

# “Our Greatest Blessing”

Hebrews 13:20-21

Dec. 21 / **Christmas** 2019

**INTRO:**      **VIDEO** – “*South Asia: The One True God*”

## **CONTEXT:**

- **Pre-Christmas**
- Book of Hebrews
- Closing **Benediction**

The benediction of vv. 20-21 is essentially a prayer.  
*The main point of the benediction is God's equipping the readers with everything they need in order to do God's will. It is God's "working in us" (the equipping) what is pleasing to him that enables us to do his will.*

### ➤ **Follow-up & Continuation from last week...**

- Blessed **PEOPLE**
  - Adopted
  - Beatitudes
  - Christ-followers
- Blessed **POWER**
  - Awesome & Authoritative
  - Builds Biblical, Battle-ready Believers
  - Complete & Comprehensive
- Blessed **PRAYER**
  - Activated
  - Benediction
  - Concentrated/Celebrated IN-Christ

## BIG IDEA:

➤ Last Week: Blessed exhorting births & builds  
blessed assurance.

➤ This Week: *Real Christians champion &  
cherish Christ, their blessing!*

## PREVIEW:

1. Miracle
2. MESSIAH
3. Mission
4. Multiplication

# I. Miracle

*Now,  
may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead,*

- A. *“Now”* =
- a. Precision...
  - b. Personal...
  - c. Parallel...

i. Start of **Hebrews** (5 weeks for 4 verses)

1**Long ago**, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2**but in these last days** He has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the Heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. 3He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

ii. End of Hebrews:

### Hebrews 13:20-21

**Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good (so) that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**

B. “may the God of peace”

- a. “may” =
  - i. Please
  - ii. Prayer

*This prayer might be one of the most beautiful prayers ever uttered by a Christian.* It stands near the end of the letter *as a declaration of absolute confidence in God.* It is a prayer for the church... It is not a small thing to be able to say, "God of peace." God's disposition toward those who are in Christ is one of peace. Because of Jesus's work on our behalf, we now know God as the God of peace. We do not have to hope that God will respond to us with peace. In the Muslim system of thought, God's peace is something one hopes for but cannot presume upon. The reason for this is simple: Christ is missing from their theology. - Mohler

b. *"may the God of peace"*

i. **Power** – capital "G" **God with Power**

ii. **Peace** – capital "G" **God of Peace**

*The Hebrews' readers... were experiencing significant stress, and hence the author reminds them that God grants peace to believers. Furthermore, several exhortations have indicated the importance of peace within the church (12:14; 13:1, 17)*

Jesus **IS** peace...

Judges 6:24

*Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it **The LORD is Peace.***

Jesus **OF** peace...

[1 Corinthians 14:33](#)

*for God is not a God of confusion but **of peace**,*

Jesus' **CRUSHING** peace...

[Romans 16:20](#)

*The **God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet**. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

Jesus brings **REWARDING** peace...

[2 Corinthians 13:11](#)

*Finally, brothers, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; & **the God of love and peace will be with you.***

Jesus is peace **UNIFIED WITH YOU**...

[Philippians 4:9](#)

*The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, **practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.***

Jesus **GRANTS/GIFTS** peace...

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Now may **the Lord of peace** Himself continually **grant you peace** in every circumstance  
The Lord be with you all!

Jesus is the **PRINCE** of Peace!

Isaiah 9:6

**For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**

T/S: Jesus gives peace that **PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING**

C. *“who brought again from the **dead...**”*

a. **Power**

- i. Miraculous Power to give life
- ii. Miraculous Power to defeat death
- iii. Miraculous Power to repeat “again”

**VIDEO** – *“Depravity Needs A Miracle”*

**Everyday Christianity:**

ONE of the most insidious dynamics in the modern church involves the dividing of life into two spheres, the sacred and

secular. The life of the spirit and the life of the street, (which are) meant to be integrated, are instead ripped apart and thrown in different directions. Where this perverted vision of the Christian life prevails, “church language” has the hollow thud of wordy noise rather than the ring of authenticity. When Christ-following truth is no longer spoken in street language, when it is no longer directed at street life, and when it no longer challenges men and women to live as Christ-followers in those streets, there is no longer a chance for real-world faith. People are tamed, learning how to act effectively inside the religious institutions. But they do not learn how to live faithfully in the real world.

Real-world faith is replaced by a shallow substitute—a spiritual-looking, institutionalized religion that is completely irrelevant to everyday life. The vibrant, zesty fullness and realness of true Christianity is replaced by a tame spiritual vapor that must be checked inside the door of the church, lest it vaporize under the heat of the streets.

Conversely, it is through the devoted living for God, in common aspects of life, that the truth of the gospel is proclaimed in a thousand varied voices, & the kingdom is built. – NIV Commentary

## II. MESSIAH

*Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good*

- A. *“our LORD Jesus”*
- B. *“the Great Shepherd of the sheep”*
- C. *“by the blood”*

*Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep precisely because he shed his blood on their behalf. And that blood establishes this eternal covenant with God. There is no need for another covenant to come. This is the “everlasting” covenant, the purpose for which God made the world: to demonstrate his glory in the salvation of sinners by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. - Mohler*

- D. *“of the eternal covenant”*

The contrast between the new and old covenant permeates Hebrews. Jesus inaugurated a new, better covenant (8:1-13; 10:15-18). He guarantees a “better covenant” (7:22; cf. 8:6), and it is characterized by full and final forgiveness of sins (10:18). Believers enjoy an “eternal salvation” (5:9), “eternal redemption” (9:12), and an “eternal inheritance” (9:15) secured “through the eternal Spirit”

*“God dwells no more on Sinai. Those who abide under the law (as a covenant) shall neither have His presence nor any gracious pledge of it. And all these things are spoken to stir us up to seek for an interest in that blessed Gospel-state which is here proposed to us. – Puritan John Owen*

- E. *“equip you”*

F. *“with everything good”*

*“He who has God & everything, has no more than  
he who has God alone.” - C.S. Lewis*

**VIDEO – “God’s Heart”**

## III. Mission

*Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead,  
our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of  
the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good **(so)**  
**that you may do His will, working in us that which is**  
**pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ,**  
**to whom be glory forever and ever.**  
**Amen.***

- A. *“so that”*
- B. *“you may do”*
- C. *“you may do HIS will”*

**The main point of the prayer is that God would equip and  
strengthen the readers to do his will.**

- D. *“working/completing in us”*

*Even Jesus' own examples, perfect and powerful as they are, cannot in themselves enable us to follow in His footsteps. We need more than example. The writer calls on God to make possible the out-working of this truth in the lives of His people. To attempt to live the Christian life with the purest doctrine and the finest examples, but without God's direct power, is to build with wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor. 3:12). We not only need to know God's will, we need to have His power. We need the God of peace to equip us in every good thing to do His will.*

*...Christian growth and obedience have nothing to do with our own power. Christian growth and obedience are by God's power, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.*

*The greatest display of divine power in the history of the universe was at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when God brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant. God is the God of peace, in that He has established peace with man through the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20).*

*It is the God of this power and  
the power of this God...  
that enable those who love Him to do His will.*

*Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God (2 Cor. 3:5).*

The thing we must contribute to the Christian life is willing yieldedness. All we have to do is open the channel of our wills and let God's power work through us.

