

STUDY 17

A NEW PRIESTHOOD

HEBREWS 7:1-28

EXPOSITION

A NEW PRIESTHOOD IMPLIES A SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD

So now we continue with verses 11-25, which concludes that the new priesthood, that of the order of Melchisedek, and which Jesus fulfilled, must therefore be superior to the old or there would be no need of a new one. If the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites was sufficient to save people, then there would be no need of a new priesthood in Jesus.

(1) The coming of the new priesthood makes the old priesthood imperfect (verse 11)

'Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchisedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?'

'Now, consider this', our writer is saying in effect, 'you have a priesthood and a high priest in Jerusalem'. (This was before the destruction of the temple in AD 70) 'You have a sacrificing priest. But', he continues, 'Jesus is our great high priest.' So there is a conflict here, a contradiction. 'Within Judaism, there is a high priest who hates Christians, and is persecuting them, sponsoring people like Saul of Tarsus (later, the apostle Paul). 'Now', he argues, 'are you going to go back to that kind of high priest who represents a line that failed to save souls? Are you going to leave Jesus who has the power through his blood to forgive our sins, remove our guilt, set us free, and bring us safely to the Father? Are you going back to all of that, to what is essentially useless? While there is a new priesthood, an effective priesthood, why go back to the old?'

(2) A new priesthood implies a new Law or Covenant (12)

'For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.' Everything is now changed. We must think in a new way. We must act in a new way. We are now in a new dispensation. Our writer is saying here, 'Look, we have a new priest in Jesus Christ. He has brought in a new regime, and everything is new and different.' So when there is a change of priesthood, there must be a change of law. Our Lord described this new regime as a 'new covenant' during that first communion service in the upper room before his death on the Cross. (Matthew 26:28). That means a new law.

(3) A new law requires a new line of priests (13-14)

'For he of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.' Now, which tribe was Jesus descended from? Did he come from the Levites? Indeed not. Who was he descended from? From Judah (14) - 'For it is evident that

our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood.' He is the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah' (Revelation 5:5), in fulfilment of the prophecy Jacob made to his son Judah just before he died (Genesis 49:9-10), and to which he added 'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah'. 'Now', he continues, 'no one from Judah ever officiated at the altar, so this is a new kind of priesthood altogether. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.'

In verse 15, he continues the argument. 'It is clearer still, that another priest has come in the likeness of Melchisedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement (like the Levite), but according to the power of an endless life.' This Christian high priest of ours did not come from Aaron or Moses. His ancestors never officiated at the altar. He came from Judah, introducing a new priesthood. Finally, he asks, 'What happened to the old priests of Aaron? Well', he says, 'first there was Aaron, and then he died.' Then they took him up to Mount Hor on the day that he was to die, and removing his high priestly robes, they put them on his son, who himself died. And this continued through history. There were about 83 of them according to Josephus, the Jewish historian. The point is, every one of them died. But we have a high priest who is not dead. He lives. He is alive for evermore, and has the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1:18) Melchisedek did not die according to the image we have of him in the Bible. But Levi died, and Aaron died, and his son died, and their sons died, right up to this last high priest who is persecuting Christians.

(4) Three ways in which Christ is compared with Melchisedek (15-19)

Firstly, the new priest is like Melchisedek - 'And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchisedek, there arises another priest who has come ...' (15-16)

Secondly, the new priest is eternal, unlike the sacrificing priest who died, for he comes from eternity - '... not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.' (16) Jesus, as the Christian high priest, has the power of an endless life. He lives forever. And, in him, we will live forever also. What kind of priesthood does he possess? We read in verse 17 - 'For he testifies, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek".' This is a quotation from Psalm 110:4, a Psalm of David. This priest comes from eternity, and he takes his priesthood into eternity. It is a priesthood inaugurated by an eternal person. It is according to the order of Melchisedek.

Thirdly, we must say some more things about the old Law. Why do we set aside the old order and the old priesthood? The answer is found in verse 18 - 'For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness.' The old law and the old dispensation and the old sacrificial system under the Aaronic priests was weak in that it could never forgive anyone's sin. It was weak and useless. Verse 19 continues '... for the law made nothing perfect'. There are many today who still believe that by their own good works they can commend themselves to God and be saved. There are still preachers who say that. That is what the Jews believed, and they were wrong. The old dispensation, the old law, was no good. It could make nothing perfect. But, 'on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.' (19) We come to God through the Lord Jesus. Our appeal to our hearers might go something like this —

'You want to come near to God? You can only come through the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to God through him. Do it now. It is really quite simple. Come to Jesus, and put your faith in him. Receive him as your Saviour, and you will draw near to God. Here is a better hope of coming near to God. It is a sure and certain hope.'

(5) Here also is the contrast between the old inferior Levitical priesthood and that of Melchisedek (20-24)

Verse 20 answers the question, 'How do we know that this is true?' 'And inasmuch as he was not made priest without an oath'. (20) Verse 17 has already informed us of God's declaration - 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek.' And he says further in verse 21 - 'The Lord has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek.' You want to know whether it is true, whether to believe in Jesus Christ. It is as certainly true as God's mercy is certain, as God's grace is certain, as God's promises are certain, and God is unchangeable. For he has sworn an oath by himself, and he cannot break his word. Christ's priesthood is forever after the order of Melchisedek. Verse 22 gives this assurance — 'Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.' He is a guarantee of our salvation. All the priests died, but the priesthood of Christ continues and is unchangeable (23-24)

CHRIST'S PRESENT WORK (25)

What sort of a high priest is Jesus Christ? 'Therefore he is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them.' (25)

These words are among the most important in the Letter to the Hebrews, if not in the New Testament. To increase the scope of the gospel that we preach, we need to spend some time with this verse. The words 'he ever lives' remind us of the vital importance of the Easter message concerning the resurrection of Christ. Now, if there is only the Cross as the Easter message, then our worship today would be purely commemoration, a remembering of a wonderful man who died two thousand years ago. But Easter is not about death; it is about life. It is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the gospel of the resurrection. It is about a living Saviour who gives us new life. It is about hope, about certainty. It is also about eternal life and heaven.

Matthew Henry, commenting on 1 Peter 1:3, says this -

'The resurrection of Christ considered as an act of power is an act of judgement; when the Father released Christ, raised him from the grave and gave him glory, advanced him to heaven, crowned him with glory and honour, invested him with all power in heaven and earth and glorified him with that glory which he had before the world was.'

So let us consider this verse — 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' Now you see why Matthew Henry is so eloquent in his description of the importance of God raising Jesus Christ from the dead, crowning him with glory, investing him with all power and glorifying him with the glory that he possessed before the world existed! And, of course, without the resurrection of Christ, the promise of Matthew 28:20 is utterly empty. Jesus said to his disciples - '... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' When did he say these words? Not before the Cross, not on the Cross, but after the Cross, and after his resurrection. It is the promise of the risen Christ. If he is not risen then that promise is in vain. There is no point in engaging in any missionary endeavour, or in preaching the gospel, if he is not risen.

How can he be with us if he is not risen? The gospel message is about One who is alive, who has risen from the dead, conqueror over sin and death. He is alive and real to anyone who comes to him. He 'ever lives to make intercession'. Now, here is a vital link between

the resurrection of Christ and his intercessory work. The work of the risen Christ is to intercede for us. 'He ever lives to make intercession for them.' Who are 'them'? At the beginning of the verse, it says, 'He is also able to save to the uttermost [forever] those who come to God through him'.

A VERY IMPORTANT VERSE

The gospel that we preach not only declares salvation, but an eternal salvation. Faith is not something that is taken up, then, in some terrible moment of backsliding or apostasy, it is dropped. Jesus never lets us go. The true believer is one who is saved to the uttermost; that is, saved forever. Why does God make our salvation so certain, and so lasting? Because we have One who ever lives to make intercession for us. Our ultimate salvation is as certain as the resurrection and heavenly intercession of Christ.

Now that is a very wonderful thought. We are his own possession. His blood was the price that was paid for our salvation. He is truly our Redeemer. But once having made us his own, that is not the end of the gospel message. There is more to come. The Easter message does not end with the death and resurrection of Christ who saves us. It goes on to speak of the One who intercedes for us.

Hebrews 7:25 makes the link between our salvation, and the Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us. As Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:10, we have one who 'has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel'. There is no gospel apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And what an important office Christ has taken upon himself! Isaiah 53:12 speaks of this intercession - 'Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' Christ is the intercessor. What an important office this is, by which Christ has taken it upon himself to plead for us, and bring our cause before God!

Finally, we can be sure that he intercedes for us successfully. He continues in his intercessory work for ever. He never ceases to intercede for us. Whatever the Son asks for, the Father always grants. That is wonderful. Because he pleads for us eternally, then we are accepted by the Father for ever. There will never be a moment in eternity when we can be turned away by God the Father, because Jesus 'ever lives to make intercession for us.' He guarantees our acceptance. He is the guarantee of the new covenant. He holds his priesthood permanently. As long as he is our priest, he lives to intercede for us forever.

So then, fellow gospel preachers, how are we to apply to our hearers this theme of the priesthood of Jesus Christ? Very simply in this way -

'If you have not already done so, come to God through the priestly ministry and heavenly intercession of our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from him, there is no other way to God; and, certainly, without him, there is no hope and no salvation for those who have a guilty conscience, and bear the load and weight of unforgiven sin.'

Salvation is only applicable to those who draw near to God through Christ. I ask you, 'Have you come this way?' You may only draw near to God through him. Or perhaps you think somehow there is something within you that will commend you to God. It will not. You may only draw near to God through Jesus Christ. If you do not have a friend, an intercessor, in the court of heaven, God will be your enemy. There is no hope for you. So why, then, do you not draw near through this risen Christ? He is risen, he is alive, he is here. Does he live

in your lives? Accept his invitation to come in. Then you will find that he 'ever lives to make intercession for you.' Why? To save you for ever.

Earlier, we quoted from a later Puritan Commentator, Matthew Henry. Here is another quotation —

'This is our safety and our happiness that this ever living high priest is able to save to the utmost in all times, in all cases, in all circumstances. He is able to save to the utmost all who come to God by him.'

THE NEW PRIESTHOOD IS DESCRIBED (26-28)

In these three verses, we have what has been described as 'a triumphant little summary'. Our writer makes three points.

(1) Although a human high priest, Christ is not like the priests of the Old Covenant, neither is he like us - 'For such a high priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens'. There are five descriptions here of our high priest: holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, higher than the heavens. All of them indicate a non-human origin, indeed, a heavenly one.

However, our writer insists that 'he is like us', but with these important differences: he is holy, that is, not only separate from sin, but totally devoted to the service of his Father in heaven; harmless, that is 'without guile', open and transparent, exactly what he claims to be, and unable to deceive or tell lies; undefiled, that is, as STRONG puts it in his *Concordance*, '...free from that which by nature is deformed or debased, again, without sin of any sort; separate from sinners, that is, possessing the human nature of sinners, but without any tendency to sin; finally, higher than the heavens, so very like Paul's assertion in Philippians 2:9-11 - 'Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' Such, then, is our high priest.

(2) His sacrifice was once for all - '... who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this he did once for all when he offered up himself.' (27) The words of Jesus on the cross spring readily to mind - 'It is finished.' Just as one sin ruined the whole of mankind, so the one sacrifice of Christ was sufficient for all those who believe in him. The death of Christ cannot be re-enacted or offered again. It is complete in itself.

These are important words, and are the centre of the Christian doctrine of the finished work of Christ. No more sacrifices, no more priests to offer them. Christ is both our priest and sacrifice.

(3) The things of the New Covenant have completely taken over the things relating to the Old Covenant - 'For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.' (28) The priests were men like us, full of weaknesses and sin; but not Christ.

The oath referred to is found in Psalm 110:4 (quoted earlier in Hebrews 7:21). These words were written centuries after the giving of the Law of Moses, and speak of the new priest as belonging to the order of Melchisedek, whose priesthood is eternal.

The word 'perfected' might raise a doubt concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. Was Christ ever imperfect? Indeed not! Not in any way! Perfected is related to the word 'telescope', an

instrument for bringing up close an object that is at a great distance. The word is used here to show that Christ achieved exactly what he set out to do - and what he did was indeed perfect! (See Hebrews 2:10) This is a great word of assurance that we, as gospel preachers, can set before our hearers. It concentrates the mind upon Jesus, our only-sufficient and perfect high priest.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 17

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Matthew 26:28

1. Which blood of the covenant is mentioned in the Old Testament?
2. Did this blood bring about the forgiveness of sins?
3. Whose blood is 'my blood'?
4. Where was it shed?
5. Was it a sacrifice?
6. Did it forgive sins?

Read Revelation 5:5

7. Who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah?
8. How can he be 'of the root of David'?

Read Genesis 49:9-10

9. What will this Lion of Judah do? (See verse 10)
10. What other title is given to this lion?
11. Who is this prophecy referring to?

Read Revelation 1:18

12. Who is this verse speaking about?
13. If he is the 'First and the Last' [=God], how could he die?
14. How did he become alive?

Read Psalm 110:4

15. Who was Melchisedek?
16. Who is the fulfilment of Melchisedek?

Read 1 Peter 1:3

17. Who makes sinners spiritually alive?
18. Are we born again through works or through mercy?
19. At what event did this new life come?

Read Matthew 28:20

20. What is a very important task of the Church?
21. What is the Church to say?
22. What promise does the Church have in its massive task?

Read 2 Timothy 1:10

23. What is revealed through Christ? (See verse 9)
24. What has Christ done about death?
25. What two things has the gospel brought into the world?
26. What two effects did these truths have on the apostle Paul? (See verse 11)

Read Philippians 2:9-11

27. What did God do regarding the risen Christ?
28. What happened to his name?
29. What will happen to every knee of believers and unbelievers alike?
30. What will happen to every tongue?

B & C. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION & PRACTICAL

- (1) Make a list of comparisons between Melchisedek and Christ.
- (2) Explain the argument of the writer of Hebrews that Melchisedek was superior to Abraham, as Christ is superior to the High Priest and the priests.
- (3) What connection is there between Abraham and the priests?
- (4) Give as many reasons as you can to explain why the priesthood of Christ is superior to the priests of the Old Covenant.
- (5) Give verses from this chapter to prove your answers.

STUDY 18

THE SANCTUARY AND THE COVENANT

HEBREWS 8:1-13

EXPOSITION

The Old Covenant failed to cleanse men from sin. Not a single offering or blood sacrifice lifted the slightest sin from men's consciences. They still continued in their sinful ways. They had no hope of forgiveness, and were always burdened by guilt. That is why a new covenant was needed which would be entirely effective in cleansing from sin, and in taking away guilt from the conscience. This was effected through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The things of the old covenant were only 'a copy and shadow of the heavenly things'. (Hebrews 8:5) Another word - a very important one - is also found in this verse - 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.' (a quotation from Exodus 25:40)

The word 'pattern' in Greek is TUPOS, from which the English word 'type' is derived. And where a 'type' is found in the old covenant, an 'anti-type' is found fulfilled in the new covenant through the Lord Jesus Christ. In the old covenant, we find 'types' in the law, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the rituals, and many other aspects of Jewish worship. The pattern was the type and shadow, and Jesus was the reality, the truth of it. He was the one to whom all these things pointed. This was the line of argument the writer to the Hebrews took with his Jewish readers.

