of the above groups; but it is describing the last group – those who have abandoned their faith in Christ. The apostle John had such people in mind when he wrote: *"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us"* (1John 2:19).

"For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and produces vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned" (6:4-8).

Commentators are divided over how to interpret this passage. There are 3 basic views. 1) It is describing 'Christians' who, because of their turning away from Christ, have lost their salvation. 2) It is describing 'Christians' who are turning away from Christ and the author is simply stating that it is impossible to be "born again" again. 3) It is describing people who acted like Christians but who were never truly indwelt by the Spirit and made alive to God. **View #1** above is the easiest way to understand *this* passage; but we reject it because it contradicts other clear teaching in the New Testament on the *security of the believer* ("once saved, always saved" eg. Heb. 13:5; John 10:27-30; Ephesians

1:13,14; Romans 8:38,39; etc.). **View #2** makes some sense, in that it is true that IF a person is saved and indwelt by the Spirit, then it is “impossible” (and unnecessary) to repeat the born-again experience. The problem with this view is that it nullifies the whole point of the author’s strong warnings and admonitions. He would simply be saying: *Remain true to Christ because you are saved and you can’t be saved all over again.* And this seems to lack any force whatsoever. **View #3** makes the most sense to me. These are people who were part of the Christian community for some time; they had made a profession of faith in Christ; but now, due to persecution, they were publicly renouncing Christ and turning away (apostasy), thus “*putting Him to open shame.*” The writer is not addressing those who have already turned away; rather, he is addressing those still in the Christian community who were tempted to turn away by the example of those who had already left. The challenge with view #3 is explaining the first four phrases underlined above. The phrases sound like they are describing Christians; but this is not necessarily so.

Enlightened – This refers to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, but His illuminating work does not imply that His regenerating work also happened. “As these Hebrews listened to the message of the New Testament, the Holy Spirit enlightened their minds and hearts to clearly understand it.” (Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies*, p.114.). They “understood clearly,” but did not “appropriate deeply” the message of salvation through Christ.

Tasted of the heavenly gift – The “heavenly gift” is likely the message of the gospel, and is connected to the illuminating work of the Spirit. These people had “tasted” the message of salvation through Christ; but apparently had not made a deep and final personal surrender to the Person and Work of Christ. As some have put it, they ‘tasted’ but did not ‘swallow.’

Made partakers of the Holy Spirit – A “partaker” is a “sharer.” Here it could denote one who has shared in (witnessed or experienced) the ministries of the Holy Spirit, while not being personally indwelt by the Spirit. These might be people who had been in church environments where the ministries of the Spirit were functioning, but now they have abandoned any connection with the body of Christ. Judas Iscariot comes to mind as one who “shared in the ministries of the Spirit” for 3 years as he spent time with Jesus; yet, he seems to have never fully embraced the message of salvation and been made alive to God. Judas even participated in the teams-of-two mission trips that Jesus commanded. All the while, he was living a lie and pilfering money

from the teams' money box.

Tasted the good Word of God – This could describe people who have sat in environments where the Word of God was taught clearly, and they have understood the meaning and implications of the teaching; but again, they have not appropriated the teaching at the heart level. Perhaps they even showed outward conformity to the practices of the community; while not fully embracing these values and beliefs in their hearts.

And then have fallen away – After four seemingly positive phrases, the fifth phrase is unambiguous. These people have turned away and renounced (publicly) their faith in Christ. There are other passages that seem to clearly indicate that IF a person falls away, then they were never truly saved and indwelt by the Spirit in the first place. (See for example 1 John 2:19,20; Hebrews 3:6; Colossians 1:22,23.)

Note: We cannot forget the central theme of the Bible: “Lost and Found” as typified in the parable of “The Prodigal Son” in Luke 15. In this case he was a ‘true son’ who chose to leave his father’s house and provision, to try life apart from him. Upon realizing finally that life apart from the father and his love was progressively more difficult, the son went home. His father acknowledged that *‘this SON of MINE was dead but is alive’* (Luke 15:24). It takes passages like Luke 15, and many others, (like Hebrews 13:5 *“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you”*) to help us interpret difficult passages like those found in Hebrews.