*"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10).*

We can work out our salvation because God is at work in us  
*"both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).*

Because Christ does the work, He deserves the credit and praise, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

- MacArthur

- E. *"that which is pleasing"*
- F. *"in HIS sight"*
- G. *"thru Jesus Christ"*

***We need God's help to do his will.***

*We cannot accomplish it on our own. This is precisely why the author asks God to accomplish these things in his people. Our aim as Christians should be to do "what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." The only way we can please God is through Jesus. No one can please God without him. - Mohler*

- H. *"to whom be glory"*
- I. *"forever & forever"*

# IV. Multiplication

***“Amen.”***

*The words in verses 20–21 pick up some of the major themes of Hebrews. The author reminds his readers that only God gives peace in the midst of the anxieties and worries of everyday life. Moreover, believers have a high priest who lives, who has conquered death, and this high priest is also their Shepherd. As their “great Shepherd” he spilled his blood for them so they would enjoy forgiveness of sins and be members of the new covenant. God works what is pleasing to him in his people. He is the one who saves and strengthens them for every good work. Hence all glory and praise and honor belong to God for granting salvation through Jesus. Those who have experienced his great goodness give him great praise. - Schreiner*

## **CLOSE:**

*The author of Hebrews has given his readers a well-crafted exhortation for right Christian thinking and living. The stakes are high, for their spiritual condition is at stake.*

*The author wants believers to live out God’s will in light of the work of Christ. Therefore, we come back to the foundational relationship between right thinking and right living.*

**- NIV Commentary**

**Let’s PRAY!**  
**VIDEO – “Limitless”**

## Contemporary Significance

### **Everyday Christianity:**

ONE of the most insidious dynamics in the modern church involves the bifurcation of life into two spheres, the sacred and secular. The life of the spirit and the life of the street, meant to be integrated, instead are ripped apart and thrown in different directions. Where this aberrant vision of the Christian life prevails, “church language” has the hollow thud of wordy noise rather than the ring of authenticity.

When Christ-following truth is no longer spoken in street language, when it is no longer directed at street life, and when it no longer challenges men and women to live as Christ-followers in those streets, there is no longer a chance for real-world faith. People are tamed, learning how to act with deftness inside the religious institutions. But they do not learn how to live faithfully in the real world.

[29]

Real-world faith is replaced by a shallow

substitute—a spiritual-looking, institutionalized religion that is completely irrelevant to everyday life. The vibrant, zesty fullness and realness of true Christianity is replaced by a tame spiritual vapidness that must be checked inside the door of the church lest it vaporize under the heat of the streets. Conversely, it is through the devoted living for God in common aspects of life that the truth of the gospel is proclaimed in a thousand varied voices, and the kingdom is built.    - NIV Commentary

## CONTEXT:

- **Pre-Christmas**
- Book of Hebrews
- Closing **Benediction**

The benediction of vv. 20-21 is essentially a prayer. *The two verses form one sentence in the Greek text, with "God" in v. 20 the subject of the main verb "equip" in v. 21.*

*The main point of the benediction is God's equipping the readers with everything they need in order to do God's will. It is God's "working in us" (the equipping) what is*

*pleasing to him that enables us to do his will.*

- Follow-up & Continuation from last week...
  - Blessed PEOPLE
    - Adopted
    - Beatitudes
    - Christ-followers
  - Blessed POWER
    - Awesome & Authoritative
    - Builds Biblical, Battle-ready Believers
    - Complete & Comprehensive
  - Blessed PRAYER
    - Activated
    - Benediction
    - Concentrated/Celebrated IN-Christ

**T/S:**

**BIG IDEA:**

- Last Week: **Blessed exhorting births & builds blessed assurance.**
- This Week: ***Real Christians champion & cherish Christ, their blessing!***

## PREVIEW:

5. Miracle
6. MESSIAH
7. Mission
8. Multiplication

## TEXT:

# v. Miracle

*Now,  
may the God of peace, who brought again  
from the dead,*

D. “*Now*” =

- a. Precision...
- b. Personal...
- c. Parallel...

i. Start of **Hebrews** (5 weeks for 4 verses)

***1**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2**but in these last days He has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the Heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. **3**He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His*

nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4**having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

ii. End of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 13:20-21**

***Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good (so) that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.***

E. ***“may the God of peace”***

***This prayer might be one of the most beautiful prayers ever uttered by a Christian. It stands near the end of the letter as a declaration of absolute confidence in God. It is a prayer for the church...***

***It is not a small thing to be able to say, “God of peace.” God’s disposition toward those who are in Christ is one of peace. Because of Jesus’s work on***

our behalf, we now know God as the God of peace. We do not have to hope that God will respond to us with peace. In the Muslim system of thought, God's peace is something one hopes for but cannot presume upon. The reason for this is simple: Christ is missing from their theology. - Mohler

- a. "may" =
  - i. Please
  - ii. Prayer
  
- b. "may the God of peace"
  - i. Power – capital "G" **God with Power**
  - ii. Peace – capital "G" **God of Peace**

*The readers*, since they were outside the social mainstream, *were experiencing significant stress, and hence he reminds them that God grants peace to believers. Furthermore, several exhortations have indicated the importance of peace within the church (12:14; 13:1, 17), and the author reminds the readers that true peace hails from God.*

The author also emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus (see §2.6). The resurrection, contrary to the opinion of some scholars, plays a major role in Hebrews. Jesus cried out to God and was saved from death by being raised from the dead (5:7). Jesus enters the heavenly sanctuary as the resurrected and exalted Lord (6:20). He is a Melchizedekian priest who abides as a priest forever by virtue of his resurrection (Ps 110:4; Heb 7:3). What sets apart Jesus as a priest is that “he lives” (7:8), for he has an “indestructible life” (7:16). He isn’t like the Levitical priests, who were hindered by death, but he “remains forever” & “always lives” (7:23–25).