THE FAILURE OF THE OLD COVENANT

Now, here is an important question, which needs answering in our gospel preaching: 'Why did all those sacrifices, and the priestly line of Aaron, fail?' Our writer gives us two reasons.

Firstly, he testifies to the fact that the priests were as sinful as the people for whom they offered sacrifices. Do not believe that the priests were more godly than the common people. Some of them did terrible things and lived shameful lives. You read of the sons of Eli who lived scandalous and immoral lives. Indeed, the priests who offered the sacrifices were every bit as sinful as those for whom they were made. So they failed in that respect.

Secondly, they failed because they all died. They were like all other men. When they arrived at their allotted span, they died, and their office was handed over to someone else. But, said our writer, we have a high priest who is not like them: he lives forever to make intercession for sinners, and who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:25-26).

Our high priest is not of the order of Aaron, but of the order of Melchisedek - a figure in the Old Testament who represented a kind of eternal priesthood. And you remember how Abraham came to Melchisedek and, on behalf of all the priests to come who were still in his loins, offered him tithes and honoured and worshipped him. As Christ is the fulfilment of this priesthood of Melchisedek, so then Jews must turn from that of Aaron to Jesus Christ. His priesthood is far superior to that of the old covenant.

How is this so? That question is answered in Hebrews chapter 8. The greatest argument is that the ministry of Jesus takes place in heaven. He is there seated at the right hand of God. His ministry is superior to that of the Levites and the high priests, because they exercised their ministry on earth and then died, but Jesus is alive for ever as our high priest in the heavenly presence of God. Moses erected an earthly sanctuary, a tabernacle containing the Holy of Holies, where the mercy-seat was, and where the blood of sacrifice was sprinkled. But this tent was pitched on the desert sands. It was earth-based. But, where is the true sanctuary? In heaven, where God dwells in his Holy of Holies forever? There, too, is our Lord Jesus, 'a priest forever'.

Now, one other thing must be said. Not a single sacrifice offered in all those centuries, of thousands upon thousands of animals taken and sacrificed on Jewish altars, ever made atonement for sin. They were shadows pointing to the substance, to the reality of Jesus shedding his own blood on the cross. This proves the superiority of the new covenant established by Christ on the Cross, and is firmly stated in Hebrews Chapter 8.

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

In 8:1, our writer begins his approach to such high and holy theme by stating - 'Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a high priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens ...' In a few words, our writer declares that we have a high priest who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. 'Majesty' is a word to describe God. That is how the Jews would talk of God. They used special titles to avoid mentioning his holy name. You will also find this word in Hebrews 1:3. Incidentally, you can tell your listeners that the word 'majesty' is also found in Jude verse 25, and is associated with Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 1:16.

(1) COMPARISON BETWEEN THE PRIESTS IN THE TABERNACLE, AND THE WORK OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN (1-6)

Here in Hebrews 8:1 is a description of Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Now, there are some useful comparisons here. First, we may ask, in what respect is Jesus superior to the old covenant?

(a) The first comparison is this: As high priest, he is seated at the right hand of God. Now, when you have been working hard through the day, you return home and sit down. That shows that your work is finished. Now, the Lord Jesus did the same. When he had finished his work of sacrifice on the Cross, and when God raised him from the dead, he ascended and entered the very throne room of God. When he sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty, he showed that he had finished his work, and God had accepted it. There was no more work to be done. But what of the priests? It was a rule that no Jew could sit down when he was performing his offices in the tabernacle. But Jesus is seated because he has finished his work. The old priests never finished. They were always serving and working until they died, when some other took their place. No one sat down because there was no end to the sacrifices that they had to offer. But Jesus has finished his high priestly work and is sitting down. That is the first comparison.

(b) Now, in verse 2, we notice the second comparison. We may ask the questions, 'What is Jesus, and what does he do?' The answer is readily given - he is 'a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.' Moses had commanded the nation to erect a tabernacle (a tent), which contained the holy place and, behind a veil, the Holy of Holies. Take careful note of the phrase 'which the Lord erected, and not man'. The tabernacle in which Christ serves was erected by God and not man. It is in heaven. Christ is 'a minister' in the true tabernacle, not the tabernacle served by the Levitical priests on earth. Christ is in heaven, in the true tabernacle where God is. It is not a tent or a building or anything like that. So here is the second comparison: Jesus is in the true tabernacle in heaven, but the priests served in a tabernacle on earth.

(c) We read in verse 3 - 'For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this one also should have something to offer.' What, then, is in common between the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant, and the high priesthood of Jesus Christ? Our writer states that they both offered 'gifts and sacrifices'. The old priests continually offered gifts and sacrifices when they came into the tabernacle. What did Jesus offer when he came before the Father? A full answer to that question we will leave for later; but we can definitely state that he did have a gift to offer.

B. THE IMPERFECTIONS OF THE OLD COVENANT SACRIFICES

However, the gifts and sacrifices the Levites offered were imperfect. This has already been explained in Hebrews 5:1-2 - 'For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also beset by weakness.' And what was their 'weakness'? It was their sin. Those who were offering gifts and sacrifices for sins on behalf of sinners were themselves sinners. But Jesus was apart from sin. We have already read in chapter 7:26 that he was 'separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens'. Because he was sinless, he was able to offer up himself. He offered himself up because he was not a sinner. He offered himself for sinners; and that is why his sacrifice was superior to the animal sacrifices of the old dispensation. Consequently, he does not need, like the Aaronic high priests, 'to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this he did once for all when he offered up himself.' (7:27)

What was the offering that Jesus brought into the heavenly sanctuary and true tabernacle and offered to his Father on behalf of sinners? It was himself. And it was a perfect sacrifice. All the previous sacrifices were imperfect, offered by imperfect, weak, and sinful men. But Christ came separate from sinners, offering a sinless sacrifice that was sufficient to take away the sins of 'the whole world' (1 John 2:2), a world of a variety of tongues, of races, and of different conditions. It is a very wonderful thought!

Why should some Jewish people long to return to the old system of sacrifice? The gospel was such a transforming message for them. Atonement was effectively made for sin by Jesus Christ, while the old sacrifices were useless. He offered himself, a perfect sacrifice for sin.

(d) We read in verse 4 of a problem - 'For if he were on earth, he would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law'. If Jesus was a priest on earth, he could not claim to be a descendant of Aaron. He was not an earthly priest like the Levites. His is a heavenly priesthood. The priesthood was greatly changed, as we read in 7:12-14 — 'For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe

Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.' His was a different sort of priesthood for we come into a different dispensation under a different covenant. He is not an earthly priest like Aaron, but is a heavenly priest.

(e) Where does his ministry take place? It is in the heavenly sanctuary. The old priests served 'the copy and shadow of the heavenly things'. The 'copy' (or, pattern) served as a 'type' of heavenly things, just as Moses was instructed by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle - 'as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For he said "See that you make all things according to the pattern (the type) shown you on the mountain.'" (Verse 5) The earthly sanctuary in which the priests served was only a 'type', whereas Jesus is in the true heavenly sanctuary.

(f) What sort of ministry does Jesus provide? The answer is in verse 6 - 'But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry'. Here is a favourite word of our writer - 'a more excellent ministry'. (See also Hebrews 1:4) Why was it a more excellent ministry? He explains - 'inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.' The word 'establish' here refers to the passing of a law. The better covenant came in with the full force and authority of the law of God. So what sort of law was established? It was the law of the gospel, not the law of the old covenant of sacrifices and priests, which passed away. It was a newly established law. It was a better ministry and a better covenant. The priests offered an inferior ministry because they were sinners; but Jesus offered a superior, a better, a more excellent ministry.

At the end of verse 6, we read of 'a better covenant, which was established on better promises.' The promises made in the Law of Moses could not come to sinners because they could not fulfil their side of the bargain under the terms of the old covenant. They broke God's laws. The word 'covenant' was also used for a will, where someone leaves property to somebody else on his death. God promised blessing and salvation to all who kept his law; but no one was able to. Thus the promise was never fulfilled because they were all sinners.

But now, God offers salvation and peace and joy, heaven on a different basis, with a new covenant, under the terms of a new will, established when Christ died on the Cross. The old covenant made with the Jews was inferior, for it held out promises, which could never be received; but in Christ we have a superior covenant, which holds out promises to all who will receive them freely by faith. 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works [terms of the old covenant], lest anyone should boast.' (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The old covenant passed away just as the old creation is passing away. Indeed, sacrifices ceased with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70. But the new covenant brings in a new creation - 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.' (2 Corinthians 5:17)

What a gospel message! What an opportunity to make a gospel appeal! Perhaps something like this:

'Have you become new? Or are you still trying to live by the old covenant of works, trying to please God? Or will you simply come to the Lord Jesus as a sinner, and say to him: 'Lord, I repent of my sin. I am sorry, and I want you to come and to cleanse away my sin and be my Saviour. Come into my heart and life, and be sovereign over it.'

And he will do it. This preacher can testify to that, and there are many others present who will also testify to that. What a great high priest we have who is interceding for us in the heavenly sanctuary!

John Cennick (1718-1755) wrote this hymn on the practical results of the intercessory and high priestly work of Christ in heaven:

1
A good high priest is come,
Supplying Aaron's place,
And taking up his room,
Dispensing life and grace,
The law by Aaron's priesthood came,
But grace and truth by Jesus' name.

2
He once temptation knew,
Of every sort and kind,
That he might succour show
To every tempted mind:
In every point the Lamb was tried
Like us, and then for us he died.

3
He died; but lives again,
And by the throne he stands,
There shows how he was slain,
Opening his piercèd hands:
Our Priest abides and pleads the cause
Of us who have transgressed his laws.

4
I other priests disdain,
And laws and offerings too;
None but the bleeding Lamb
The mighty work can do:
He shall have all the praise; for he
Has loved, and lived, and died for me.

Here is hope and confidence when we feel depressed, dispirited, overburdened, and crippled with a sense of failure, in looking to our high priest in heaven who ever lives to make intercession for us, knowing that his prayers on our behalf are effective for us. That is the kind of high priest we have! He belongs to the new covenant. Is that not a wonderful things to preach to our hearers!

2. THE NEW COVENANT IS DESCRIBED IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (8-13)

Now, we come to what is at the very heart of the Letter to Hebrews. All that our writer teaches in his letter, plus the appeal to backsliders, is based upon the importance of the new covenant. Indeed, so vital is the new covenant, that there is no salvation outside of it. As gospel preachers, we must convince our hearers of the vast distance between the old covenant of works, and the new covenant of grace. Our writer used several words to describe the failure of the old covenant - 'inferior' (the opposite of 'excellent' and 'better' in

verse 6), 'faulty' (the opposite of 'faultless' in verse 7), 'old' and 'obsolete' and 'growing old' and 'vanishing away' (the opposite of 'new' in verse 13).

Our writer then gives us an extensive quotation from an Old Testament book (Jeremiah 31:31-34). From this quotation, he is able to answer the question: What sort of new covenant has Jesus brought into being? If it is a better covenant, what sort of covenant is it? He introduces the quotation with the following words - 'For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.' (7)

This is an argument we gospel preachers must use often. You see, if it were possible to be saved without knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour, then he would never have come to die on the Cross. And if God allowed Jesus to die on the cross, then obviously there was no other way to save sinners. So what kind of covenant is the new covenant? We are told here that God found fault with the old covenant. Now that is interesting, isn't it? God actually declared the old covenant to be faulty. Why so? It is because it could not save sinners. What it did was to make them feel guilty by breaking God's law. That was good, for it was designed to make sinners flee to what would save them from sin — that is, Jesus Christ under the terms of the new covenant.

Our writer then quotes from the book of Jeremiah (Hebrews 8:8-12). In this quotation we will find the answer to the question: What sort of covenant is the new covenant? It is a new covenant - 'Because finding fault with them, he says: "Behold, the days are coming", says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them", says the Lord.' (8-10)

You will remember that they all perished in the desert apart from Joshua and Caleb. Our writer continues his quotation — 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ...' What sort of covenant is the new covenant?

Well, first of all, we must tell our hearers this wonderful message, that God promised to bring in a new covenant for Israel and Judah. This phrase 'Israel and Judah' means the whole people of God. Under the terms of the new covenant, both Jews and Gentiles are included. Under the new covenant, Jews and Gentiles are saved in exactly the same way. Believing Jews are saved on the same basis as the Gentiles. When the Jewish nation rejected Christ, they no longer serve any purpose outside of his saving plan for the Church.

WHAT IS THE 'ISRAEL OF GOD'?

We come now to the word 'Israel' in verse 10 - 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: "After those days", says the Lord, "I will put my laws in their mind and I write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'" Here we are informed to whom the new covenant is made - to Israel. 'Israel' is the name used in the Bible for the people of God, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. The apostle Paul tells us plainly that the people of God, whether Jews or Gentiles, are those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ - 'But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel' (Romans 9: 6) In other words, 'Israel' is not necessarily those who are descended from the Jews. So, then, who are 'Israel'? Paul continues, '... nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham ... That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as seed.' (7-8) The 'promise' makes reference to the new covenant. It is the promise of salvation. Look at Romans 9:24 - '... even us, whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also

of the Gentiles.' They are the ones to whom the promise to 'Israel' is made. It is a promise to all those - whether Jews or Gentiles - who believe in Christ.

So, then, what is 'the house of Israel' mentioned in Hebrews 8:10? It is simply the believing Church. Galatians 6:15-16 makes that plain - 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything'. Paul is saying that the mark of the Jew - circumcision - is not the mark of Christian. It is the new creation that matters. 'And as many as walk according to this rule' (that is according to the new covenant) 'peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.' Now, the word 'and' does not mean that a physical Israel of God is marked off as something separate, but in fact, the word is better translated 'even' - '...peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God.' Another occasion in Galatians where 'and' is translated 'even' is found in 2:16) Both believing Jews and believing Gentiles are the same thing - 'the Israel of God'. They are the same because they have come to the promise in exactly the same way, by faith in Jesus Christ. The believing Church of Christ is the 'Israel of God'.

How, then, can believers belong to 'Israel'? Their characteristics are set out precisely by Jeremiah - 'I [the Lord] will put my law in their minds and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'. Their relationship with God is spiritual, not legal, as under the old covenant. All believers are spiritual Jews. Paul says: 'For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith ... Therefore it is of faith, that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.' (Romans 4:13, 16)

The spiritual nature of this relationship with God is seen, not in a nation, but in believing individuals. That is what Jeremiah says of the new covenant - 'None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, "Know the Lord", for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them' (quoted in Hebrews 8:11).

Finally, Jeremiah reminds us of the reason for the new covenant - it is a covenant of salvation. 'For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' (Hebrews 8:12) There was no hope of salvation under the old covenant of works. What a wonderful message of hope we gospel preachers hold out to our hearers! A message of grace, not works! Isaiah 43:25 contains this lovely promise from God — 'I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins.' This message concerning God's forgiveness also lies at the very heart of the Gospel we wish to proclaim.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 18

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Exodus 25:40

1. In Exodus 25, four things became the 'pattern' for use in the worship of Israel. Name them.
2. What is another word for 'pattern'? (See the sermon transcript)
3. Where did God give this 'pattern' for worship?