- Evidence of Commitment to Christ: 6:9-12

The author now addresses directly those who are still clinging to their faith in Christ (“beloved ones”). He points to all the ways they have given credible evidence of the reality of their faith. These are the kinds of actions and attitudes that “accompany salvation” (or, flow out from the heart and life of a truly saved person).

“But, beloved, we are convinced of better things regarding you, and things that accompany salvation, even though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, by having served and by still serving the saints. And we desire that each one of you demonstrate the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and endurance inherit the promises” (6:9-12).

“Your work; your love toward Christ; your service and help toward His people.” His desire for them is clear: Keep going! Keep being diligent in living out your faith in Jesus. Imitate those who have gone before you who through faith and endurance inherited the promises of God (alluding to the great hall of fame of faithful believers in ch.11).

- God’s Promises never Fail: 6:13-18

Having just mentioned those who *“inherit the promises”* of God (6:12), the author now reflects on the reliability of God’s promises. Regardless of how life seems to be ‘working’ or ‘not working,’ God’s promises are faithful and true. God’s promise to Abraham is an example of the steadfast nature of God’s word (6:13-18). Abraham and Sarah had to wait 25 years for the promise of a son to be fulfilled. Yet, in the end, the promise *was fulfilled* because *God is faithful*. The writer ends the section by speaking of the “hope” that believers have because of the faithful promises of God.

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and reliable and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:19,20).

Regardless of what these believers were going through, they had an *“anchor for the soul.”* That anchor was their HOPE in the trustworthiness of a God who cannot lie, and the fact that there will ultimately be a great reward for their persevering faith.

Biblical “hope” is very different to just “hope” as we may say, ‘I hope I hear from Mom or Dad this week’. That ‘hope’ is based on earthly circumstances or people. Biblical hope is anchored in the promises of GOD. When God has spoken specifically in His Word, then we can claim His promise and place our hope in Him. Eg. ‘Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you’ (Heb. 13:5). Learn to anchor yourself in God’s promises that are specific to you. At the same time, pray with persevering faith for God to answer your hearts’ desires. As JESUS prayed for the “cup to pass by Him, yet not His will, but the Father’s will be done’ (Luke 22:42).

C. His Priesthood Compared: 7:1 – 10:18

Back at 5:10, the writer had said that Jesus was appointed as a High Priest *“according to the order of Melchizedek.”* Having completed his parenthetical warning about the danger of becoming *“dull of hearing,”* the writer now returns to this deep teaching on the nature of Jesus’ High Priestly role. Although the argumentation is complex, the overall point

is simple: The priesthood of Jesus is superior to the Levitical priesthood of the Jewish O.T. system. Much of the argument here is based on the Messianic Psalm 110 (used much in Hebrews 1:13; 10:13; 12:2) where it is said that the Messiah will be “*appointed by God as a priest from the order of Melchizedek*” (Ps.110:4).

- The Superiority of Melchizedek over Levi: 7:1-28

Melchizedek appears in the story of Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20). In Hebrews, he becomes a ‘type of Christ’ in three ways. 1) He was “king of Salem” which literally means “king of peace” (Salem = Hebrew shalom). Jesus is our King of Peace. 2) He was “king of righteousness” (melchi = king; zedek = righteousness). Jesus is our King of Righteousness. 3) He appears in the Abraham narrative with no genealogy (which was required in Israel to prove one’s right to be a priest). This can be *figuratively interpreted* to mean that Melchizedek “had no beginning and no end.” Jesus is the Eternal Son of God/High Priest, Who has no beginning and no end.

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually” (7:1-3).

The writer is establishing the fact that Jesus is a High Priest from the superior order of Melchizedek, not from the lesser order of Levi. His line of argument in what follows is this: Abraham (who was the forefather of Levi, one of Jacob’s 12 sons) paid tithes to Melchizedek; thus, the order of Melchizedek must be superior to the order of Levi. This is the 1st mention of giving a 10th of our wealth. Remember, the Levitical priesthood was established by God through the tribe of Levi. Jesus, however, was from the tribe of Levi’s brother Judah.

“And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, has paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his forefather when Melchizedek met him” (7:4-10).