*Jesus is the resurrected Lord, sitting at God’s right hand (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).*

1. [Judges 6:24](#)

*Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it **The LORD is Peace.***

2. [1 Corinthians 14:33](#)

*for God is not a God of confusion but **of peace,***

3. [Romans 15:33](#)

*Now **the God of peace be with you** all. Amen.*

4. [Romans 16:20](#)

The **God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.** The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

5. [2 Corinthians 13:11](#)

Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and **the God of love and peace will be with you.**

6. [Philippians 4:9](#)

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, **practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.**

7. [2 Thessalonians 3:16](#)

Now may **the Lord of peace** Himself continually **grant you peace** in every circumstance  
The Lord be with you all!

8. [Isaiah 9:6](#)

**For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**

F. "who brought again from the dead..."

a. **Power**

- i. Power to give life
- ii. Power to defeat death
- iii. Power to repeat “again”

b. **Perseverance** – “again from the dead”

## VI. MESSIAH

*Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good*

G. “our”

H. “LORD”

I. “LORD Jesus”

J. “the Great Shepherd”

See Christ’s pastoral love for his people. His love runs so deep for his sheep that he gives his life up for us (John 10:11).

Jesus’ role as shepherd fulfills **Ezek 34:23**, showing that he is the new and true David, and

that as the shepherd he will take care of his flock (cf. also **Zech 13:7**). Indeed, as “the good shepherd” he gave his life for his sheep (**John 10:11** ESV; cf. 10:14; **1 Pet 2:25**)...

K. *“of the sheep”*

L. *“by the blood”*

*The author revisits a major theme in the letter, for the death of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, inaugurates the new covenant and effectively and finally provides forgiveness of sins so that believers enter God’s presence boldly (**9:12; 10:19**). The blood of animals could not cleanse from sins in contrast to the blood of Jesus (**9:14**).*

M. *“of the eternal”*

**"God dwells no more on Sinai. Those who abide under the law (as a covenant) shall neither have His presence nor any gracious pledge of it. And all these things are spoken to stir us up to seek for an interest in that**

**blessed Gospel-state which is here  
proposed to us. – Puritan John Owen**

**N. “eternal covenant”**

*Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep precisely because he shed his blood on their behalf. And that blood establishes this eternal covenant with God. There is no need for another covenant to come. This is the “everlasting” covenant, the purpose for which God made the world: to demonstrate his glory in the salvation of sinners by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. - Mohler*

Furthermore, the contrast between the new and old covenant permeates Hebrews. Jesus inaugurated a new and better covenant (8:1-13; 10:15-18). He guarantees a “better covenant” (7:22; cf. 8:6), and it is characterized by full and

final forgiveness of sins (10:18). Believers enjoy an “eternal salvation” (5:9), “eternal redemption” (9:12), and an “eternal inheritance” (9:15) secured “through the eternal Spirit” (9:14) because Jesus has instituted through his blood an “eternal covenant” (13:20).

O. “equip you”

P. “with everything good / every good thing”

**C. S. Lewis** once remarked,

*“He who has God & everything, has no more than he who has God alone.”*

## **VII. Mission**

*Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good (so)*

*that you may do His will, working in us that which is  
pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ,  
to whom be glory forever and ever.  
Amen.*

- J. *“so that”*
- K. *“you may do”*
- L. *“you may do HIS will”*

***The main point of the prayer is that God would  
equip and strengthen the readers to do his will.***

*In light of the remainder of the letter, he wants the  
readers to be faithful until the end. The God to  
whom he prays is the God who acknowledges Jesus  
Christ as the shepherd of the sheep and who raised  
him from the dead.*

- M. *“working/completing in us”*

***Even Jesus' own examples, perfect and  
powerful as they are, cannot in themselves  
enable us to follow in His footsteps. We***

need more than example. The writer calls on God to make possible the out-working of this truth in the lives of His people. To attempt to live the Christian life with the purest doctrine and the finest examples, but without God's direct power, is to build with wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor. 3:12). We not only need to know God's will, we need to have His power. We need the God of peace to equip us in every good thing to do His will.

So God gives us His ethics and He gives us the power to follow them, to live them out. Christian growth and obedience have nothing to do with our own power. Christian growth and obedience are by God's power, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. The greatest display of divine power in the history of the universe was at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when God brought up from the dead the great

*Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant. God is the God of peace, in that He has established peace with man through the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20).*

*By that cross an eternal covenant was made (cf. Zech. 9:11; Ezek. 37:26).*

*So the blood of Jesus our Lord is eternally powerful (unlike the repeated, temporary Old Covenant sacrifices) and satisfactory to God, thus He brought Him up from the dead.*

*It is the God of this power  
and the power of this God that  
enable those who love Him  
to do His will.*

*"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5).*

*The thing we must contribute to the Christian life is willing yieldedness. All we have to do is open the channel of our wills and let God's power work through us.*

*"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10).*

*We can work out our salvation because God is at work in us "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).*

*Because Christ does the work, He deserves the credit and praise, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

- MacArthur

- N. *“that which is pleasing”*
- O. *“in HIS sight”*
- P. *“thru Jesus Christ”*

We need God’s help to do his will. We cannot accomplish it on our own. This is precisely why the author asks God to accomplish these things in his people.

*Our aim as Christians should be to do “what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.” The only way we can please God is through Jesus. No one can please God without him. - Mohler*

*It is God who will equip the readers with everything they need to do his will.*

- New American Commentary

- Q. *“to whom be glory”*
- R. *“forever & forever”*

## VIII. Multiplication

*“Amen.”*

**ILLUSTRATION:** see the gift of an apple...

*The words in verses 20–21 pick up some of the major themes of the letter. The author reminds his readers that only God gives peace in the midst of the anxieties and worries of everyday life. The believers have a high priest who lives, who has conquered death, and this high priest is also their Shepherd. As their “great Shepherd” he spilled his blood for them so they would enjoy forgiveness of sins and be members of the new covenant. God works what is pleasing to him in his people. He is the one who saves and strengthens them for every good work. Hence all glory and praise and honor belong to God for granting salvation through Jesus. Those who have experienced his great goodness give him great praise.* - Schreiner

**T/S:**

**REVIEW:**

**CLOSE:**

*The author of Hebrews has given his readers a well-crafted exhortation for right Christian thinking and living. The stakes are high, for their spiritual condition is at stake. We would expect, therefore, that his closing statements have been given much thought.*

**in the Jewish context specifically a benediction was an aspect of worship.**

**a writer could craft a benediction to address specific needs of the audience or to express a summary of his main message. Thus, the author of Hebrews ends with a prayer**

*containing the essential elements of his book. At the heart of his message is Christ's work of effecting the new covenant and God's work in us to do his will. The author wants believers to live out God's will in light of the work of Christ. Therefore, we come back to the foundational relationship between right thinking and right living.*

- NIV Commentary

Let's PRAY!