Read Jude verse 25

4. Who is 'God our Saviour'?

5. What five things are attributed to him?
6. Explain what 'majesty' is in relation to God?

Read 2 Peter 1:16

7. How did Peter know of Christ's majesty?
8. In his majesty, what two things did Christ receive from the Father?
(See verse 17)

Read 1 John 2:1-2

9. Who speaks up for sinners before the Father's throne of judgement?
10. What is his title?
11. What does this title of Christ mean?
12. What is Christ in relation to our sins?

Read Ephesians 2:8-9

13. What must we do to receive grace and faith?
14. Is this a gift of God?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

15. What does Christ do to believers?
16. What happens to all the sins of the old life?
17. What sort of life does Jesus bring to the believer?
18. If we believe in such wonderful things, what ministry does God give to gospel preachers? (See verses 18-19)

Read Romans 9:6, 24

19. Does being born a Jew of the nation of Israel automatically make one a member of 'Israel'?
20. What is 'Israel'? (See the sermon transcript)
21. Who belongs to the 'people of God'? (See verse 24)

Read Galatians 6:15-16

22. Who were the circumcision?
23. What is the main condition for belonging to the people of God? (15)
24. What is the title used by Paul to describe all the people of God — Jew or Gentile? (16)

Read Romans 4:13, 16

25. Who was promised that he would be 'heir of the world'?
26. Were those who were born under 'the law' necessarily the 'seed' of Abraham?
27. What is the rule for becoming the worldwide 'seed' of Abraham?
28. How is this rule also described in verse 16?
29. Who are the 'all' in this verse?

Read Isaiah 43:25

30. Who is the 'I' in this verse? (See verse 14)
31. What are the two things that he does for sinners?
32. What is the meaning of the phrase 'for my own sake' in relation to our sins?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

1. What is 'the true tabernacle which the Lord erected' (Hebrews 8:2)?

2. Read the following verses, and make a comparison between the Tabernacle of Moses and the Heavenly Tabernacle: Hebrews 8:1, 2, 4, 5; 9:1, 11, 24.

List your comparisons in two columns under the headings:

TABERNACLE OF MOSES

HEAVENLY TABERNACLE

3. Explain the following words in Hebrews chapter 8:6:

Mediator; Covenant; Promise

4. Is the union of Israel and Judah, and Jews and Gentiles to be understood physically or spiritually? Explain your answer in no more than 30 words.

C. PRACTICAL

Preach a sermon based on Hebrews 8, explaining to your congregation what the new covenant is, and why it is superior to the old covenant.

Show how the new covenant affects believers today.

Send in your sermon outline for assessment.

If you are later asked any questions about your sermon, send them in, and the answers you gave.

If you are not asked any questions, make your own list of questions based on your sermon.

STUDY 19
THE TABERNACLE
HEBREWS 9:1-10

EXPOSITION

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE 'TYPES'

To many Christians, coming to the Old Testament for the first time, references to the furniture and apparatus of Jewish worship laid down in the Law of Moses, seem remote, and without application to the Christian life, and to Christian worship, today. Some have even gone so far as to adopt some of the items into their own worship, even though there is no reference to them in Christian worship as described in the New Testament.

As gospel preachers, we must help our hearers to understand two ideas about these things:

- (1) that there is a vast gap between the things of the old covenant and their fulfilment in the new covenant;
- (2) that the 'types' (patterns) - such as the furniture of the Tabernacle - are fulfilled in a spiritual way in the new covenant, and are related to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as 'anti-types', as is seen in the Letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 9 begins with a description of some of the items found in the daily worship of the Tabernacle:

'Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the shewbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.'
(1-5)

After making out this formidable list, our writer provides us with some working principles for their spiritual interpretation, and their application in the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ:

'Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holy Place was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience - concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.' (6-10)

Now, we consider a further fulfilment of what was very much at the heart of Jewish worship. Our writer is saying in effect:

‘All these things are very appealing to Jewish people, for they were wonderfully ordained by God, and are written about often in the Scriptures. But Jesus has fulfilled them all. Therefore, come out of Judaism, and find their fulfilment in your true Messiah, Jesus. Why do you keep what has become obsolete? They are finished, for they are only shadows of the better things in him?’

At the same time, our writer also appeals to those Jewish converts who are being tempted through false teaching or social pressure to return to Judaism. He says, ‘Why are you going to all these things that have been fulfilled in Jesus? Why leave a better for a worse? Why forsake a superior for an inferior?’

Thus his purpose is to compare some of the great Old Testament characters, and many of the Old Testament regulations for worship, with the Lord Jesus, showing how much better Jesus is. The Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) wrote one of the largest commentaries on Hebrews in the English language. In it, he states —

‘[The Tabernacle] was also a continual representation of the incarnation of the Son of God, a type of his coming in the flesh to dwell among them, and by the one sacrifice of himself to make reconciliation with God, and atonement for sins.’

In Hebrews 9, we are shown how to compare the work of Christ with what went before in the Jewish worship of God. No one was revered more than the Lord - JEHOVAH. So sacred was his name, that it could not be spoken. Never was his name used in blasphemy, or taken in vain, for it was forbidden in the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:7) They should act righteously before a God who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), and who is the Judge of all the earth. (Genesis 18:25) He made a covenant with his people to protect them and bless them; and he gave them his laws. Among these laws was found the proper way to approach him in worship.

This way was bound up with the Tabernacle. Our writer was not prepared to go into that in detail on this occasion. (9:5) It was a vast subject! In our turn, as gospel preachers, we need go no further than present a general picture, and show how much better it is to remain with Jesus, and come out of the camp, as Christ himself was taken out of the gates of Jerusalem to his Cross. (Hebrews 13:12-13) ‘So too’, our writer appeals, ‘you Jews, come out of the camp, come out of Judaism, come out of Jerusalem, come out of the old temple worship, and come to your fulfilment in Jesus Christ.’

Central to the whole of Jewish worship was a building - only temporary, that is true. In the time of Moses it was just a tent, an ordinary tent made of material, and a temporary tent that could be put up or taken down as it became necessary to travel during forty years in the wilderness. Later, it became a sanctuary, and then King Solomon was permitted by God to erect a permanent building that he called a temple. It was just like the old Tabernacle, but more permanent until it was destroyed at least twice.

Everything connected with this structure showed a right and proper approach to God. What was the proper way to come to God? The Lord Jesus told his disciples, ‘I am the way.’ Later, in the Acts of the Apostles, the whole of the Christian faith and life was called ‘the Way’. (Acts 16:17; 18:26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus Christ is described as the Way (9:8; 10:20) - the way into the Holiest of All. He has opened ‘**a new and living way**’.

THE TABERNACLE (TENT)

What was the right way to approach God? The Jews were provided with 'symbols' (the Greek word is 'parable' here in 9:9). And the symbols were connected with a tent. This tent was surrounded on all sides by a courtyard which, in its turn, was surrounded by white curtains. We might be tempted to stop here and give a little explanation of this; but we must resist, for time and patience is limited!

The items our writer points out were significant, but we have little time to explain them here. The general principles are straightforward. The ordinances laid down in the Law of Moses provided certain rituals for worship under the old covenant. But they were imperfect (9). They failed, so they became obsolete, waiting for a 'time of reformation'. (10)

In John 1:14, we read these words: '**And the Word** (referring to Jesus Christ) **became flesh and dwelt among us**'. The Word is the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. (1) This Word came and took flesh, taking to himself a true human nature. Thus two natures - divine and human - met together in his matchless person. John continues, '**... the Word dwelt among us**'. This word 'dwelt' is the same as Tabernacle, thus connecting Christ with the Old Testament search to come to God. Christ is the only way to God. He is the true Tabernacle to bring us to God. He pitched his tent among us. And that would open many evangelistic opportunities among Jewish readers.

'Even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared'. (1-2) What was the purpose of this earthly tabernacle, this church in the desert? It was a place where God and man could meet. It gave the people the idea of God dwelling in the midst of his people, and was often called 'the tent of the congregation'. (Exodus 39:40; 40:2, 6-7, 22, 24, 26, 29). It was the place where God met with his people, and where sin, which prevented man from coming to God, was dealt with and put away. In the tabernacle, man could approach God, and there God met with man.

Christ is the true tabernacle, where God meets with sinful man. He is 'Immanuel', which in Hebrew means 'God with us'. (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14). In Christ, God was in the midst of men. In Christ, we have a mediator between sinful men and a perfect and a holy God. The outward tabernacle was a picture of these truths.

THE FURNITURE OF THE TABERNACLE

In verses 2-5, we have a list of the furniture in the tabernacle - '**the lampstand, the table, and the shewbread ... the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.**'

Our writer apologises that he cannot make detailed comments; and neither will we - '**Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.**' A more detailed description would soon exhaust the patience of our hearers!

SACRIFICES FOR SIN

In the courtyard outside the tent was the altar of brass where the animals were slain, and their blood shed. In the Jewish mind, sacrifice was the only way whereby sin could be dealt with. It is easy to see how this is fulfilled in the death of Jesus Christ. The high priest went into the tent once a year, into the Holy of Holies, and there sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat - '**But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance.**'

(7) We remember how John the Baptist called out concerning the Lord Jesus, **'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'** (John 1:29) In picture language, the sacrifices of the tabernacle pointed to the saving work of Christ in his death. And also, beyond that, the basis for the forgiveness of sin in the offering up of the blood sacrifice.

The mercy seat is mentioned in verse 5, which stood above the wooden box called the ark of the covenant. And the ark contained three things. (4): the tablets of the law (the ten commandments), the rod of Aaron, which, to show that he was the proper high priest ordained by God, budded, and a pot of manna that God provided during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. All these things are explained with reference to Christ in the New Testament books. They were not only significant for Christians, but were very significant to those who came from a Jewish background. The cherubim are also mentioned in verse 5. They first appear in Genesis 3:24, right at the beginning. When man was sent by God away from the garden and from his presence, and from the tree of life, cherubim, with a sword that flamed every way, prevented his return. The cherubim were, as it were, guarding the way into the very presence of God. The only way of approach to God for the Jews was on the annual Day of Atonement, when the high priest brought in the blood of the atonement and sprinkled it on the mercy seat in order to appease God's anger, and make a propitiation for sin. Only in this way could sinners come to God. All these things were finally fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Finally, we come to verses 8-10: **'... the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holy Place was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience - concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.'**

THE PRIESTS AND THE SACRIFICES

What did the priests do in the tabernacle? Well, it says in verses 6-7 - **'the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services ... Into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance'**. Now, what does this mean? 'Well,' says the writer to the Hebrews, 'the Holy Spirit is telling you that the way into the heavenly holy place was not disclosed while the earthly tabernacle still stands,' There was conflict in the early days of the Church until AD 70, when the temple was destroyed by Titus and the Roman legions in that year. This brought an end to the sacrificial system and worship in the temple.

However, in the Lord Jesus Christ, all these outward symbols were fulfilled. At the last Supper, the Lord Jesus said, **'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'** (Matthew 26:28) Here is the true high priest speaking as he was about to enter into the Holiest of All with himself as the sacrifice, shedding his own blood to satisfy the righteous anger of God against sin and sinners. How right was the writer to the Hebrews to go on to say, **'... and without the shedding of blood, there is no remission. Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.'** (9:22-23) We will take up this subject in greater detail in Study 20.

As gospel preachers, we have this glorious task of telling our hearers that forgiveness of sin is possible through the Lord Jesus Christ. **'These things'** of the old covenant were faulty. (Hebrews 8:8) They were only symbolic for the present time. (Hebrews 9:9). They could not make the worshipper perfect in conscience. No animal sacrifice, no religious action, could ever take away sin; only Jesus. **'But Christ came as high priest of the good things to**

come'. (Hebrews 9:11) Who wants the inferior when the Lord Jesus Christ brings better things?

The old animal sacrifices were symbolical, pointing to Calvary, at a time when they would be put away, and a day of reformation would come in. We must remind our hearers that we thank God that we are now in that day of reformation. Sinners may now come to him through the blood of Christ, which he shed on Calvary. No other offering or sacrifice can bring peace to the conscience. Consider this hymn by Isaac Watts, a later Puritan hymn writer (1674-1748), and successor to the church of John Owen:

1
Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

2
But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.

3
My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin.

4
My soul looks back to see
The burdens thou didst bear,
When hanging on the cursèd tree,
And knows its guilt was there.

5
Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing his wondrous love.

These animal sacrifices were offered continually, over and over and over again, a picture of something better until the day of reformation. Again, the writer is implying, 'Why do you stay with the useless old when you can come into the new?'

As we preach through Hebrews, we pray that sinners will forsake their religious observances and turn instead to Jesus Christ. So many feel that they do God a favour by their good deeds. But this is not so. They are useless like the observances of the old covenant. There is no way to come to the Father except through his Son Jesus Christ. They must believe in him, and receive him as Saviour. They must leave the rituals alone, and leave good works alone. They are not able to save us being imperfect and full of sin.

But, in Jesus Christ, we have a perfect man, a perfect high priest, and a perfect mediator with God. Our message to sinners is always the same:

'Therefore come to Christ. Receive his salvation which is offered freely. You will never have a clean and peaceful conscience by anything that you have done. Have you taken this step? Have you come to God's perfect tabernacle, the Lord Jesus Christ? Come to him without delay. Come to him now, for he is the only way to God.'

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 19

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Exodus 20:7

1. What is the number of this commandment?
2. What does it mean 'to take in vain'?
3. Which word is used for the one who does this?

Read Hebrews 13:12-13

4. What does the phrase mean - 'suffered outside the gate'?
5. What connection does the word 'sanctify' have with God's people?
6. What will come to those who go out to Jesus?

Read Matthew 1:22-23 (Isaiah 7:14)

7. How was the birth of Jesus a fulfilment of this prophecy?
8. How could a virgin (Mary) be with child? (See verse 20)
9. What is the meaning of the Hebrew word 'Immanuel'?
10. How did Jesus merit such a title?

Read John 1:29

11. To whom was John referring as the 'Lamb of God'?
12. What happened to the lamb in the Old Testament?
13. Why did the lamb under the Old Testament Law not take away sin?
14. Where did the Lamb of God take away sin?
15. What is surprising about the words 'the world'?

Read Genesis 3:24

16. What was the function of the cherubim in this verse?
17. What was their function found in these verses:

Exodus 25:19-20

1 Kings 8:6

Psalms 99:1

Read Matthew 26:28

18. Where did Jesus utter these words?
19. What could the New Covenant do that the Old could not do?
20. Whose blood was shed?
21. What happened on the next day?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

1. Explain the function of the Tabernacle 'types' in the Old Covenant. And give some examples to show how they refer to Jesus Christ.

2. Give an explanation of the following phrases in the hymn by Isaac Watts:

- 'guilty conscience peace'
- 'the heavenly Lamb'
- 'richer blood'
- 'like a penitent, I ... confess my sin'
- 'the cursed tree'
- 'the curse remove'
- 'his wondrous love'

C. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

From Hebrews 9:1-10, preach a sermon to show to your congregation that no sacrifices of any kind are needed for us to come to God.

Explain carefully why this is so.

- (1) Send in your sermon outline, and all Bible verses used.**
- (2) Write out your conclusion in full.**
- (3) Ask your elders or deacons what they thought of your sermon, and write out their replies.**

STUDY 20

THE BLOOD OF THE ATONEMENT

HEBREWS 9:11-15

EXPOSITION

'But Christ came as high priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And for this reason he is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.'