The remainder of ch.7 argues that IF the Levitical priesthood had been adequate to fulfill God’s mission, THEN there never would have been the need for a priest to be appointed from a new line (line of Melchizedek). As it stands, the change indicates that the line of Levi was inferior to the priestly line of Melchizedek/Jesus.

“So if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?” (7:11).

(Aaron was from the priestly tribe of Levi; but he is distinct within that tribe because his family was chosen to provide the line of High Priests for Israel. Aaron was the first High Priest. See Numbers 17).

Further, because Jesus is an ‘eternal’ High Priest, He is able to offer eternal salvation to those who accept His mediatorial work.

“Therefore He is also able to save forever those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25).

The chapter ends with a sweeping description of the attributes of Jesus the superior High Priest.

“For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens; who has no daily need, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because He did this once for all time when He offered up Himself. 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, who has been made perfect forever” (7:26-28).

Holiness: Christ “fulfills all the divine obligations both in His character and work” (Vine, p.75).

Innocence: He was totally free from guilt; He did not need to offer a sacrifice for His own sins.

Undefiled: He needed no cleansing bath before He entered God’s presence on our behalf. (See Leviticus 16:4.)

Separate: He is “void of all contact and commerce with sinners, removed far away in His glorified state and body, into God’s Holy of Holies” where He now ministers in the presence of the Father, on our behalf (Wuest, p.139).

Exalted: Jesus has passed through the heavens and is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High (also Heb.1:3 and 4:14).

Finished work: He offered Himself as the one great sacrifice for all time. He was both the offer-er and the offering (“*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*”, John 1:29).

Sonship: This great High Priest is God’s very own Son (also Heb.1:2).

Perfection: Christ is perfect in terms of His fitness to serve as our High

Priest. (See comments above on Heb.2:10).

Eternality: He is a Priest forever.

- The Superiority of the New Covenant: 8:1 – 10:18

This long section compares the Old Covenant, mediated by the O.T. priests, to the New Covenant mediated by Christ. The central argument is that Jesus mediates a Covenant that, in all aspects, is superior to the Old Covenant, that God established through Moses. We will highlight the 4 main points in this section.

1. Jesus serves in a better tabernacle, a heavenly one (8:1-6). The earthly tabernacle that Moses was instructed to build was but a copy or shadow (8:5) of the true heavenly tabernacle (presence of God) in which Jesus serves as our High Priest. The concept of the Old Testament ritual being a “shadow” of the true reality runs throughout the book of Hebrews on every level. The priesthood was a shadow of Christ’s true priesthood. The tabernacle was a shadow of the true tabernacle in heaven. The sacrifices were shadows of the once-for-all true sacrifice Christ would offer. The Old Covenant is but a shadow of the New Covenant.

2. Jesus mediates a superior covenant (8:7-13). The writer quotes at length from Jeremiah where God promised to make a “new covenant” with the people of Israel (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). Instead of the law being written on tablets of stone (the Mosaic law, given on Mt. Sinai), God would write His laws on the tablets of human hearts, through the work of His Spirit. The writer of Hebrews is arguing that the High Priestly work of Christ grows directly out of this new (i.e., superior) covenant between God and humanity.

“Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will bring about a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care about them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they will not teach, each one his fellow citizen, and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful toward their wrongdoings, and their sins I will no longer remember” (Hebrews 8:8-12; citing Jeremiah 31:31-34).

3. Jesus offered a superior sacrifice. By the sacrifice of Himself,

Jesus granted perfect and permanent access into the Holy of Holies (the presence of God in heaven). Detail is given here as to the complicated process by which the O.T. priests ministered in the “outer court” of the tabernacle daily; but only the high priest was able to enter the holy of holies once a year (on the Day of Atonement) with very specific sacrifices for both his own sins and the sins of the people. In contrast, Jesus, the superior High Priest, entered the true heavenly tabernacle through the perfect sacrifice of Himself, thus opening permanently the access to God’s most holy presence.

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things having come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made by hands, that is, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all time, having obtained eternal redemption” (9:11,12).

All of the key issues discussed thus far, with regard to the Priestly role of Jesus and His superior sacrifice, are summed up well in the final verses of chapter 9.

“For Christ did not enter a holy place made by hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And just as it is destined for people to die once, and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (9:24-28).