### Hebrews 13:20-21

*Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good (so) that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### Hebrews 13:20-21

Amplified Bible (AMP)

## **Benediction**

*20 Now may the God of peace [the source of serenity and spiritual well-being] who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood that sealed and ratified the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with every good thing to carry out His will and strengthen you [making you complete and perfect as you ought to be], accomplishing in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.  
Amen.*

**BIG IDEA:** Blessed exhorting births & builds  
blessed assurance. -JDP

a. **BENEDICTION:**

- i. Definition – a prayer of blessing
- ii. Illustrations – all throughout Scripture...
- iii. Hebrews Application:

## **1 Now**

- *Precise*
- *Personal*

## **2 may**

- *Please*
- *Plead*
- *Pray*

## **3 the God of peace**

- *Peace-Provider*
- *Peace-Protector*
- *Peace-Personified*

## **4 who brought again from the dead**

- *Power – over death & darkness*

## **5 our Lord Jesus,**

- *Personal (our) Savior*
- *Passionate God (Lord)*
- *Person of Christ (Jesus)*

## **6 the great Shepherd**

- *Perfect (great)*
- *Purchaser (owner vs. hireling)*

- *Provider (23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm)*
- *Protector (23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm)*
- *Particular... (sheep vs. goats & wolves)*

## **7 of sheep,**

- *People of God*

## **8 by the blood**

- *Propitiation*
- *Price-paid (blood-bought)*

## **of the eternal covenant,**

- *Progressive*
- *Promise*
- *Partnership*

## **equip you**

- *Prep/Prepare*
- *Perfect (verb)*
- *Personal (you)*

## **with everything good,**

- *Pervasive (all/everything)*
- *Peter – see 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:3*

***(so) that***

- *Point*
- *Poignant*
- *Purpose*

***you may do His will***

- *Personal (you)*
- *Produce*
  - *Fruit*
  - *Faith*

***working in us***

- *Parakleet*
- *Purifying*
- *Person/People (us)*

***that which is pleasing in His sight***

- *Particular*
- *Pleasing*
- *Performance*

***thru Jesus Christ,***

- *Personal propitiation*
- *Price-paying Prince of Peace*
- *Perfecter of our faith*

*to whom be glory,*

➤ *Praise*

*forever & ever.*

➤ *Permanent*

*Amen.*

➤ *Passion!*

## **A Remarkable Benediction**

### **Hebrews 13:20-21**

We finally arrive at the benediction. ***This prayer might be one of the most beautiful prayers ever uttered by a Christian. It stands near the end of the letter as a declaration of absolute confidence in God. It is a prayer for the church*** from which the author is absent, but which he loves so dearly.

## The God of Peace and the Blood of the Resurrected Shepherd:

**It is not a small thing to be able to say, “God of peace.” God’s disposition toward those who are in Christ is one of peace. Because of Jesus’s work on our behalf, we now know God as the God of peace. We do not have to hope that God will respond to us with peace. In the Muslim system of thought, God’s peace is something one hopes for but cannot presume upon. The reason for this is simple: Christ is missing from their theology.**

**If it were up to us to achieve peace with God, we would always remain eternal enemies with him.**

Instead, we thank God that Christ has achieved that peace for us. Thus it is a wonderful thing to be able to say, “The God of peace.”

**This benediction also shows the centrality of Christ’s resurrection. It is the foundation for our faith.**

Of all things the author could have brought up about Jesus, he chooses to emphasize his resurrection from the dead. **This, among the many other reasons the author has pointed out throughout Hebrews, distinguishes Jesus from all other priests. Unlike**

every other high priest, Jesus is a high priest who lives.

The author also identifies Jesus as “the great Shepherd of the sheep.” What an amazing title. Of the many titles given to Jesus, could there be a sweeter one? **Sheep are aimless, vulnerable creatures; they desperately need someone to take care of them.** Given that the letter’s original recipients were Jews, they would have been well acquainted with the imagery of sheep. Therefore, they would have understood themselves to be Christ’s sheep, his people. We are the sheep of Jesus’s pasture. Such a designation encapsulates Christ’s pastoral love for his people. His love runs so deep for his sheep that he gives his life up for us (John 10:11).

Even in this prayer, the author does not miss another opportunity to emphasize the superiority of the new eternal covenant God has made with his people.

*Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep precisely because he shed his blood on their behalf. And that blood establishes this eternal covenant with God. There is no need for another covenant to come. This is the “everlasting” covenant, the purpose for*

*which God made the world: to demonstrate his glory in the salvation of sinners by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **Equipped to Please**

**Verse 21** tells us what the author expects the Lord to do for these people by virtue of forgiven sins through the blood of Christ. He confidently asks God to equip them with everything good so that they can do his will and please him. **We need God's help to do his will. We cannot accomplish it on our own. This is precisely why the author asks God to accomplish these things in his people.**

*Our aim as Christians should be to do “what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.” The only way we can please God is through Jesus. No one can please God without him. At the same time, the author asks his prayer to be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, whose great love for us leads us to glory in the Father forever and ever.*

**Dr. Albert Mohler**

**The benediction of vv. 20-21 is essentially a prayer.**

[725] The shift to the use of participles and paraphrastic

constructions "achieves a noticeable change of rhythm and the solemnity appropriate to the conclusion of the sermon." [726] *The two verses form one sentence in the Greek text, with "God" in v. 20 the subject of the main verb "equip" in v. 21.*

*The main point of the benediction is God's equipping the readers with everything they need in order to do God's will. It is God's "working in us" (the equipping) what is pleasing to him that enables us to do his will.*

**The overall structure of the benediction is symmetrical. Between an opening invocation and a closing doxology, there are two strophes of four lines each.** [727]

God is described as **the God "of peace,"** where the genitive case likely indicates source: **"the God who gives peace."** This phrase is common in Pauline benedictions and is **closely parallel to 1 Thessalonians 5:23**

Interpreters differ over whether the reference to peace has any relationship to the tension between the readers and their leadership.

The remaining structure of v. 20 is (lit.) "who brought back from the dead the shepherd of the sheep the great [one] by [through] [the] blood of the eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus." Lane considered Isa 63:11-14 LXX and Zech 9:11 LXX to be in the mind of the author.[728] Jesus has been brought back from the dead "through the blood of the eternal covenant." Lane translated "who lead out from the dead" based on the parallel with Isa 63:11-14 LXX, and concluded that "the 'leading out' is the fundamental redemptive action of God under both the old and new covenant." [729]

The phrase "through the blood" is taken causally by Lane based on the allusion to Zech 9:11 LXX and the construction of the strophe itself.[730]

Bruce captures the meaning: "His resurrection is the demonstration that his sacrifice of himself has been accepted by God and the new covenant established on the basis of that sacrifice." [731] The genitive noun phrase "eternal covenant" indicates what the blood accomplished. The adjective "eternal" is emphatic by word order. [732]

*The "eternal covenant" is equivalent to the "new covenant."*

Jesus is described as "the great Shepherd of the sheep," where the adjective **"great" is given prominence by**

**the repetition of the article and its position at the end of the phrase.**

The shepherd imagery applied to Jesus is common in the Gospels. As always in this epistle, the name "Jesus" is placed phrase or clause final for emphasis.