THE PRINCIPLES OF TRUE WORSHIP

We come now to an area of truth that was particularly appealing to Jewish people. It concerns their worship connected with the tabernacle - later, their temple - and many things connected with that worship. The great question after the Fall in Eden, and which demanded an answer, was, 'How may a sinner come to God?' The worship of the tabernacle was part of the answer. It was indeed partial, and it was indeed an imperfect answer. It was **'a copy and shadow of the heavenly things'** (Hebrews 8:5), and **'a shadow of the good things to come'** (Hebrews 10:1). The tabernacle showed that the way to come to God was on God's terms - whatever God laid down. This way was unique. And this happened round about 1300 years before Christ, during the time of Moses.

Here was part of God's answer in the tabernacle, a kind of picture-language. Now, when Christ came, and his Church of Jews and Gentiles no longer offered sacrifices in the temple, but observed the Lord's Supper, and then no longer on the day of atonement, there was bound to come a growing rift between Judaism and its later offspring, Christianity. We read about this crisis in the pages of the Acts of the Apostles. There was a gradual and then a violent split. So much so, that the Christians put themselves at risk before the Romans by showing that, although their roots were in the Old Testament Scriptures, they were now distinct from Judaism. Thus they no longer came under the protection that the Romans gave to Judaism, allowing the Jews to observe their own religion without repression or persecution. That is why the Christians came to be persecuted under the Emperor Nero, when they were no longer regarded as part of Judaism.

Now then, what caused this split? Well, because the Christian Jews saw all the Old Testament apparatus of worship as being only a shadow of what was to come in Jesus Christ. Thus, when Jesus came, bringing in a new way, there was no longer any need for

the old. The old was to be discarded, as Jesus himself taught —

‘Then he [Jesus] spoke a parable to them: “No one puts a piece from a new garment on to an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better’.”’ (Luke 5:36-39)

The first Christian converts were all Jews. Having tasted the ‘new wine’, how could they ever go back to the old? That is the main point of the Letter to the Hebrews. What is the point in using an imperfect old model when the new model is working perfectly? ‘The sacrifices’, declares our writer, ‘under the old covenant were faulty and useless’ This was a provocative thing to say to a Jew. Yet we may ask correctly of the Jews today, ‘Where is your temple? Where are your animal sacrifices? Where is the shedding of blood? Where is your priesthood? Judaism since just after Christ, has none of these things. They ceased when the temple was destroyed and sacrifices and priests were abandoned. They were rapidly coming to an end when Hebrews was written — **‘becoming obsolete and growing old ... and ready to vanish away.’** (Hebrews 8:13). They came to an end once and for all in AD 70.

THE EMPTINESS OF JUDAISM

As a historical fact, Judaism was forced to do away with these things. We might ask, ‘What better things have you put in their place, if you say that they were so wonderful and marvellous, and essential to the old covenant? Yet you no longer observe them. So what are their replacements?’ The answer is, ‘Nothing’. That is why many Jews are dissatisfied with their religion today. They have nothing to replace the shedding of blood, which was a central and essential part of their old covenant religion. They remain unsatisfied, for how can sins be cleansed without the shedding of blood? They read in the law, **‘And according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no remission [of sin].’** (Hebrews 9:22) There is nothing in Judaism for the cleansing of sin; nothing for the purging of the conscience; no satisfaction for sin offered to God.

Yet even the sacrifices of the old covenant were not sufficient to cleanse the conscience. **‘...both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience - concerned only with foods and drinks and various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.’** (Hebrews 9:9-10) Now, the ‘reformation’ arrived with the coming of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice on the cross was the fulfilment of every part of the Jewish sacrificial system. Hebrews 9:14 declares, **‘... how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?’** The sacrifice of Christ was perfect. It does purge our conscience and cleanse us from our sin.

Another related question might be, ‘Why did Jesus come?’ The answer is in verse 11 — **‘But Christ came as high priest of the good things to come’.** Earlier, we read in 4:14 - **‘... we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God’.** We read in 7:25 — **‘Therefore he is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them.’** ‘We have a priest’, says our writer, ‘after the order of Melchisedek, not after the order of Levi or Aaron. We have a high priest after the order of Melchisedek, **‘having neither beginning of days nor end of life’.** (7:3) In Christ, we find something outside the Jewish rituals, and yet

was totally effective in achieving the end to which the rituals pointed. Yet he not only came as a high priest, but he brought in **'good things'**. (9:11)

THE BAD THINGS OF THE OLD COVENANT

What did the old covenant bring? Obviously, not good things! It brought in a bad conscience. Here was a covenant under which people offered sacrifices and gifts to try and remedy their sinful lives. They longed to be righteous before God, but they could never achieve it. They were bound by their old sins and a bad conscience. Attempting to keep the law, they made their situation worse. Paul confessed sadly, **'...sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.'** (Romans 7:8-11) This was the function of the law: to convict sinners, and to show that they were far from perfect and far from God. The law of the old covenant stirred up a bad conscience; but Jesus came with free grace, offering the gift of salvation from God to anyone who would reach out and take it for themselves. It is an act of mercy not based on merit, bringing sinners to cast themselves at the feet of the Lord Jesus. They cry out, 'Deliver me from this evil conscience. I've tried many things - among them, rituals and works of righteousness - but nothing can deliver me from this sense of sin. Nothing works. I still have this burden of guilt and a bad conscience.' Such people are trying to live like the Jews under the old covenant, doing things to secure forgiveness. But Jesus did not bring religion; he established a relationship between himself and the penitent sinner who throws himself entirely on the mercy, grace and love of God.

So then, we may say that the old has been done away with because it is fulfilled to perfection in Jesus. Jesus declared in his Sermon on the Mount, **'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.'** (Matthew 5:17) He came **'as high priest of the good things to come.'** (Hebrews 9:11) How good it is, as gospel preachers, to declare to our hearers:

'Now, isn't it wonderful to be able to put your heads down on your pillow at night and to know that if you die, you will have no fear of punishment. Because you belong to Jesus, you have no fear of the judgement. You sleep at night with a perfect conscience, knowing that all is well with your soul. This is true for every Christian. He has peace; he has forgiveness from God. His burden is gone. He is set free because Jesus has brought the 'good things to come.'

THE HIGH PRIEST AND THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Now, we must add one further thing. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place as part of his duties. Now this place, as we have learnt previously, was a most sacred place; so much so that only the high priest could go into it once a year on the Day of Atonement with the blood of the sacrifice. There, he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat. Only the consecrated high priest could enter that place. The spiritual application is that only one Person has the right to go into the very presence of God, into the Holiest of All; and that is Jesus, because he is the Son of God. There, he may sit at the right hand of the throne of God because he lived a perfect and sinless life, having earned the right to be received by the Father, as any human would if he were perfect. He had the right to enter the Holy of Holies where God is because he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice, knowing that the Father would accept him and the sacrifice he made. We know that God accepted his sacrifice because he raised him from the dead — **'...declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.'** (Romans 1:4)

Now, just as there was a tent (tabernacle) for the Jews, so, for the Christian, there is a perfect tabernacle in the heavens, where a sinner may meet with God. In the old tabernacle (temple), **'the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom'** when Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:51), signifying that believers have a perfect access to God in the Holiest of All. This is what it meant here in verse 12, where it says that **'...with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.'** Christ made it possible for sinners to come at last into God's presence, into **'a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, not of this creation.'** (11) Now, what sort of tabernacle is this?

Well, it is not an earthly tabernacle. The only thing it can be is a heavenly tabernacle. We are told that it is not made with hands. It is not man-made, constructed by man. Only God could do this. We are told that it is a **'greater and more perfect tabernacle'** — that is, a perfect place where Christ, our perfect high priest, entered in **'the time of reformation'**. (10). There is only place it can be - heaven itself. The tabernacle of God is in heaven. The ministry of Christ is described in this way - **'a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.'** (Hebrews 8:2) Christ, as high priest, performed his priestly duties in a tabernacle that the Lord erected, not man. Here in heaven was the tabernacle, which he entered, having fulfilled the purpose of his coming in the shedding of his sacrificial blood on the cross.

This is how our writer argues with his fellow-Jews. It is difficult for us Gentiles to follow. To follow the argument, we need to understand as much of the Old Testament Scripture as possible.

THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST

What kind of sacrifice did Christ bring into the spiritual, heavenly, tabernacle? The answer is found in verses 12-14. It was not anything like the rituals of the old covenant —

'Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?'

Now, the animals had no choice in the sacrifice. They were chosen by the priests and killed in the prescribed way, and the blood was sprinkled. They had no say in their own death, or their manner of death. But Christ did. He chose the way he should die and gave himself to it willingly — **'Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours be done.'** (Luke 22:42) Our Lord, by his own choice — a choice made before the creation — became **'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.'** (Revelation 13:8) He deliberately made this choice that he might die, shedding his blood on the Cross. And because his blood was acceptable to God, he entered heaven to present it, as it were, to the Father.

'He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.' (12) There, he simply pointed to his blood. He did not take his blood literally into heaven with him, but, pointing to his wounds, he reminded his Father of what he had accomplished in the shedding of his precious blood. This is a striking phrase concerning the blood of Christ in Revelation 1:5 - **'To him who loved us and washed us from our sins by his own blood ... to him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.'** There are some that find the teaching concerning the blood of Christ very objectionable. But, properly understood, it is not objectionable but very precious. The centuries' old offerings of bulls and goats could

not take away sin from the conscience. It was all ritual. We find a description of these sacrifices in Leviticus 16:15, 17 -

'Then he [Aaron] shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat ... There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel.'

'The ashes of a heifer' signified that those who came confessing their sin, making sacrifice for sin, were now separated, and cleansed from sin. Numbers 19 instructs — **'... bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect ... (2) Then the heifer shall be burned in his [Eliezer the high priest] sight ... (5) Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place; and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin.'** (9) As the ashes were being taken out of the camp, it brought to their minds the fact that their sins were now taken away from them. Once, their sins separated them from God, but now their sins were separated from them so that they could come into the very presence of God.

All the ceremony of the old covenant pointed to its fulfilment in Christ. This brings us, then, to a final question: What did Christ do? In verse 14, a question is asked - **'... how much more shall the blood of Christ...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?'** His blood cleanses us from dead works. How sinners cling on to their dead works! How they like to feel that they are building up enough merit by their good works to justify themselves and make them right with God. They admit that they have slipped up, but they feel in their consciences that it may not be so easy to convince the Lord. There is always the vain hope that with enough effort there may be enough good works for God to accept us. But no! They are **'dead works'** (or, as it is in the original 'works of death'). For no sinner can perform good works to God's satisfaction. Even the good works are filthy. They are all defiled. **'But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.'** (Isaiah 64:6) All our good deeds are abominable in God's sight because they are full of sin and selfishness. There are no good deeds, and there are no good works, that can commend us to God. Instead, they only bring death. And **'the wages of sin is death.'** (Romans 6:23)

In contrast, we are told that Christ's sacrifice was perfect, and without spot - **'who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God'**. (14) The animals were to be faultless in every way; but they could not take away sin. But Christ was sinless in every respect. He was able to offer up himself as a perfect sacrifice.

Then we are told that his sacrifice implies a responsibility for us — that we should **'serve the living God.'** Salvation must be matched with our service. It is a normal conviction in a Christian that he should serve the living God who has delivered him from sin. A gospel appeal at this point might go something like this:

'How do you stand in this respect? Are you serving the living God? Does your salvation lead to service, both to God and to others? This inward work of God through Christ is indeed connected with the work of the Holy Spirit. That is how our consciences are made alive. Only one person can do that, and that is the Holy Spirit. That was why the Holy Spirit was given, says Jesus - that he may 'convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement'. (John 16:8) Your conscience is moved by the Holy Spirit; you cannot do it. Praise God when you see evidences of his work in you! He comes to you when you are spiritually

blind and opens your eyes, touches your conscience, and delivers your soul by turning you to the Lord Jesus Christ.'

The New Covenant

Verse 15 introduces the subject of the new covenant - **'And for this reason he is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.'** We will deal with the meaning of this verse in connection with the following verses in Study 21. However, here are some general principles that show the difference between the old covenant, and the new covenant the Lord Jesus brought into being?

What is a covenant? We will consider this in our next Study. However, here is a summary. What interest does the believer have in the blood of Christ? It is of vital interest. Upon every believer, the Lord Jesus has come to apply his own blood on the altar of his heart, and cleansed him from all sin. Jesus has, as it were, presented his blood to the Father, and said, 'Father, this is my dear one whom I have bought with my own blood. I died for him. He is a sinner, I know; but he cried to me for mercy, and believed in me.' The Father replies, 'My wrath must be poured out upon him. That is my righteous judgement.' Then the Lord Jesus reminds the Father, 'Yes; but you poured out that judgement upon me when I died on the cross.' The Father then replies 'Yes, Son; that is right. I will accept that sinner for your sake.' That is the effect of the new covenant, and it shows very well how Christ is our mediator under the terms of that covenant.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 20

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Luke 5:36-39

1. What is a parable?
2. Write in your own words the parable of the cloth
3. Write in your own words the parable of the new wine
4. How is the remark of Jesus - **'No one says ... "the old is better"'** (verse 39) echoed in Hebrews?

Read Romans 7:8-11

5. What does sin produce?
6. What is the connection between sin and the law? (8)
7. Give an example of this (see verse 7)
8. What does sin bring? (9)
9. Does that mean that the law was designed by God to bring death? (10)
10. What did sin deceive Paul into believing? (11)

Read Matthew 5:17-18

11. What did Jesus fulfil?
12. How did he fulfil?
13. What will not pass away with time?

Read Romans 1:4

14. What proof was there that Jesus was not a sinner?
15. Who raised him?
16. What title is used here for Christ?

Read Matthew 27:51

17. When was the veil torn in two?
18. What is the significance of the tearing from the top?
19. What other four signs accompanied this event?
20. What was the testimony of the centurion?

Read Luke 22:42

21. What was Jesus willing to do?
22. As a man, what caused Jesus great distress at that time?
23. What was he tempted to say?

Read Revelation 13:7-8

24. Who was given authority over every tribe?
25. Who will the tribes worship?
26. Where will their names not be written?

Read Revelation 1:5

27. Who loved us and washed us?
28. What did he wash away?
29. With what did he do that?
30. Where did this happen?
31. Could this rightly be called a sacrifice?

Read Leviticus 16:15, 17

32. Two animals were sacrificed in this verse. Name them.
33. Where was the blood sprinkled?
34. Why? (See verse 17)
35. What is another word for atonement?
36. Of who was this a picture?

Read Isaiah 64:6

37. How does God see us?
38. Is this true of all?
39. How are our good works described?
40. What is the result of our sins?

Read Romans 6:23

41. What results from sin?
42. Is this well-earned?
43. What is the importance of the word '**but**'?
44. What is the gift of God?
45. Can we earn this?
46. Who provides it?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

1. Find as many differences as you can when you compare the sacrifices of the Old Covenant with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.
2. How did Christ bring about blessings for his people (11), and how did he obtain eternal redemption for them? (12)
3. What is the meaning of the words '**purge our consciences from dead works**'? (14)

C. PRACTICAL

As a part of a sermon on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

- (1) Explain why sacrifices of any kind are not required today.**
- (2) Why were the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant useless?**
- (3) Why is the sacrifice of Christ entirely effective in what it was designed to do.**

Find verses in the New Testament for each of these three points.

Write out this part of the sermon in full, and send it in.