4. Jesus offered a once-for-all sacrifice. This is an extension of the previous point; but the emphasis here falls on the once-for-all nature of His sacrifice as compared to the repetitive nature of the O.T. sacrifices. The O.T. sacrifices never actually removed sins; rather, they were a figurative representation of the only sacrifice that actually could remove sins – the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Thus, the O.T. sacrifices were symbols pointing forward to the death of Jesus, “*the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*” (In a similar way, the communion elements are symbols that point back to the cross of Christ; while the O.T. sacrifices were symbols pointing forward to the cross of Christ.)

“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the form of those things itself, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually every year, make those who approach perfect. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10:1-4).

In contrast to those repetitive sacrifices that could never remove sins, we have the *once-for-all* sacrifice of Christ:

“By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:10-14).

This kind of passage should cause us to rejoice in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. There is nothing we can add to, or take away from, the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. We can just enjoy it, give thanks, and respond to His sacrificial love by offering our lives as “living sacrifices” to be used for His purposes (Romans 12:1,2).

D. His Priesthood Utilized: 10:19-39

The writer has completed a long section (8:1-10:18) where the comparison was made between the priestly role of Christ with that of the O.T. priests. *The message was: Christ is our superior High Priest.* Now the writer turns once again to admonish (and warn) the audience not to turn away from this Great High Priest, rather, to turn toward Him.

- The Encouragement to Draw Near to Christ: 10:19-25

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to encourage one another in love and good

deeds, not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (10:19-25).

Notice the string of exhortations. “Let us approach God.” “Let us hold firmly to the confession.” “Let us consider how to encourage one another.” These are called ‘hortatory subjunctives’ (Greek) where the writer includes himself in the exhortation. This is a common style of the author of Hebrews. (See 4:11; 4:14; 4:16; 6:1; 10:22,23,24; 12:1;12:28; 13:13; 13:15.)

- The Warning not to Fall Away: 10:26-31

The warning passages in Hebrews become stronger as the letter progresses. Here the writer warns of the judgment that awaits those who going on “*sinning willfully*” after “*receiving the knowledge of the truth.*” As per our comments on the previous warning passage (6:4-8) there are various views as to how to interpret this section. My understanding is that the writer is referring to people who have already departed from Christ and from the community of believers; they have already publicly renounced their faith in Christ. These are not “true believers” for, if they had truly been indwelt by the Spirit, they would have persevered. The writer is addressing everyone (“we”) including himself, admonishing all to walk in the footsteps of the faithful (who are held up as examples in ch.11).

“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has ignored the Law of Moses is put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:26-31).

Notice the phrases the writer used to describe those who have departed from Christ: *Sinning willfully. Trampling underfoot the Son of God. Regarding as unclean the blood of the cross of Christ. Insulting the Spirit of grace.* These are not phrases that describe a Christian who is struggling with temptation and often falling short in his/her walk with Christ. (See Romans 7 for Paul’s description of his own struggles.) These phrases describe the person who, having once been associated in

some way with the name “Christian,” has now made a full and public renunciation of Christ.

- Remembering Better Things of this Audience: 10:32-39

As in chapter 6:9-12, the writer moves from a *strong warning* to a *vivid reminder* of the past where these people had shown clear evidence of the reality of their commitment to Christ. Jesus said: “*You will know them by their fruits.*” These people were currently in a difficult fight to “keep the faith” in an environment of persecution; yet, they had given previous evidence of genuine fruit in their actions and attitudes. The writer is admonishing them (and himself) to continue on.

“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through insults and distress, and partly by becoming companions with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better and lasting possession. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. ‘For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one will live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not among those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith for the safekeeping of the soul” (10:32-39).

The underlined phrases above capture the intent of the writer. The next chapter will give a long list of O.T. people who pressed on in their faith in God, in spite of trials, difficulties and persecution in this present world.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the concept that the O.T. worship system foreshadowed the Person and Work of Christ. What parallels does Hebrews make? What parallels do you see?
2. How does this long section of Hebrews deepen your view of the Person and Work of Christ?
3. How does this section of Hebrews challenge you in your own walk with Christ?
4. There is emphasis in Hebrews on “pressing on toward maturity” in Christ. How can we best do this in our current context?