## 13:21

Verse 21 provides the predicate to the benediction.

*It is God who will equip the readers with everything they need to do his will.*

The participle "doing" is translated as a second exhortation in the NIV, but it is better to construe it either temporally, "as he brings to pass,"[733] or as expressing purpose in the sense of "for the purpose of doing."

*The author's rhetorical strategy is seen in his repetition of the concept of "pleasing" which he used in 12:28 and 13:16. Based on the new covenant inaugurated by Christ, the goal of the Christian life is to obey God and do that which is pleasing to him.*

The phrase "through Jesus Christ" is connected with the participle "doing," although it is possible to construe it with the entire clause, as does Dods.[734]

*The entire thought is reminiscent of  
**Philippians 2:12-13.***

The concluding doxology "to whom be glory" is ambiguous as to its antecedent. Some see it as a reference to "Jesus Christ" since this is the nearest referent, but it is best to take it as referring to "God" since God is the subject of the entire sentence in Greek.[735]

The benediction concludes with the traditional "Amen."

**New American Commentary**

### **Benediction and Closing (13:20-25)**

*The author of Hebrews has given his readers a well-crafted exhortation for right Christian thinking and living. The stakes are high, for their spiritual condition is at stake. We would expect,*

*therefore, that his closing statements have been given much thought.*

In the ancient world benedictions were important to an address, and **in the Jewish context specifically a benediction was an aspect of worship.** [26]

**They expressed a wish of well-being for the reader or hearer** and often followed a general formula, such as our author's "may the God of peace," common in Paul's letters, and "to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (13:20-21).

However, **a writer could craft a benediction to address specific needs of the audience or to express a summary of his main message. Thus, the author of Hebrews ends with a prayer containing the essential elements of his book. At the heart of his message is Christ's work of effecting the new covenant and God's work in us to do his will. The author wants believers to live out God's will in light of the work of Christ. Therefore, we come back to the foundational relationship between right thinking and right living.**

The writer begins his closing in verse 22, urging the readers to bear with or “put up with” his “word of exhortation,” a rather diffident request that is rhetorical in nature. The expression “word of exhortation” is probably a technical phrase referring to a sermon (cf. Acts 13:15, where Paul and companions are invited to give a “message of encouragement” in a synagogue service; the same expression is used in both places: *logos parakleseos*). This understanding is not diminished by the next statement: “for I have written you only a short letter.”

The Greek text does not contain the word “letter” and would be better translated, “I have written to you briefly.” The author is referring to the writing down of his sermon. That he has written “briefly” is a literary convention of the day, a polite statement included at the end of a correspondence. [27]

The “Timothy” of verse 23 is commonly assumed to be Paul’s missionary companion. If so, his “release” indicates an incarceration not mentioned in Acts or elsewhere in the New Testament. In any case, Timothy is a companion of the author and is known to this church. The author expects him to arrive soon and anticipates that they will travel together to see the recipients of Hebrews.

The book closes with a formal greeting and a final blessing ( 13:24-25). The author greets the leaders and the saints generally, using a common literary form of the day. He also sends greetings from those from Italy who are currently with him, —presumably the destination of the author’s correspondence. [28] His closing blessing states

simply, “Grace be with you all.”

## **Contemporary Significance**

### **Everyday Christianity:**

ONE of the most insidious dynamics in the modern church involves the bifurcation of life into two spheres, the sacred and secular. The life of the spirit and the life of the street, meant to be integrated, instead are ripped apart and thrown in different directions. Where this aberrant vision of the Christian life prevails, “church language” has the hollow thud of wordy noise rather than the ring of authenticity.

When Christ-following truth is no longer spoken in street language, when it is no longer directed at street life, and when it no longer challenges men and women to live as Christ-followers in those streets, there is no longer a chance for real-world faith. People are tamed, learning how to act with deftness inside the religious institutions. But they do not learn how to live faithfully in the real world.

[29]

Real-world faith is replaced by a shallow substitute—a spiritual-looking, institutionalized

*religion that is completely irrelevant to everyday life. The vibrant, zesty fullness and realness of true Christianity is replaced by a tame spiritual vapidness that must be checked inside the door of the church lest it vaporize under the heat of the streets. Conversely, it is through the devoted living for God in common aspects of life that the truth of the gospel is proclaimed in a thousand varied voices, and the kingdom is built.*

In the common practices of financial management, date nights, cleaning dirty faces and dirty bottoms, integrity at work, care for the burdened or oppressed, and hospitality God finds pleasure, for these are worthy sacrifices when presented on an altar made holy by the blood of Christ. For example, a healthy sexual relationship within marriage gives a platform for truth's proclamation to the world and a joyful dance of worship before God. In marriage pleasure and fidelity we shout against the inevitability of marital breakup and adultery proclaimed by the godless. Our healthy marriages trumpet the redemption of people from self-centeredness and destructive, immoral life patterns. The bed becomes a mini-church in which the two covenant members sacrificially and ecstatically meet one another's needs and offer their bodies as living sacrifices in worship before God. We should remind the world that God created the wonder and fireworks of sex long before

the advent of the glossy, counterfeit sex-sellers of modern culture.

Nevertheless, our sexuality rumbles as thunder in our bones, a power both beautifully dynamic and horrifically damaging in its relational potential—both in relation to people and God. Author Mike Mason writes:

Surely it was God's full intention for the physical joining together of a man and a woman to be one of the mountaintop experiences of life, one of those summit points of both physical and mystical rapture in which He Himself might overshadow His people in love, might come down among them and be most intimately and powerfully revealed. How horribly tragic, therefore, that it is here at this very point, here at this precious male-female encounter which ought to be overflowing with holiness, here that godless people have succeeded in descending to some of the most abysmal levels of human degradation.... Sex is sacred ground.... It is more conspicuously than anywhere else, the place where the angel and the animal in man meet face to face, and engage in mortal struggle. [30]

This mortal struggle is why we need to be reminded of guidelines such as those found in Hebrews 13:6. Good marriages and good sex do not just happen; they take thought and effort, both born of a selfless willingness to live for God in the details of life over a long period of time. It may also be that the intensity of the struggle increases

proportionately the worth of this pleasing sacrifice.