Here is a short sermon by the great German Reformer Martin Luther. There are no questions on this sermon. Notice particularly how he expounds the passage carefully to open up our spiritual understanding, with lots of room for application. He also puts the finished work of Jesus Christ at the centre of the gospel.

CHRIST OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 9:11-15.

A SERMON BY MARTIN LUTHER

Easier English version by Geoffrey Stonier

1.

An understanding of practically all of the Letter to the Hebrews is necessary before we can hope to make this text clear. Briefly, the epistle deals with a two-fold priesthood. The first priesthood was a material one, with material adornment, tabernacle, sacrifices and with pardon surrounded by ritual; material was all it knew. The new order is a spiritual priesthood, with spiritual adornments, spiritual tabernacle and sacrifices - spiritual in all that relates to it. Christ, in the exercise of his priestly office, in the sacrifice on the Cross, was not adorned with silk and gold and precious stones, but with divine love, wisdom, patience, obedience and all the virtues. This was apparent to none but God and possessors of the Spirit, for it was spiritual.

2.

Christ did not sacrifice goats or calves or birds; not bread, or blood or flesh, as Aaron and his posterity did. Christ offered his own body and blood, and the manner of his sacrifice was spiritual; for it took place through the Holy Spirit, as stated here. Though the body and blood of Christ were visible, just like any other material object, the fact that he offered them as a sacrifice was not obvious. It was not a visible sacrifice as in the case of offerings at the hands of Aaron. Then, the goat or calf, the flesh and blood, were material sacrifices visibly offered, and recognised as sacrifices. But Christ offered himself in the heart before God.

His sacrifice was not detected by any mortal. Therefore, his bodily flesh and blood became a spiritual sacrifice. Similarly, we Christians, the posterity of Christ our Aaron, offer up our own bodies. (Romans 12:1) And our offering is likewise a spiritual sacrifice, or, as Paul has it, a **'reasonable service'**; for we make it in spirit, and it is seen by God alone.

3.

Again, in the new order, the tabernacle or house is spiritual; for it is heaven, or the presence of God. Christ hung on the Cross; he was not offered in a temple. He was offered before the eyes of God, and there he still abides. The Cross is an altar in a spiritual sense. The material cross was indeed visible, but none knew it as Christ's altar. Again, his prayer, his sprinkled blood, his burnt incense, were all spiritual, for it was all done through his spirit.

4.

Accordingly, the fruit and blessing of his office and sacrifice, the forgiveness of our sins and our justification, are likewise spiritual. In the Old Covenant, the priest, with his sacrifices and sprinkling of blood, only accomplished, as it were, an external absolution (pardon), suitable for the childhood stage of the people. The recipient was permitted to move publicly among the people; he was externally holy, and like one restored from excommunication. He who failed to obtain absolution from the priest was unholy, being denied membership of the congregation and enjoyment of its privileges. In all respects, he was separated like those under the ban today.

5.

But such absolution rendered no one inwardly holy and just (righteous) before God. Something beyond that was needed to secure true forgiveness. It was the same principle that now governs church discipline today. He who has received no more than the absolution (remission) of the ecclesiastical judge will surely remain forever out of heaven. On the other hand, he who is under the ban of the Church is hell-ward bound only when the sentence is confirmed by a higher court.

I can make no better comparison than to say that it was the same in the old Jewish priesthood as now in the Papal priesthood, which, with its loosing and binding, can prohibit or permit only external communion among Christians. It is true, God required such measures in the time of the Jewish dispensation that he might restrain by fear. Just now, he sanctions church discipline when rightly employed in order to punish and restrain the evil-doer, though it has no power in itself to raise people to holiness or push them into wickedness.

6.

But, with the priesthood of Christ, comes true spiritual remission, sanctification and absolution (forgiveness). These avail before God - may God grant that it be true of us! - whether we be outwardly excommunicated, or holy, or not. Christ's blood has obtained for us pardon forever acceptable with God. God will forgive our sins for the sake of that blood so long as its power lasts, and its intercession for grace on our behalf, which is forever. Therefore, we are forever holy and blessed before God. This is the meaning of our text. Now that we find it easier to understand, we will briefly consider it.

'But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come.'

7.

The adornment of Aaron and his descendants, the high priests, was of a material kind, and they obtained for the people a merely formal remission of sins, performing their office in a perishable temple, or tabernacle. It was evident that their absolution and sanctification before the congregation was a temporary blessing confined to the present. But, when Christ came on the Cross, no one saw him as he went before God in the Holy Spirit, adorned with every grace and virtue, a true High Priest.

The blessings brought through him are not temporary - a merely formal pardon - but are the **'blessings to come'**; namely, blessings which are spiritual and eternal. Paul speaks of them as blessings to come, not that we are to wait for the life to come before we can have forgiveness and all the blessings of divine grace, but because now we possess them only in faith. They are as yet hidden, to be revealed in the future life. Again, the blessings we have in Christ were, from the stand-point of the Old Testament priesthood, blessings to come.

'Through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation.'

8.

The apostle does not name the tabernacle he mentions; nor can he, so strange is its nature! It exists only in the sight of God, and is ours by faith, to be revealed hereafter. It is not made with hands, like the Jewish tabernacle; in other words, not of **'this building'**. The old tabernacle, like all buildings of its kind, necessarily was made of wood and other earthly materials created by God. God says in Isaiah 66:1-2: **'What manner of house will you build unto me? ... For all these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be.'** But that greater tabernacle has not yet its final form; it is not yet finished. God is building it, and he will reveal it. Christ's words are - **'And if I go and prepare a place for you ...'** (John 14:3)

'Nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption.'

9.

According to Leviticus 16, the high priest must once a year enter into the holy place with the blood of rams and other offerings, and with these make formal reconciliation for the people. This ceremony typified that Christ, the true Priest, should once die for us in order to obtain for us the true atonement. But the former sacrifice, having to be repeated every year, was only a temporary and imperfect atonement; it did not eternally suffice, as does the atonement of Christ. For though we fall and sin repeatedly, we are confident that the blood of Christ does not fall, or sin; it remains steadfast before God, and the propitiation is perpetual and eternal. Under its sway, grace is perpetually renewed, without work or merit on our part, provided we do not stand aside in unbelief.

'For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer ...'

10.

Concerning the water of separation, and the ashes of the red heifer, read Numbers 19; and concerning the blood of bulls and goats, see Leviticus 16:14-15. According to Paul, these were formal and temporary purifications, as I said earlier. But Christ, in God's sight, purifies

the conscience of dead works; that is, of sins meriting death, and of works performed in sin, and therefore dead. Christ purifies us from these, that we may serve the living God by living works.

‘And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant [testament] ... ‘

11.

Under the old law, which provided only for formal, or ritualistic, pardon, and restored to human fellowship, sin and transgressions remained, burdening the conscience. The old law did not benefit the soul at all, inasmuch as God did not institute it to purify and safeguard the conscience, nor to bestow the Spirit. It existed merely for the purpose of outward discipline, restraint and correction. So, Paul teaches that under the Old Testament dispensation man’s transgressions remained, but now Christ is our Mediator through his blood; by it our conscience is freed from sin in the sight of God, inasmuch as God promises the Spirit through the blood of Christ. All, however, do not receive him. Only those called to be heirs eternal, the elect, receive the Holy Spirit.

12.

We find, then, in this excellent passage, the comforting doctrine taught that Christ is he whom we should know as the Priest and Bishop of our souls; that no sin is forgiven, nor the Holy Spirit given, by reason of works or merit on our part, but alone through the blood of Christ, and only to those for whom God has ordained it.

STUDY 21

THE NEW COVENANT

HEBREWS 9:15-28

EXPOSITION

This section (9:15-28) is what the letter is leading up to, and lies at the heart of the letter. However, it is also very difficult to understand due to the technical terms used (which would have meant a great deal to Jewish people). Let us first grasp the meaning of this passage; and then we will consider it in detail.

THE NEW COVENANT

The writer indicates in verses 15-17 that we are living in the time of a new covenant —

‘And for this reason he is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant ... For where there is a covenant, there must also be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.’

God made a covenant of promise with his people Israel. It was a covenant that, if its terms were kept by those who accepted it, would bring great blessing. It would bring them an eternal rest and peace and prosperity, and a place with God that would never be taken away. But that covenant was faulty, for no one could keep its terms. So that covenant was useless and imperfect. However, through the Lord Jesus Christ, God brought in a new covenant. This new covenant had similarities with the old covenant, but was essentially quite different. It was a covenant into which sinners could not enter. This covenant God made with his Son.

The benefits of the covenant were secured by the death of his Son. We may enter into its blessings simply by faith in Christ. By accepting these blessings by the grace of God, we receive reconciliation with himself, the removal and cleansing of our sins, and forgiveness. Then comes a sense of spiritual peace in our hearts, and an assurance that we are the children of God.

SIMILARITIES WITH THE OLD COVENANT

It is a different sort of covenant, yet it has some similarities with the old, which in its turn was a pattern for the new.

Now, this is what we read in 16-22. Our writer tells us what those similarities are. He says that the main similarity between the two covenants is that they were both brought into force through the shedding of blood. Now, we have already discussed the shedding of blood where it appears in other verses.

We have also noted the death of Christ on the Cross, and what it meant to shed his blood. We have looked at the purpose of the killing of all those animals, the shedding of their blood, and the confession of sins over them. The writer to the Hebrews says that the old covenant was brought into force through the shedding of blood. Therefore, the new covenant, which brings great blessings to Christians (Jewish or Gentile), into which we enter by faith was brought into force by blood. The blood of animals could not cleanse the defiled conscience,

but the blood of Christ can. How do we know? Because it happened to us. From our own experience, we know that it is effective. The Jews never knew a sense of peace and sins forgiven through the sacrifice of animals.

And these animals were sacrificed over and over again; but the blood of Christ was shed once for all. The act of priestly sacrifice is described many times in the Old Testament. The old priest died, and he was replaced by a new high priest. These sacrifices went on till their end in AD 70 when the army of Rome came and destroyed the whole city of Jerusalem with its temple. No more sacrifices were offered after that. When Jesus died, he offered a sacrifice as a very special high priest, a high priest after the order of Melchisedek, who had no beginning and no end. Christ's is an eternal priesthood, yet his one sacrifice was once and for all. He made a sacrifice of himself, and shed his own blood once and for all on the Cross. Since that time, no more sacrifice is needed, and no more blood is to be shed. We read in verse 26 - **'...but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'** The important words are, **'now, once'**. The work is finished. The covenant was kept between the Father and the Son, and its benefits are available to all who will accept them.

We come deserving nothing. We come as sinners. We come pleading for forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ. We cannot commend anything in our lives to the Father. We cannot even offer our good works to the Father. The only thing that we can do is to come to Jesus Christ for his cleansing from sin, and his forgiveness on the basis of what he has done on the Cross. This he did once and for all; and its benefits are available to all who come by faith.

A COVENANT IS A WILL

That leads us to a slightly different subject found in verse 17, where our writer uses the word **'testament'** (covenant) - **'For a testament is in force after men are dead ...'** A 'testament' is a will. Now, some of us have written wills. And some of us are the beneficiaries of wills. But at the moment, the will is not effective for us. Why? Because the one who made the will had not yet died.

In the same way, the new covenant (or, will) has come into force. God keeps to the terms of his 'will'. The Lord Jesus died on the Cross, in a perfect death. He kept the old covenant too, for he lived a perfect life, and obeyed God's Law. But for the benefits of that covenant he made with the Father to be effective for us, he died to bring the will into force. That 'will' is the blessings of the new covenant for all who desire to be saved. Now, we will return to this subject later, and see how this 'will' that Jesus brought into force (the New Covenant), becomes effective for Christians.

Finally, at the end of this chapter, our writer goes on to answer such questions as, (1) 'Will the benefits of this new covenant ever come to an end for some, or will it go on for ever?' Or, (2) 'Will there come a time when it will be impossible for anyone else to be saved?' The answer to both questions is 'Yes'. **'...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement'**, and, **'to those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.'** Our writer is saying that at a certain time Jesus will come again, when he will take those who have been saved to himself, but there will be no free offer of the gospel of grace any more. At such a time, he will come not as Saviour, but as judge. Having successfully completed his heavenly intercession for those who are saved, he will then return to judge the world in righteousness. The benefits of his 'will' stretch no further.

Now, let us look at the rest of Chapter 9 in greater detail. Let us begin with verse 15, which I introduced at the end of Study 20. Here are some wonderful words - **'And for this reason...'** The shedding of his blood was the reason why Christ came as high priest. **'Christ came as high priest of the good things to come'**. (11) The old covenant brought only guilt, hopelessness, and conviction of sin. But Christ appeared as the high priest of 'good things'. We Christians are filled with joy. We have peace with God. We are justified on the

basis of what Christ accomplished on the Cross. We have a new life in Christ. We are not always immediately aware of it, but others take note of it. These are part of the '**good things**'. We see an end to the sacrifices of the old covenant - '**the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer**' (12-13), could not obtain eternal redemption, only '**the blood of Christ [will] ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**' (14) Central in our salvation comes this term that upsets so many: '**the blood of Christ**'. Yet it comes through the death of Christ on the Cross, the way of blood. It is through his blood that we obtain all our blessings.

Consider the words that he uses here: '**mediator of the new covenant**'; '**for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant**'; '**the promise of the eternal inheritance**'. What marvellous words! 'Mediator', 'Redeemer', 'the one who calls'. Here lies the very basis of the assurance of our faith. We must not base our assurance on our feelings, for feelings change. Our assurance is founded on what Jesus Christ is - Redeemer, Mediator, the One who not only calls us but keeps us according to the promises of God. Upon this solid rock we base our faith. This hymn by Edward Mote (1797-1874), with addition by others, expresses such an unshakeable faith:

1
My faith is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

2
When darkness seems to veil his face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

3
His oath, his covenant, and blood
Support me in the 'whelming* flood:
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

[* note, 'whelming = overwhelming = something that overcomes]

CHRIST IS THE MEDIATOR OF GOD'S WILL

He is our mediator. He is the one who makes sure that the will (covenant) he made with the Father is effectively made out to us. He is the guarantor of the Father's promise to forgive and save and keep for ever. He is the mediator, the go-between, making sure that the terms of the covenant are kept for us. As long as Christ remains our high priest in heaven, we have no uncertainty in our faith. We may feel that we have lost our faith; we may feel doubts coming in to suffocate us; we may feel that God has deserted us. Instead, let us set our minds on Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), the go-between and guarantor of all of God promises.

Consider this word '**redemption**'. Redemption means 'to buy back', 'to pay the ransom price'. Christ did so by shedding his precious blood upon the Cross. (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:18-19) He is a lamb without blemish - words taken straight out of the old covenant sacrificial system. Our works cannot purchase our freedom from sin and the devil, only the precious blood of Christ shed on the cross. That is what it means by a 'redeemer' - someone who is willing to pay the price needed to set us free. The Lord Jesus Christ is the mediator of the new covenant.

What does it mean when Christ is described as the One who calls us? 'You did not choose me, but I chose you', Jesus said to his disciples. (John 15:16) How their pride must have suffered at these words! 'You did not choose me', he said to Matthew-Levi, who had sat at his seat of custom counting up the taxes in Capernaum. 'You did not choose me', he said to James and John the sons of thunder, so proud of their position with Christ. 'You were mending your nets, for you were fishermen; I came and commanded you to follow me.'

What is the basis of this office of mediator? What is the basis of being redeemed? What is the basis of being saved? What is the basis of being called? What is the basis of receiving God's promises? And, finally, what is the basis of being brought safely to heaven in eternity? Well, the basis is the covenant that Jesus fulfilled. Notice that there is a word change here in verse 16: our writer prefers to use 'will' or 'testament'. Now, a covenant is a bargain struck between two or more parties when they make an agreement concerning certain things, and the agreement is made secure with certain conditions, which all sides must keep. If the conditions are broken, then the bargain is broken, and there is no benefit. Now, that is certainly true so far as God making a covenant with his Son. It is also true that when the Son kept the conditions of the covenant, God kept his side of the bargain - and this bargain affects our very souls. That was the covenant between the Father and the Son: that the Son would effectively die on the cross for every sinner in the whole world who would believe in him, making them eternally secure. The Son gave himself as a perfect sacrifice on the cross.

GOD'S 'WILL'

Now we must explain this word 'will' or 'testament'. Think of Calvary as the means by which the 'will' or 'testament' of God became of benefit to us - '**For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.**' (14) When does a will come into force? It becomes legal when the person making the will writes out its terms, and makes sure that suitable persons bear witness to it. But when does the will come into operation for the beneficiaries of that will? The person making the will must die before it becomes effective. It could be years before he dies; and all those years, the beneficiary receives nothing but the promise. Yet it is all written down. The will only becomes active when the person making the will dies. That is exactly what happened when Jesus died on the cross. This is how the writer to the Hebrews sees it - '**For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.**' (17) In a spiritual sense, no one could be forgiven his sin until Jesus died, although the promise was given. The moment he died on the Cross, the will came into force. When Jesus died, the 'will' (or 'testament', or 'covenant', or 'promise'), was made effective for all those who receive its benefits. Jesus had to die. Now, what do we say to those to whom we are preaching this gospel of promise?

'Consider the price that Jesus was willing to pay, his own death, that we might

become the beneficiaries of the covenant he made with his Father. That ‘will’ could only be made effective when Jesus died. So, what does this mean to you? Until you believe, none of the promises of God can be made secure, although Christ made them effective with his death.’

In what way did Jesus die? Did he die as the animals did under the old covenant? Yes; he did. **‘Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood.’** (18) How did the old covenant begin in the days of Moses, when they erected a tabernacle, and filled it with furniture — particularly the altar of sacrifice? We are told in verses 19-20 that it began when Moses sprinkled everything with the blood of the sacrifice - **‘For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you”’.** The ‘book’ comprised the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. So, in order for the old covenant to come into action, Moses took the blood of the animals and sprinkled it on everything in the tabernacle, including the Ten Commandments. That is when the covenant was inaugurated. It began with the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifice. The words of Moses here remind us also of the words of Christ at the Last Supper - **‘Then he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”’** (Matthew 26:27-28)

Thus, any application to the New Covenant is obvious, as our writer points out - **‘Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry.’** (21) Everything was covered under the blood. Defilement was cleansed away, as it were, with the sprinkling of the blood, making them fit vessels for God’s service. Verse 22 hammers the point home - **‘And according to the law, almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.’** ‘Remission’ is just another word for ‘forgiveness’. Now, ‘blood’ is a word that comes across into the New Covenant, does it not? All the things of the old tabernacle, the old covenant, and the law of Moses - all the things that the Jews knew so well - had to be covered, as it were, with blood. In the same way, the Lord Jesus shed his blood to obtain the forgiveness of our sins. There was no other way that God could have fulfilled his promise. There can be no possible grounds for the forgiveness of our sins without the shedding of the blood of Christ on the Cross.

It is impossible to preach the gospel, and encourage our hearers to understand the gospel, without referring to the Cross; for at the heart of the gospel is the Cross. And the object of the cross was the shedding of the blood of Christ. The gospel is no gospel at all **‘without the shedding of blood’**, for without it, **‘there is no forgiveness of sin.’**

SIMILARITIES OF THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

Going on to verse 23, we are bound to ask the question: In what sense is the new covenant - the one that Jesus brought in - like the old? The answer is forthcoming -

‘Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.’

Spiritual matters concerning the forgiveness of sins, and entering into the holiest place of all - heaven itself - we have dealt with earlier. We are able to affirm that Christ as our great high priest, being also the sacrifice, offered up his blood, and came into the very presence of God, into the holiest of all. He brought his shed blood, just as the high priest did on the Day of Atonement, entering the holiest part of the tabernacle and offering it there.

Now, Jesus did that. He brought, as it were, spiritually, his blood into heaven. That is why he is described standing before the throne like **‘a Lamb as though it had been slain’** (Revelation 5:6) The wounds are still fresh on him. When the Father sees the wounds, and

is reminded of the sacrifice of his Son, then his anger is removed from us sinners, for it has already fallen on Christ on the Cross; and thus we who believe in him are set free from judgement. Set free from condemnation! Cleansed from sin and all offence! God now sees us as if we had never sinned. Every sin of every believer is now covered by the blood of Christ. When we appear before God, we shall be covered by the perfection of Christ, and God accepts us on that basis.

'For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands' (24). He never went into the holy place in the temple. He was not allowed into the court of priests, for he was not a Levite, and certainly not into the holiest place of all where the mercy seat was, for he was not the high priest of the family of Aaron. But he went into the true temple, where God is, in heaven. The earthly things were mere **'copies of the true'**. So Christ entered **'into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us'**. Why did he return to heaven? Why did he not stay and build up his kingdom here on earth? Well, the answer is that he had **'to appear in the presence of God for us'**. That is why he went back to heaven. This question has puzzled some Christians for a long time? Why did Jesus not stay among his disciples? There were two reasons. **First**, of course, he was going to send his Holy Spirit into the world - **'I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth'**. (John 14:16-17) **'... if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you'**. (John 16:7) **Second**, he went to appear, on our behalf, at the Father's right hand, to plead for us. Now, that means that if we fall into sin, the blood of Christ prevails before God for us. God accepts us in his Son. Praise his name!

Verse 25 - **'... not that he should offer himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another'**. Now, here is a profound difference between the old and the new covenants. The high priests went in for centuries offering these animal sacrifices. But Jesus, our high priest, entered the holy place only once. The high priest went into the holy place year after year with the blood of the animal sacrifices, but Christ only once, with one sacrifice alone. If his sacrifice had not been unique and effective, **'he would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world'**. (26) But Jesus had to suffer only once on the Cross - **'... but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'**

The history of all the ages was leading up to the Cross. Nothing more was needed to be done by God for the salvation of sinners after Jesus died on the cross. By the cross, God brought in his universal kingdom, and began the building up of his church. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross was a once-for-all event - **'... once at the end of the ages'**. Christ can never again be sacrificed. There can be no repetition of the shedding of his blood at Calvary. It is finished. There is no more sacrifice for sin. It was completed at the cross.

Verse 27 - **'And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement ...'** What is our writer saying to his readers? 'Just as Christ died once, so, if you have not yet believed in him, consider this, that there will come a time when this covenant will no longer be in effect. The day of salvation will come to an end, and all opportunity to be saved will come to an end. Only the day of judgement remains for those who refuse the gospel.'

HEBREWS 9:27-28: A GOSPEL APPEAL

It is at this point that many gospel preachers pause, and appeal to their congregations, perhaps in this way:

'Every day that you live, you come nearer to meeting your maker. Not one of us can say with assurance that we will see the light of tomorrow. We hope that we will, but we cannot be sure. God can take us any minute, particularly at a time we think is not appropriate. Remember the farmer who filled his barns, and said to himself, 'Take it easy; eat and drink.' Then God said to him, 'You fool; this night your soul will be required of you.' (Luke 12:16-21) **It is not when you think that the time has come for you to die that God takes you to himself. It is when God says so unexpectedly. It is the sovereign act of a sovereign God. Now, at**

that moment when God calls you to himself, you will know the truth of these words - 'It is appointed for men once to die, but after this the judgement.' These are solemn words for you. Once you die - and you do not know when that unique event will happen - God will call you before him. And how will you stand then? Do you have the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to speak up for you; or will it be judgement? How do you stand right now? If God should call you, would it be to salvation or judgement? There is no other opportunity to be saved, and no other chance.

After death, you will die in eternity as you lived in this life. If you die in Christ, you will live for eternity with Christ. If you die without Christ, you will spend eternity apart from Christ. 'It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement.'

Are you under the covenant that Christ made with the Father, and whose saving will is effective for all those who believe in him who died on the Cross? Are you a beneficiary of that will, and consequently of God's promises?'

There is an outstanding promise in verse 28 — '...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.' No longer does he bear sin, but he prepares for that day when he will receive to himself 'those who eagerly wait for him'. There are an ever-increasing number of those who eagerly await the Saviour. They long for his coming. (Revelation 22:20). What joy to think that he is coming again to receive us to himself!

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 21

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Mark 10:45

1. What did the Son of Man come to do?
2. What does 'give his life' mean?
3. A 'ransom' is paid for someone. Who is being referred to here?

Read 1 Peter 1:18-19

4. What three things were unsuitable as a redemption price?
5. What did pay the ransom price?
6. Why is Christ compared with a lamb?
7. What two things were unique about Christ?

Read John 15:16

8. Who chooses Christians?
9. What does he do to those who follow him?
10. What does he expect them to produce?

Read Matthew 26:27-28

11. What was in the cup?
12. What connection does this have with the blood of Christ?
13. Was there blood in the Old Covenant?
14. What was needed in the old and new covenants to produce blood?
15. What did the blood of the new covenant do that the old covenant could not do?

Read Revelation 5:6

16. What is strange when the imagery of verse 6 is compared with verse 5?
17. Where was the lamb?

18. What was strange about its appearance?

Read John 14:16-17

- 19. What did Jesus pray for?
- 20. Would the answer last for ever?
- 21. What was the answer?

Read John 16:7

- 22. Would the disappearance of Jesus be an advantage or a disadvantage?
- 23. What would happen if Jesus went away?
- 24. Where did Jesus go?

Read Luke 12:16-21

- 25. What was good about this farmer?
- 26. What was bad about him?
- 27. When did God take his life away?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- 1. Make a comparison between the High Priest going into the Holy Place, and Christ's death, resurrection and ascension.
- 2. How do we know that Christ's death on the cross for sin was once for all. Why is it so important to preach this truth?
- 3. Explain, in your own words, the meaning of the hymn quoted in the Study.
- 4. Which phrase in this hymn is found in the Letter to the Hebrews?

C. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Preach a sermon on the blood of Christ from Hebrews 9:13-18.

Use the following headings:

- 1. **The blood of Christ and a guilty conscience (13-14)**
- 2. **The blood of Christ and the death of Christ (15-17)**
- 3. **The blood of Christ illustrated in the Old Covenant (18-23)**
- 4. **The blood of Christ in heaven (24-28)**

Make points for each of these headings, and include Bible verses that provide authority.

Do not send in an introduction or conclusion, but send in your complete sermon script for the above four points.

Send in an additional note on the difficulties you encountered not only in preparing this sermon, but actually in preaching it to your congregation.

STUDY 22

THE OFFERINGS

HEBREWS 10:1-18

EXPOSITION

In our last study, with the help of our writer, we came to this conclusion on the subject of sacrifice. He showed how the Lord Jesus not only bore our sins and ascended to heaven to intercede for sinners, but is coming again as our eternal Saviour to take us to be with him for ever - **'... so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time apart from sin, for salvation.'** (9:28) That is his last word, and there is really nothing more to be said beyond this point. He has gone as far as he can with the revelation concerning **'so great a salvation'** stated in 2:3. There is nothing beyond eternity!

But he has not quite finished. In this chapter, he returns to the theme he has touched on several times already - backsliding.

FALLING BACK TO THE OLD SACRIFICES

Now, sadly, I believe it would be true to say that backsliding touches us all. It approaches all us, and is one of the trials we have to bear and learn to overcome. The way we deal with this sore trial reveals the kind of Christians we are. While writing to his fellow Jews, our author deals with this particular problem in the light of severe social pressures to return to a former traditional religion; that is, to desert their Christian life and conform to the old life. And, in conforming to the world of Judaism, they risked denying the unique place of the Christ in the gospel, and his unique death on the Cross. If they returned to recognising the old priesthood and animal sacrifices, they would be denying that sins can be forgiven only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, this was also true in some respects of some wavering Gentile converts. They had professed faith in Christ as their Saviour, and claimed that the load of guilt for their sin had been removed. They also professed with assurance that they had a place with him in eternity. Yet there was always the temptation to let the memory of such precious moments fade, and give in to the pressures of the world. What definition can we offer our hearers for 'the world'? We mean anything that spoils or diminishes our devotion to the Lord Jesus; anything that takes away our love for him; anything that takes the place of our service for him; anything that brings doubts into our minds concerning the sufficiency of the death of Jesus Christ for us. Ultimately, 'the world' wants to reduce or even destroy our relationship with him.

Well, our writer deals with this problem in chapter 10. In the first eighteen verses, we are introduced to what might tempt Jewish Christians to return to the traditions of Judaism. This subject is vital - the need for sacrifice - for it lies deep in all human experience. As far back as records go, we discover human beings offering sacrifices in some form or another. There is an instinct in all of us to employ sacrifice as a means of transferring the guilt of our sin somewhere else. For a strict Jew in those days, brought up to believe in the necessity of

blood sacrifice, suddenly to stop after embracing the Christian faith, was a radical change. The blood of Christ took the place of all animal sacrifices. And even more - there was to be no more sacrifice. The last sacrifice in the world was Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Now, many of the Jewish converts did not fully understand what Jesus had accomplished on the Cross, and so were tempted back to the old sacrificial system.

Our aim in this Study is to answer the question, 'Why were the old sacrifices set aside and finished with?' The short answer is, 'Because Christ has done a perfect work. The work of salvation is complete.' This will take us through the next three chapters, where our writer offers some very practical remedies to backsliding. So then, how should we deal with this sin? When we recognise it in ourselves, what can we do about it? Indeed, is there anything we can do about it?

The answer is a firm 'Yes'. God declares the responsibility of backsliding is upon us, and completely upon us. We cannot blame God. It comes through our own faults and failings. Our salvation is of God; but our backsliding, our spiritual coldness, and our falling into sin, is entirely our own responsibility. So God says, 'I will give you the remedy for it. But you must apply it.' The remedy is threefold:

- Chapters 10-11 - the remedy of faith;
- Chapter 12 - the remedy of hope in Jesus;
- Chapter 13 - the remedy of love.

This threefold pattern was laid down by the Apostle Paul, most notably in his words - '**And now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**' (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Let us now consider the first 18 verses of chapter 10. We find two sections here. The **first** section is found in the first four verses. There, wavering Jewish Christians are told plainly to remove themselves from the reaches of Law. 'Do not expect that the Law will bring you to God', he is saying in effect. 'You cannot come to God through the Law - with its tabernacle and temple worship, its sacrificial system and old priesthood. You cannot come to God that way.'

The **second** section shows how Christ is a fulfilment of every aspect of the Law (5-18). We are already familiar with this method of making comparisons. As we look at the furniture of the tabernacle, as we look at the old priesthood, as we look at Melchisedek, Moses, Aaron, and Joshua, we see that everything they stood for God used to teach the people about his Son.