**Money is another area that tests the authenticity of our devotion to God.** *The heart that is too close to the back pocket is out of place and grows numb to the good gifts and provisions of God. Again, it provides an arena in which great spiritual vitality can be grown and demonstrated.*

***Corrie ten Boom recounts an event from her childhood that well illustrates the power of keeping money in perspective. The ten Boom family prayed one morning that God would send a customer that day to the family's shop to purchase a watch, the income from which would pay bills that had come due at the bank. During that day a customer with a large sum of cash came into the store. He picked out and paid for an expensive watch but, at the same time, complained about a Christian watchmaker, suggesting that the merchant had sold him a defective piece of merchandise. Casper, Corrie's father, asked the man if he could examine the watch that was not working properly. Only a minor repair was needed, which Casper made, assuring the customer that he had been sold a fine quality watch that would work well for him. He then gave the astounded gentleman his money back, and the man returned the watch for which he had just paid. Little Corrie asked, "Papa, why did you do that? Aren't you worried about the bills you have due?" Her father responded, "There is blessed and unblessed money," explaining that God would not be pleased with the ruination of another believer's reputation. God would***

*provide, he assured her. Just a few days later another man came into the shop and paid for the most expensive watch produced at that time. The purchase not only allowed the family to pay their bills, but also provided the funds for Corrie to receive training in Switzerland as a watchmaker for two years. [31]*

**C. S. Lewis** once remarked,

*“He who has God & everything, has no more than he who has God alone.”*

The truth of this statement and freedom from the love of money can elude rich and poor alike. The poor struggle against the clinging, grasping demands of daily existence. An empty stomach, a lack of transportation or social advancement, and dire surroundings can cry out against God’s promise of provision as a mockery. The rich, by contrast—and the vast majority of Christians in the Western world should be considered rich by the world’s standards—experience the drowning out of God’s promises by their super supply of material things.

**“Provision? Who needs provision?” Such questions are but a short step away from, “Who needs God?”**

Along these lines James warns the poor and rich to think rightly. The poor should take joy in their exalted status as Christ’s persons; the rich should focus on their low station

as Christ's servants and on the temporality of life ( James 1:9-11). We cannot be both lovers of money and lovers of God because these loves divide our allegiance, passions, and efforts in life ( Matt. 6:24). Thus, if we are to be effective Christ-followers, productive members of his covenant community, we must keep ourselves "free from the love of money."

In areas such as marriage and money *the worlds of the spirit and the street meet. Such meeting places either become dance floors on which we move to the music of his will or a stage of games on which we play at Christianity with dichotomized, hypocritical hearts.*

**Everyday.**

*Everyday... God wants us and wants us to want him in the nitty-gritty wonder, the plain and exalted dance of everyday.*

**Follow the leaders.**

Kent and Barbara Hughes tell of the wife of a close pastor friend, who relates a humorous nighttime encounter with

her husband. One night she awoke to find her sleeping husband on elbows and knees at the foot of their bed. With his arms wrapped around some unseen object before him he was mumbling to himself. The startled wife asked, “George! What on earth are you doing?” “Shhh,” the sleeping pastor answered. “I’m holding a pyramid of marbles together, and if I move, it’s going to tumble down.” A pyramid of marbles—an appropriate metaphor for a church leader’s ministry! [32]

In the years I have been involved in ministry, it has struck me how naïve some church members are about the realities of daily church leadership. Most pastors have heard with chagrin, “So, I know you preach on Sunday. What do you do the rest of the week?” One close friend of mine, a layperson in his church, suddenly found himself thrown into (over his head!) a critical leadership position because of the pastor’s sudden departure from the church. The circumstances of that departure and the continuing needs of a young congregation made for late nights and weary days. My friend, who has been involved in church faithfully for many years, exclaimed, “I had no idea!!!” Most do not, unless they have been there.

Church leaders, especially those who serve as the “main minister” or “pastor,” have difficult jobs. In many contexts they are expected to wear the multiple hats of social coordinator, superb orator (several times a week), sensitive and insightful counselor, administrator, motivator,

teacher, evangelist, mender of relationships, “marryer,” and “buryer”—all the while cultivating an exemplary personal, spiritual, and family life. The pressure to spend hours in study, hours in the community, hours in visiting prospects, hours in counseling, hours in training the staff, and hours in prayer all add up to unrealistic expectations on the part of the church. The effect can be overwhelming.

In 1925 the great theologian Karl Barth was offered the pastorate of a church in Neumunster near Zurich, Switzerland. Reflecting on his previous pastorate he sighed, “I am troubled by the memory of how greatly, how yet more greatly, I failed finally as a pastor of Safenwil.... The prospect of having to teach children again, of having to take hold of all kinds of practical problems ... is really fearful to me.” [33]

So what can you and I do in response to our church leaders? I would like for us to reflect on a number of questions in light of the principles found in Hebrews 13:7-17. (1) Church members are to keep in mind the example of godly leaders, scrutinizing the outcome of their manner of life and imitating their faith. Who are those leaders in your church life that you should be holding up as examples worthy of imitation? Have you of late thought carefully about the fruit of a great leader’s life, using that scrutiny as a motivation in your own spiritual life? Do the expectations your church has of its pastor(s) facilitate a

spiritual life that is worthy of imitation, or is the pastor so overwhelmed with responsibilities that there is little time to be with God in prayer and study?

(2) Church members are to respond to the leadership by embracing right doctrine, valuing the Christian community and thought more than the comfort and community offered by groups who do not believe the gospel. Are you respecting and yielding to your leaders in this regard, being teachable when it comes to Christian instruction? Are you struggling with the pull of social or religious groups outside the Christian community, and have you begun to drift from thinking clearly about Christ? Do you value the community of faith? What in your life demonstrates clearly that value? Do you value your leaders' seriousness about right doctrine? Do you encourage their theological training, their further education? Or do you fight against it? Do you cloud church discussions by downplaying the leaders' pleas for theological reflection?

(3) Believers should offer to God "thank offerings" for the sacrifice of Christ and should perform practical ministry to one another in the community of faith. The impetus for such worship and work is the work of Christ, who has redeemed and leads the community. Are you characterized by thankfulness to God, or are you a grumbler, constantly finding fault with people and processes in the church? Are you engaged in meeting the needs of others in the church on a weekly basis? Do you see your ministry as a sacrifice that pleases God?

(4) Members of the church should reflect on the effects of their responses on the church's leadership. Does their relationship with you facilitate the difficult work of your church leaders or hinder it? Are you a source of emotional refreshment or emotional fatigue? Does your pastor leave you with a song on the lips or a groan in the heart? What might be a way you can show encouragement to your church leaders this week?

Church life is difficult. Relationships get strained because the church is full of real people. But when church leaders lead well, living lives worthy of imitation, and when church members follow their lead, the kingdom is built. God is pleased. This helps and benefits all.