GOD'S LAST WORD, AND THE END OF THE LAW

When Jesus came, there was nothing more to say, for the old things had passed away - '**God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son**' (Hebrews 1:1-2) And what did the Son do? '**...when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**' (3) It was a finished work. He fulfilled all that the law prefigured when he offered a perfect sacrifice of himself. The service he performed before God as our high priest will endure for all time for those who avail themselves of it. It is a finished work.

THE FAILURE OF THE OFFERINGS OF THE LAW (1-4)

Now, consider these questions: 'How did the old law of the old covenant fail? Why did it

fail?' Our writer calls it 'a shadow' - '**For the Law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.**' We are told three things about the Law.

(1) The Law is imperfect

First, the old covenant represented by the Law is called '**a shadow**'. What is written in the Old Testament concerning the Law represented the old way of approaching God. This Law was only a shadow - a shadow which could not exist in and of itself; it was insubstantial, depending on whatever casts the shadow. Thus the Law was like a shadow, having no meaning without its fulfilment in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. The Law was a shadow of Christ. When he came, there was no longer a need for a shadow. It just disappeared.

'Therefore', our writer is saying, 'we must not go back to the shadow when we have the substance. We have '**the good things to come**'. We do not need the shadow of Jesus when we have the real thing. We no longer need fasting or tithing or sacrifices or priests or blood. Why go back to them when we have their fulfilment in Jesus Christ? Men worked hard to make themselves right with God through the works of the Law. But that was not the right way. It ended in failure. No one ever made himself right with God this way. There is only one way by which we may dare to come to God, and that is through Jesus Christ. He is '**the good things to come**'. The law of works and ritual and sacrifice failed to bring us to God. Although offered year after year, they could not make anyone perfect who drew near through them.

The word '**perfect**' at the end of verse 1, does not mean that when we become Christians we become perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect Christian in this life, for there is no perfection this side of heaven. At no time may a Christian declare himself absolutely perfect and sinless. Draw the attention of your hearers to these two Bible verses:

'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him [God] a liar, and his word is not in us.'
(1 John 1:8, 10)

'This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:15)

Yet Hebrews 10:1 speaks of those who come to God through Christ as being made '**perfect**'. In what sense? In the sense that God sees us as those who are made perfect in Christ. When we stand before God at the end, we will indeed be perfect. '**Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy ...**' (Jude verse 24) But that is in the future. The writer to the Hebrews is saying here that there is only one perfect way to come to God; and that is in Jesus Christ. When he says that he will '**make those who approach perfect**', he means that there is only one perfect way by which sinners can approach God; that is through Jesus Christ. He has opened a perfect way by which we may dare to approach God. '**Therefore, brothers, having boldness to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way...**' (Hebrews 10:19-20)

(2) The Law required repeated sacrifices

The sacrificial system failed because the priests had to keep on repeating the sacrifices. The priests of the old covenant went on day after day, year after year, offering their sacrifices; but Jesus, on a Roman cross on a hill outside Jerusalem, in just a few hours,

completed all that they represented.

In a short time, and on only one occasion, he accomplished what thousands of sacrifices had failed to do. He offered a perfect sacrifice on the cross, never to be repeated.

(3) Christ's sacrifice was a finished work

The sacrifices of the Old Covenant were a failure because they could not cleanse from sin. We have already met this truth in what is probably the most important verse in the letter - **'... how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?'** (Hebrews 9:14) 'Dead works' brought only guilt and death because of sin. But the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, and sets us free from its power.

Thus the Law is only 'a shadow', with its repeated sacrifices, and its sacrifices that could not cleanse from sin. 'So come out of it', our writer is declaring. 'Perish the thought that you should fall back into it!'

In verse 2, he goes on to say that the repetition of the sacrifices proved their failure — **'For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sin.'** In other words, the works of the Law could not touch their consciences. Neither could it cleanse them from sin. If that had been the case, the sacrifices would have ceased, for the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had any consciousness of sin. **'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin ... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us [and go on making us clean] from all unrighteousness.'** (1 John 1:7, 9) The blood of Christ is sufficient. But the sacrifices of the Old Covenant failed to take away even one sin.

Verse 3 answers the question, 'What did the sacrifices do for the people? Well, they convicted them of their sin: verse 3: **'But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.'** Every time the high priest went with the blood of the atonement on the Day of Atonement, and sprinkled it on the mercy seat, he was reminding the people that they were sinners, and that sin needed sacrifice. Year after year he did it. Yet they had no assurance of salvation. But you see, we also have a reminder. If the Jews had a sacrifice that, on the day of atonement, was repeated year after year, we as Christians also have a reminder, but in quite a different way; for if the blood of the atonement reminded the people of their sin, and that their sin was not forgiven, we know that our sins have had a sacrifice that was perfect and acceptable to God and is sufficient to cleanse us from our sin. The time of reminder is when we take the cup in the communion service - **'This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he come.'** (1 Corinthians 11:35-36)

There is another link between what we do as a Christian church and what is in the old covenant. The old covenant brought conviction of sin. Our taking of the cup reminds us of the forgiveness of sin on the basis of Christ's finished sacrificial work on the cross. **'This do ... in remembrance of me.'** Not in remembrance of our sin. We are not to continually dredge up our sins and ask God to forgive them; that way comes only spiritual depression. But we are reminded that our sins have been dealt with once for all on the Cross. If we have come to Christ, there is nothing more to fear. The blood of Christ cleanses our every sin; not only when we first become Christians, but throughout our lives.

THE WRITER'S VERDICT ON THE OLD COVENANT (4-7)

Even in the Old Testament, there were saints who realised that the old sacrificial system for

sin was useless — **‘For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when he came into the world, he said...’** Then comes a quotation from Psalm 40:6-8 which is in reference to the coming of Christ into the world:

‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, I have come - In the volume of the book it is written of me - to do your will, O God.”’

Now, this is the main argument. The prophet Micah said it long ago — **‘With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousands rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.’** (6:6-8)

There is only one way to perform these three things, which are impossible for the natural man to do. We can only do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God when we have cast ourselves down at the foot of the Cross, and there by faith cried in mercy to the One who died on the Cross, and pleaded, ‘Lord Jesus, save my soul.’ When we have done that, we are able to do the other three things with his help.

Even in the old times, there were saints who realised that the sacrifices were useless in taking away sin. Our writer reminds us that they were only a shadow, a picture to prepare men’s minds for what Christ would do on the Cross.

How, then, did he fulfil the old covenant? We notice three things in this quotation from Psalm 40.

Firstly, it was a perfect offering of himself - **‘But a body you have prepared for me.’** (5) He fulfilled God’s purpose in his willingness to die on the Cross. Indeed, he says so in verse 7 - **‘... to do your will, O God.’** What sort of sacrifice was it? In heaven, in the council of God, the Son said to the Father, ‘I am willing to go. I am willing to take human flesh and be subject to its limitations. I am willing to die in agony and shed my blood on the Cross. I am willing to go.’ Then the Father replied, ‘I am willing to let you go.’ Something of this self-sacrifice is found in John 3:16 - **‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ...’** Our gospel appeal might go something like this:

“So great was his love for the world, that, in love, he gave his Son for sinners. Yet we did not deserve that love. But the Son said to the Father, ‘I am willing to go for the sake of those whom I am going to save, and who will believe in me’. He was willing. And what was he willing to do? To offer himself as a sacrifice. He became the sin offering. He offered himself to God, and God accepted him. He offered himself up on the cross as a sacrifice, and God accepted it, for it was without blemish. Now, I say to you: If Christ was willing to offer himself for us, what are we willing to offer to him? How far does the will of God take first place in your life?

Do you remember in the garden, before he died on the Cross, how he knelt, and so awful was the thought of the suffering that he would endure, the sweat stood out on his face so that it looked as if blood was falling from him. (Luke 22:44) So great was his agony. At such a time, the Lord Jesus said, ‘Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but your be done.’ He had an overriding desire to do his Father’s will.

We must put the will of God first when it comes to doing the will of God with all our

hearts, and be totally obedient, having no desire to please ourselves. Then, and only then, will we receive the blessing that Jesus received, for right sacrifices bring blessings. If you are Christians, are you willing as Jesus was willing? ‘We love him because he first loved us.’ (1 John 4:19) Because of his great love, he was willing to come and offer himself as a sacrifice on the Cross.”

The Lord brings us this challenge. Do you say to the Lord, ‘If that is what you did for me, this is what I will do. Take me, body, soul and mind.’ In response to the offering of yourself on the Cross, I say, ‘Not my will, but yours be done.’ Until you reach that point, there will be no blessing in your life.

Secondly, his service for God was perfect - ‘And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God’. (11-12) He offered himself; and because of it, the Father received that offering as a perfect sacrifice.

We are also told that he finished his work, and thus conquered his enemies - **‘...from that time waiting till his enemies are made his footstool.’ (13) Well, we have a formidable enemy; indeed, we have many enemies. But because Jesus sits there at the right hand of the Father, we have the victory over them. Sin, death and the devil are our enemies; and if we are going to overcome them, we must declare Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives. As he triumphs over his enemies, so too will we by our faith in him. ‘And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.’ (1 John 5:4)**

We end with Christ’s finished work under the new covenant in verse 15-18 - **‘And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after he had said, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them”, then he adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more”.’** The quotation is from Jeremiah 31:33-34. Now, if you are concerned about the sins of the past, consider these words - **‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’** It is wonderful thing to know that we have a God who suffers from forgetfulness! **‘There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus’.** (Romans 8:1)

Finally, there is a summary of the gospel in verse 18 — **‘Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.’** We need no more sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is all-sufficient.

After all these centuries since Christ died, can he still save? Yes! The blood of Christ avails for all times. It is sufficient to save all those who, by faith, look to him and cry for forgiveness. Matthew Henry reminds us of the matchless gospel — **‘This only goes to show the riches of divine grace, and the sufficiency of Christ’s satisfaction, so that it need never be repeated ... For there will be no more remembrance of sin against true believers, either to shame them now or to condemn them later. This was much more than the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices could promise.’**

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 22

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read 1 Corinthians 13:13

1. What three things last?
2. Which is the most important?
3. What is the main characteristic of this important thing? (See verse 8)

Read 1 John 1:8, 10

4. Can a Christian live without sinning?
5. What do we say to someone who says that he is without sin?
6. What serious charge is made about God if someone says he is without sin?

Read 1 Timothy 1:15

7. How does Paul describe himself?
8. Why is this statement about himself unusual, do you think?

Read Jude verse 24

9. Who keeps us from falling?
10. What title is used to describe him in verse 25?
11. How will believers be presented at the end?
12. How will God feel about that?

Read 1 John 1:7, 9

13. What cleanses us from sin?
14. All sin?
15. What do sinners have to do?
16. What two things will God do?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:25-26

17. What did the cup represent?
18. How was it different from the old covenant?
19. What is remembered in the Communion service?

Read Psalm 40:6-8

20. What four things did God not require?
21. Who is the One coming to do God's will?
22. What are his two qualifications given in verse 8?
23. In verses 9-10, what six things does he reveal?

Read Micah 6:6-8

24. What four things does man think he should present to the Lord, but are rejected?
25. Do these things take away sin?
26. What three things result from God's salvation?

Read John 3:16

27. What proved the extent of God's love?
28. Who benefits from this great love?

Read 1 John 4:19

29. What is so humbling about this verse?

Read Jeremiah 31:33-34

30. In place of stone tablets, where will God write his commands?

31. Why will they not need teachers to tell them about God?

32. What are the two greatest promises in the Bible in verse 34?

Read Romans 8:1

33. The Law brought spiritual death; what did Christ bring?

34. The law confirms sin and death, what does the Spirit do? (See verse 2)

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

There are two quotations from the Old Testament in Hebrews 10:1-18.

(1) State where they come from.

(2) What do they say about the old covenant?

(3) What do they say, in contrast, about the new covenant?

Briefly, in no more than 100 words, explain what this passage says about offerings and sacrifices?

C. PRACTICAL

Prepare a Bible Study on Hebrews 10:1-18.

(1) Send in its outline.

(2) Ask your hearers to answer the questions given below.

Then write a report how they received your study, and how well they answered the questions.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the 'good things' of which the Law was a 'shadow'?

2. What statements are made in this chapter which prove that the Old Testament sacrifices were imperfect.

3. How is the coming of Jesus Christ prophesied in this chapter?

4. Explain why the priesthood of Christ is better than that of the priests of the old covenant?

STUDY 23

THE REMEDY FOR BACKSLIDING

HEBREWS 10: 19-39

EXPOSITION

We come now to the fifth exhortation and warning against spiritual backsliding, while also examining and putting into practice the important subject of persevering faith. This gives us a link with the next chapter which contains an explanation and examples of the true faith.

We were examining previously some of the great themes in this letter, such as the perfection of Christ and the finality of the New Covenant, which he brought into effect by his death on the Cross. Thus Christ is superior to anything the Jews had ever known. At the conclusion of Hebrews 9, we really came to the end of the letter. There, our writer spoke of Christ's death on the Cross to put away sin —

'And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement, so Christ offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.' (9:27-28)

So there, as far as Christians are concerned, is the end. There is nothing more to come except eternity. The theme of Christ's second coming winds up our salvation, as far as we are concerned.

However, there remains one more theme to be dealt with. That is, the great temptation of some of his Jewish readers to turn back to the old ways, and go back to Judaism. The pressure was on these Jews both from their families and their culture. They were tempted to return to their former ways. But to do so was to deny the sufficiency, the power, and the finality of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. Such a return would inevitably lead to backsliding.

Now, as we have already seen, no true Christian can ever be lost or come under condemnation. He holds on tight to the old saying, 'Once saved, always saved!' Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Christ saves **'to the uttermost those who come to God through him'**. Some people see 'uttermost' as the extent to which sinners are saved. Others translate it as Christ saving to the 'gutter-most', implying that no one is too bad, too evil, too depraved, too far away from God, to be saved. That is true; but it also means that God will keep us to the end, and bring us safely into eternity. We note also in John 10:28 that Jesus declared, **'And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand.'** What a promise! **'They shall never perish'**. Here is a great basis for spiritual security. And the evidence for that is seen in the perseverance of all true believers. The Lord Jesus said this concerning his disciples (excluding Judas Iscariot) - **'Those whom you gave me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition'**. (John 17:12) And here is his declaration when he presents us faultless before his Father, saying, 'I have kept this one safely; and here he is!'

In Matthew 24:13, we read another declaration of our Lord Jesus on the subject of perseverance - **'But he who endures to the end shall be saved.'** We may also turn the sentence round and say that the saved will persevere to the end. This is wonderfully true

because of the perfect sacrifice and death of Christ on the Cross. He died for all who believe in him, and he will not lose one of them.

Now, we come to Hebrew 10:19-39. In the previous verses, the first incentive for avoiding backsliding was stated. He dealt there with the fact that Jesus came willingly to die for men's sins. He spoke of the awful sacrifice Jesus was willing to offer for sin. 'Now', our writer is saying, 'in the light of that, what sort of Christians are you?' If Jesus died, are we willing to lay down our lives for him? How can we fall away? How can we lose our first love? How can we desert Christ when he did so much for us? When it strikes us that Christ died for us, no sacrifice can be too great for us to make for him.

There are five sections in these verses dealing with the subject of salvation.

- (1) 19-21: a description of the way of salvation, and how it is possible to be saved.
- (2) 22: the means of salvation, which is by faith.
- (3) 23-25: the evidence of salvation.
- (4) 26-31: those who refuse salvation.
- (5) 32-39: the assurance of salvation.

(1) The way of salvation (19-21)

'Now', says our writer, 'Christ's death on the Cross is sufficient for the forgiveness of all our sins.' And, having been cleansed from all our sins, we are justified in God's sight. To be justified is to be declared righteous by God if we are in Christ, and therefore not found to be guilty of any sin. The doctrine of justification by faith is stated plainly in Hebrews 10:38, as well as it is in Paul's Letters to the Romans and the Galatians. It is also inferred here in verse 19. Notice what he says: '**...having boldness to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus**'. (19) If we stand in Christ, and if we are saved in Christ, then we may, with all boldness, enter the holy place. But note also that we cannot come before God boldly on the basis of our own works, but alone on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. As gospel preachers, whenever we speak of the blood of Christ, we should always direct the minds of our hearers to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. This is very important. The greatest of the Puritan writers, John Owen (1616-1683), comments:

'This "blood of Jesus" [means] "the sacrifice of himself", removing and taking away all causes of distance between God and believers; it made atonement for them, answered the Law, removed the curse, broke down the partition wall ... in which were all the prohibitions of approaching God with boldness.'

Next, we are told that we may come to God by a new way — '**...by a new and living way which he consecrated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh.**' (20) Here is the very centre of the gospel; it is indeed 'a new and living way'. John Owen says this:

'It is called a "new way" because it was newly made, prepared, and consecrated; because it belongs to the New Covenant; and because it admits of no decay, for it is always new with regard to its use and power as in the days of its first preparation.'

It is a new covenant, quite different from the old Jewish covenant, a covenant that touches the heart and the mind. This new covenant has nothing to do with the spilling of animal blood for the forgiveness of sin, which was ineffective anyway, but it cleanses from sin all men and women who turn to Christ in faith. Only life in Christ can bring us safely and boldly into the presence of God. The apostle Paul writes — ‘... **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**’ (Romans 6:4) If we walk in the old ways, we will backslide. If we walk in the new way, we will persevere and come into the very presence of God. The word ‘**consecrated**’ means ‘inaugurated’, or ‘opened up’. It is an entirely new way. We recall that when the Lord Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn in two. (Matthew 27:51) The old ritual was done away with. All now have access to God through Jesus Christ. You will also notice that we come to God not through the old veil that the high priest passed once a year on the Day of Atonement, but at any time.

Now, consider what the Lord Jesus has done. Isaiah declared, ‘**He was wounded for our transgressions**’. (Isaiah 53:5) But he could not have been wounded if he had not possessed human flesh. Isaiah continues, ‘**He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.**’ It took flesh to be wounded and bruised. That is the new way, the way of his flesh, through his death on the Cross. Only on these grounds dare we approach God.

Verse 21 tells us what Jesus is doing now for us - ‘...**and having a high priest over the house of God**’. Our high priest is there at the right hand of the throne of God interceding for us. As our writer put it - ‘... **he ever lives to make intercession for them.**’ (Hebrews 7:25) John Owen points to his greatness as High Priest:

‘He is great in his Person as both God and man (Hebrews 1:2-3); great in his glorious exultation (Hebrews 8:1-2); great in his power and the effectiveness of his office (Hebrews 7:25); and great in honour, dignity and authority.’

(2) The means of salvation (22)

We find in verse 22 the means of our salvation: ‘... **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.**’ John Owen defines ‘**sprinkled**’ like this:

‘This sprinkling of our hearts is an act of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, by virtue of the blood and sacrifice of Christ, in making that application of them to our souls, where the blood of the Son of God makes us clean from all our sins.’

Here, I believe, is an opportunity for a gospel appeal, perhaps something like this:

“How may we step out on to this new and living way? Well, the first thing is to come personally to Jesus: ‘Let us draw near’. Have you come near to him? Do you want to come near to him? You may do so in faith. You must stretch out the hand of faith to Jesus, and, in so doing, draw near to him. Have you done that? The simple offering up of a prayer of faith is sufficient.”

The words of one of the most prolific hymn writers, Fanny Jane Crosby, (1820-1915) encourage us in a hymn that has these words as a chorus:

**'Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To the cross where thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To thy precious, bleeding side.'**

[The four verses of this hymn are quoted at the end of this Exposition]

"May Christ draw you to himself every moment of every day! Well, that is the first step of faith. Have you taken it? Then, come to the Cross. Come not only with faith, but 'with your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and your bodies washed with pure water.'"

Now, there is a reference here to the worship of the tabernacle under the Old Covenant, when the sinner first came to the altar where the offering was made. Having confessed his sin, the blood of the animal was then spilled, and the body of the animal was burned. On that basis, there was offered hope of pardon, provided there was repentance.

Immediately behind the altar of sacrifice was the laver, the washbowl where the priests cleansed themselves before going about God's business. And we, as Christians, need not only to be forgiven our sins, but to be made clean, so that we might go about Jesus' business. Do you remember when the disciples were gathered together on that last evening before our Lord died on the cross, how he took a towel and washed their feet? (John 13:3-10) We ourselves need to be washed spiritually in order to be made useful in the service of our master.

(3) The evidence of salvation (23-25)

In verse 23 we find a promise that those who believe in Christ will make progress in their faith. They will be stable, and their faith in Christ will be like an anchor for the soul. **'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.'** If we base our faith on our feelings, or on our conversion, or on the experience of other Christians, we will be disappointed. The Reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564), says a helpful thing here — **'Since he is here urging the Jews to perseverance, he speaks of hope rather than faith. Just as hope is the child of faith, so it is fed and sustained by faith to the end.'** If we desire to be stable Christians, our hope and faith must be set firmly on the foundation of what Christ has done for us. An unwavering faith in Christ is a proof of salvation.

Another point is added here. We need the example of other Christians to spur us on - **'And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works'**. (24) That word 'stir up' is a Greek word from which comes the English 'paroxysm' - a spasm of pain, a shudder. Now, how do we feel about the wellbeing of other Christians? Do we have an agony of soul to see them make progress? Are we willing to stir them up to **'love and good works'** by our own example? Our writer indicates that this behaviour towards our brothers and sisters in Christ should be normal.

Verse 25 informs us that Christian happiness comes through church fellowship - **'...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.'** How important it is that we love one another in the Christian family, and want to be with one another. It would be a very strange family indeed if parents and children never come together. In the same way, it is very important for Christians to meet with one another to help one another, and stir one another up by their example, especially those limping along in their faith. For the Jewish readers of this letter, **'forsaking the assembling'** would have a special meaning and application, as John Calvin points out:

'By pulling down the barrier (Ephesians 2:14), God added to his children those who had been aliens from the Church; thus the Gentiles were a new and unaccustomed addition to the Church. The Jews thought this was an insult to them, with the result that many seceded from the Church thinking that they had a just pretext as a result of this mixture.'

Would that we gospel preachers had such an ethnic mix in our congregations!

Then, says our writer, we must regulate our behaviour in the light of Christ's Second Coming - **'so much the more as you see the Day approaching.'** How important it is to maintain our fellowship with other Christians! A minister was visiting an elderly member of his congregation who had not been to church for a long time. This man had his fire burning warmly. Reaching out with the tongs, the minister drew a log from the fire and put it on the ground. Being a very tactful man, he said nothing but continued his conversation about other things. After a while, the log was smoking, and the flame died away. The minister, with a twinkle in his eye, looked at the old man, but still said nothing. The old man looked puzzled, and then a look of recognition came into his face, for he said 'Yes Pastor, I'll be there on Sunday.'

(4) Those who refuse salvation (26-31)

Here is probably the most alarming passage in the Letter:

'For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God under foot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay", says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

Now, it is true of Christian profession that time will sort out the genuine from the counterfeit, the unbeliever from the saved. There are those in the fellowship that only go for what they can get out of it. From Asia comes the term 'rice Christians', those who professed Christianity in order to receive rice and other benefits from the missionaries years ago. In their hearts, they did not really love Jesus, and they only came for a bowl of rice given out after the service. A 'rice Christian' is someone who goes to church, appears to be a Christian, but his daily behaviour contradicts his confession of Christ. Verses 26-27 is a description of such 'rice Christians' - those who are unsaved but are regularly found in Church. **'If we [go on sinning] wilfully after we have receiving the knowledge of the truth ...'** Here are some who make it a habit to sin, who know no triumph and no victory over sin. Their daily habit is to sin, and they know no victory over it; yet they know gospel truth but do not act upon it, and sit regularly under the sound of the gospel but never show any repentance, or faith in Christ. For them, it is all head knowledge, but no heart experience. Now, if Jesus only came to die for those who believe in him, he cannot save those who harden their hearts towards him. There remains only for those kinds of people the second coming of Christ and the day of judgement when those who are true will be declared so openly.

There are three witnesses under the New Covenant by which we may know whether we are true Christians or not. Consider verse 29 - **'How much worse punishment ... will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of**

the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?’

The first and most important witness - ‘**...trampled the Son of God underfoot**’. Do we despise the truth of the Lord Jesus and our need of him as Saviour and Lord? Do we suppress the truth concerning our sin in unrighteousness? (Romans 1:18) Or do we love Jesus so much that we are willing to lay down our lives for him?

The second witness — there is the counting ‘**the blood of the covenant...a common thing**’. Have we availed ourselves of the benefits of the blood of Christ, and counted it more to us than anything else in the world?

The third witness — here are the most chilling words of all - ‘**...insulted the Spirit of grace**’. If we go on thinking that we can build up some kind of merit with God by our good works, then we insult the Holy Spirit who tells us in our hearts that the only way of salvation is by faith in Christ. These, then, are the three witnesses of the New Covenant: the Son of God, his blood, and the Holy Spirit.

(5) Assurance of salvation (32-39)

Finally, here are five good reasons for pressing on in the Christian life. Each one is an incentive to persevere. ‘**But recall the former days in which, after you were enlightened, you endured a great struggle with sufferings**’. (32) In those early days after our conversion, when we first loved the Lord, we would have done anything for him, go anywhere for him, and endure any reproach or suffering for him. The encouragement of verses 32-34 assures us that pain in this world is nothing compared with the glories that are to come in heaven. (Romans 8:18) See what these Hebrew believers were willing to patiently endure - ‘**...for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.**’ (34) Against heavenly riches to be gained in Christ, what is earthly loss?

Then there is a reward to be obtained - ‘**Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.**’ (35) At God’s right hand there are pleasures for evermore. (Psalm 16:11) There are believing loved ones who have died: a believing father, a believing wife or husband or child, believing friends. But the greatest pleasure of all will be to see the Lord face-to-face.

There is also a promise to be fulfilled - ‘**For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise**’ (36) All the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:20) And what promises they are which God will fulfil as we persevere in the faith!

Then, there is a Saviour to meet at his coming — ‘**For yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry.**’ (37) We must take stock of our spiritual adventure in faith. How do we stand at this moment? Would we be ashamed to meet the Saviour if he were to return now? Let us meet him with joy, not in sorrow! Let us meet him with endurance, not falling back!

Finally, there is a life for evermore — ‘**Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him.**’ (38; Habakkuk 2:3-4) There is eternal life to come. Are we ready for that? A life with Christ that lasts forever? Are we preparing ourselves for that?

In contrast, there comes the firm assurance of the last verse: a final word to those who are

tempted to fall away and thus prove that they are not saved, but an encouragement to those who persevere — ‘**But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.**’ (39)

For gospel preachers, the instinct of prayer must always urge us to intercede for those who, having made a profession of faith, battle with the many pressures and temptation of this life:

“O Saviour of the world, and preserver of all your people! Lord Jesus, strengthen and keep your suffering ones in their time of need. They strayed much when they were still sinners. Bind them to yourself in your great love, and fill them with a determination to persevere, so that when they are tempted to fall away, they may know that you will never let them go. To your honour and glory, and to the encouragement of your Church, I offer this prayer. And please keep me also ever in your love when I too am in danger of falling. Amen.”

THE HYMN ‘DRAW ME NEARER’
BY FRANCES (FANNY) JANE CROSBY

1

I am thine O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
And it told thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be closer drawn to thee.

*Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To the cross where thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To thy precious, bleeding side.*

2

Consecrate me now to thy service, Lord,
By the power of grace Divine;
Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,
And my will be lost in thine.

3.

Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with thee my God,
I commune as friend with friend.

4

There are depths of love that I cannot know
Till I cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach
Till I rest in peace with thee.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 23

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read John 10:28

1. What connection is there between this verse and John 3:16?
2. Who are the 'them' in this verse? (See the previous verse)
3. What does it mean - 'snatch them out of my hand'?
4. What great promise is found in verse 29?

Read John 17:12

5. When did Jesus 'keep' his disciples?
6. Is that true for today?
7. Is it possible for Jesus to 'lose' any of his disciples?
8. So who was lost?
9. What was his name?
10. What did he shamefully do?

Read Matthew 24:13

11. Who will be saved?
12. When will the end be? (See verse 27)
13. Endure through what? (See verse 21)
14. What is Christian endurance?

Read Romans 6:4

15. What happens to the old life?
16. What new thing comes to the believer?
17. What great sign in Christ's life proves this?

Read Matthew 27:51

18. Three things accompanied the death of Christ on the Cross. Name them.
19. Find another in verse 52.
20. What was the significance of the tearing on the veil?

Read Isaiah 53:4-5

21. How do these verses prove that Jesus Christ was a true man?
22. What part did God the Father play in Christ's suffering?
23. What two things happened to Christ on the Cross? (verse 5)
24. What two things come to sinners because of the Cross (verse 5)
25. Verse 6 adds one more thing. What is it?

Read John 13:3-10

26. What did Jesus do?
27. Who objected to this?
28. Why did he object?
29. What astounding thing did Jesus say about him? (See verse 10)
30. What lesson did Jesus teach from this incident? (See verse 14)

Read Ephesians 2:14

31. Who is our peace? (See verse 13)
32. Who has been made at one? (See 11-13)
33. Where was this middle wall of division found in the Temple?

Read Romans 8:18

34. For the Christian, what is characteristic of this present time?
35. What is characteristic of the future age?
36. Why does Paul compare these two things?

Read Habakkuk 2:3-4

37. What great doctrine central to the gospel is found in verse 4?
38. What concerning the gospel is coming in its appointed time?
39. What can the gospel never do?
40. Who has no time for the gospel? (See verse 4)

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

1. Read the chorus and four verses of the hymn quoted during and at the end of the Exposition.

- (1) What does this hymn tell us about the drawing power of God?
- (2) Write briefly explaining the meaning of the following words in the hymn:

‘bleeding side’
‘the arms of faith’
‘Consecrate’
‘commune as friend with friend’
‘the narrow sea’
‘rest in peace’

2. In the section: ‘(3) The evidence of salvation (23-25)’ in the Exposition, find the quotation by John Calvin.

- (1) What does it say about the connection between faith and hope?
- (2) How does hope cause believers to persevere and not fall into backsliding?

3. What warnings against spiritual backsliding do you find in Hebrews 10:26-31?

C. PRACTICAL

- 1. Write of your experience of the temptation to backslide, particularly in relation to strong spiritual, cultural, and family influences.**
- 2. Write in full of the experiences of at least two people in your congregation who have fallen into backsliding.**

If you helped to restore them from the sin of backsliding, describe how you counselled them, and what you said and did to help them.
- 3. Which verses in the Bible have you found most useful in dealing with the sin of backsliding?**

THIS IS THE END OF MODULE 3