Conclusion. So, dear reader of this commentary, we come to the end of Hebrews. Thank you for taking up this volume. Unless you are unusual, you have not read it from beginning to end—we do not normally interact with commentaries in that way! However, whatever your circumstance—whether you are doing personal study in Hebrews, have stopped by this wonderful New Testament book for a brief look at an isolated passage, or are engaged in leading others through a more detailed study—I pray that you will heed “the word of exhortation” that is Hebrews. May you grasp fully the message of the exalted Christ, who has died for our sins and lovingly embraces us in the new covenant. May you consider him, fixing your eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith.

May you heed the warnings and exult in the promises of this book, following the good examples such as Abraham and Moses and avoiding the errors of the bad. May you receive an inheritance with the saints in the heavenly Jerusalem as we worship with the angels “in joyful assembly.”

In the words of Hebrews 13:20-21:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## **NIV Commentary**

### **Context**

Thus far the writer gives practical exhortations about life in the community (13:1–6) and warns the readers about finding strength in old covenant practices (13:7–17). They should continue to eat at Jesus’ “altar” and suffer reproach with him. They will show that they are willing to suffer such reproach if they obey their leaders (13:17). The letter ends with a call to pray for the author (13:18–19), a prayer wish

(13:20–21), one final exhortation (13:22), greetings (13:23–24), and a benediction (13:25). Such matters are often found in the closing of letters. In 13:18–19 the author solicits prayer for himself, for he himself may be in trouble with the authorities. He says he has a clear conscience and expresses his desire to conduct himself in an honorable way. He also asks them to pray that he will be restored to them soon.

As noted above, the final verses of the epilogue have a number of elements that are common in the closings of letters.

**In 13:20–21 we find a prayer wish, which was typical near the closing of NT letters (Rom 16:25–27; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 6:23; Phil 4:20; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16; 1 Pet 5:10).**

Certainly...

*the prayer wish here is one of the most beautiful and one of the most theologically rich in the NT.*

**The main point of the prayer is that God would equip and strengthen the readers to do his will.**

*In light of the remainder of the letter, he wants the readers to be faithful until the end. The God to whom he prays is the God who acknowledges Jesus*

## *Christ as the shepherd of the sheep and who raised him from the dead.*

### Exegesis

#### **13:18**

The author asks the readers to pray for him. The plural “us” here probably refers to the author himself and thus represents a literary plural. The request to pray for the author of a letter is a common feature in NT letters (Rom 15:30–32; Eph 6:19; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1). Here the admonition is rather general. Given the other references in the NT, such prayer for the author is probably tied to the spread of the gospel. The comment that the author has “a clear conscience” might suggest that he is under attack from governing authorities, especially when combined with the request to be restored in 13:19. Perhaps he is imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. The righteous life of the author commends the gospel, and hence it is important to him that his conscience is clear and his behavior honorable in all that he does. He doesn’t want to bring reproach on the gospel through any sinful behavior.

#### **13:19**

Perhaps the author is in prison or is detained from visiting the readers for another reason. In any case he urges them to pray that he should be restored to them soon, so that he

can encourage them face-to-face. The language of restoration suggests the author was a member of the church and longed to be with them again.[716]

## 13:20

The author begins the prayer by designating God as the “God of peace.” The phrase is fairly common in Paul (Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23) and should be interpreted to mean the God who gives peace.

*The readers*, since they were outside the social mainstream, *were experiencing significant stress, and hence he reminds them that God grants peace to believers. Furthermore, several exhortations have indicated the importance of peace within the church (12:14; 13:1, 17), and the author reminds the readers that true peace hails from God.*

The author also emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus (see §2.6). The resurrection, contrary to the opinion of some scholars, plays a major role in Hebrews. Jesus cried out to God and was saved from death by being raised from the dead (5:7). Jesus enters the heavenly sanctuary as the resurrected and exalted Lord (6:20). He is a Melchizedekian priest who abides as a priest forever by

virtue of his resurrection (Ps 110:4; **Heb 7:3**). What sets apart Jesus as a priest is that **“he lives” (7:8)**, for he has an **“indestructible life” (7:16)**. He isn't like the Levitical priests, who were hindered by death, but he **“remains forever” & “always lives” (7:23–25)**.

*Jesus is the resurrected Lord, sitting at God's right hand (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).*

The resurrection of Jesus signifies his superiority to all Levitical priests.

Jesus is also “the great Shepherd of the sheep.” In the OT God freed Israel from Egypt through Moses as the shepherd of Israel (Isa 63:11 LXX).[718]

*Jesus' role as shepherd fulfills **Ezek 34:23**, showing that he is the new and true David, and that as the shepherd he will take care of his flock (cf. also **Zech 13:7**). Indeed, as “the good shepherd” he gave his life for his sheep (**John 10:11** ESV; cf. 10:14; **1 Pet 2:25**)...*

...and such notions are not far from the author's mind since he refers next to the spilling of Jesus' blood.

The phrase “with the blood of the eternal covenant” is attached to the phrase “who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus.” The word “with” (ἐν) designates in context the reason Jesus was raised from the dead. His resurrection vindicated his sacrifice, showing that God approved of the yielding of his life for others. We likely have an allusion to Zech 9:11, which says, “Because of the blood of my covenant with you (ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης), I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.”[719]

**The shepherd theme also appears in Zech 9:16: “On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock his people” (ESV).**

*The author revisits a major theme in the letter, for the death of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, inaugurates the new covenant and effectively and finally provides forgiveness of sins so that believers enter God’s presence boldly (9:12; 10:19). The blood of animals could not cleanse from sins in contrast to the blood of Jesus (9:14).*

*Furthermore, the contrast between the new and old covenant permeates Hebrews. Jesus inaugurated a new and better covenant (8:1–13; 10:15–18). He guarantees a “better covenant” (7:22; cf. 8:6), and it is characterized by full and*

*final forgiveness of sins (10:18). Believers enjoy an “eternal salvation” (5:9), “eternal redemption” (9:12), and an “eternal inheritance” (9:15) secured “through the eternal Spirit” (9:14) because Jesus has instituted through his blood an “eternal covenant” (13:20).*

## **13:21**

*Since the readers have Jesus as their “great Shepherd” and “Lord,” and since by virtue of his sacrificial death they have been forgiven of their sins, and since Jesus now reigns as the risen Lord, they can be confident that the prayer uttered here will be answered. The author prays that his readers will be strengthened to do God’s will in every good thing, asking God to work what is pleasing in them through Jesus Christ. Given the rest of the letter, the*

*author is probably thinking particularly of their perseverance, though it is not limited to such. The readers do not have the internal capacity to fulfill what is written here, and thus he prays for God's power to be unleashed in them and at the same time asks that his petition will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ. The God who has done this great work for believers, who has sent the "great Shepherd" to atone for their sins and has instituted a new covenant, deserves all the glory and praise for all time. His magnificent love exhibited to the readers and the wonder of his plan of salvation elevate human hearts so they are drawn to give great praise and glory to God, both now and forevermore.*

There is some ambiguity as to whether the glory belongs to God or to Jesus Christ here. Still it is most likely that the glory is ascribed to God. **In 13:15 praise is given to God through Jesus Christ, and here glory is given to God through Jesus.**[720]

## 13:22

A common verb for exhortation in the NT, “I urge” (Παρακαλῶ), is used here (cf. 13:19; Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:27; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 2 Cor 2:8; 10:1; Eph 4:1; Phil 2:2; 1 Tim 2:1; Phlm 9–10; 1 Pet 2:11; 5:1). The term is well translated here, signifying the importance of carrying out the instructions that follow. The author addresses the readers as “brothers,” as fellow members of the people of God. He encourages them to “bear with” (ESV) and “receive” (HCSB) his “message of exhortation” (λόγου παρακλήσεως). The phrase designates a sermon or a homily, and it is used in Acts 13:15 of the synagogue sermon given by Paul in Pisidian Antioch. Hebrews, then, is not a theological treatise or a theological essay but a sermon, an urgent word of warning and admonition given to the readers. “Our author wishes to convey the impression that he is present in the assembly and actually delivering his sermon to them.”[721] The main point of the sermon is that they must not fall away from the message they first received, and the author organizes the letter to explain why falling away would be fatal and senseless. Apparently the author thinks he wrote briefly, though that may be a conventional word (cf. 1 Pet 5:12). One can only imagine what the letter would be like if the author wrote everything he desired in its fullness.

## 13:23

The verb “be aware” (or “know”) here is likely an

imperative.[722] The author wants the readers to know that Timothy has been freed from prison. The reference to Timothy is fascinating, and it explains why some identify Paul as the author, given his close relationship with Timothy. Timothy plays a significant role in the NT, especially in terms of the Pauline mission (Acts 16:1, 3; 17:14–15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor 1:1, 19; Phil 1:1; 2:19; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 3:2, 6; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:2; Phlm 1). Apparently Timothy had been imprisoned and was subsequently released.[723] Unfortunately we have no further information about his imprisonment or the reasons for his release. The author hopes that Timothy will join him quickly, and if he does so, they will visit the readers together.

13:24

Final greetings are a staple of early Christian leaders, signifying the love and kinship that characterizes believers in Jesus Christ (Rom 16:3–16, 21–23; 1 Cor 6:19–20; 2 Cor 13:12; Phil 4:21–22; Col 4:10–15; 1 Thess 5:26; 2 Tim 4:19, 21; Tit 3:15; Phlm 23; 1 Pet 5:13–14; 2 John 13; 3 John 15). Interestingly, the “leaders” (τοὺς ἡγουμένους) are singled out for greetings. Indeed, “all” the leaders are to be greeted. The readers should subject themselves to these same “leaders” (13:17) since they teach and live out the message communicated by the author. Greetings are also to be given to “all the saints.” The word “saints” (οἱ ἅγιοι) is another common designation for Christians, indicating that they are dedicated to God and set apart

from the world (e.g., Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10; Rom 1:7; 12:13; 15:25–26; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1; 16:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; 5:3; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; Heb 6:10).

The love and affection believers have for one another is evident, for also those who are with the author greet the readers of the letter. The phrase “those who are from Italy” (οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας) is ambiguous. It could mean that the author writes from Italy, probably Rome itself, and those who are with him (probably in Rome) greet the readers. In this scenario the readers may be in Palestine, Egypt, or somewhere else. On the other hand the phrase may refer to those who are from Italy (i.e., Rome), and the author and his friends send back their greetings to those at home. The latter seems a bit more likely, for the expression is limited to “those from Italy.”[724] He doesn’t say, “All those from Italy greet you,” or “The churches of Italy greet you.” By way of contrast we see expressions like: “The churches of Asia greet you” (1 Cor 16:19). “All the brothers greet you” (1 Cor 16:20). “All the saints greet you” (2 Cor 13:12). “All the saints greet you” (Phil 4:22). “All those who are with me greet you” (Titus 3:15). “The church in Babylon . . . sends you greetings” (1 Pet 5:13). It seems that some from Italy who are currently with the author send greetings to their home.

13:25

A grace benediction at or near the conclusion of letters is common in the NT (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Phil 4:23; Col 4:18; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 3:15; Phlm 25; cf.

also Rev 22:21). Many of Paul's grace benedictions contain references to Jesus Christ or include other statements that make them more complex. The grace benediction in Hebrews is lean and spare. Actually, however, it matches the wording of Titus 3:15 exactly, "Grace be with all of you" (Ἡ χάρις μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν). Paul is even briefer in 1 Tim 6:21 and 2 Tim 4:22, concluding with the words, "Grace be with you" (ESV). Perhaps he abbreviates the form when writing to friends. The author of Hebrews prays that God's grace will be with all his readers, for the grace of God will keep them from apostasy, and the grace of the new covenant established through the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them from all sin.

### Bridge

*The Christian faith expresses itself in mutual care and love for one another. Believers, therefore, turn to God in prayer, asking God to strengthen and help fellow Christians in their journey to the heavenly city. We also recognize that the witness of believers in the world is exemplified in living a godly life so that God is honored by the moral virtue of saints. Finally, the*

author wants to see the readers so he can minister face-to-face with them, for such ministry is typically the most effective. The church of Jesus Christ is a family. Greetings and news about one another are significant, for every person matters; every person is important. Part of what it means to love one another is to greet one another warmly and in love.

The words in verses 20-21 pick up some of the major themes of the letter. The author reminds his readers that only God gives peace in the midst of the anxieties and worries of everyday life. The believers have a high priest who lives, who has conquered death, and this high priest is also their Shepherd. As their "great Shepherd" he spilled his blood for them so they would enjoy forgiveness of sins and be members of the new covenant. God works what is pleasing to him in his people. He is the one who saves and strengthens them for every good work. Hence all glory and praise and

*honor belong to God for granting salvation through Jesus. Those who have experienced his great goodness give him great praise.*

**Hebrews is a sermon.**

In reading the NT we do not have abstract theology unrelated to life. It was a pastoral issue that precipitated the letter, and we only approach it rightly if we receive it in the same pastoral spirit.

**Dr. Tom Schreiner**

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**The Power of God**

These verses are really a benediction and could stand without comment.

*Even Jesus' own examples, perfect and powerful as they are, cannot in themselves enable us to follow in His footsteps. We need more than example. The writer calls on God to make possible the out-working of this truth in the lives of His people. To*

attempt to live the Christian life with the purest doctrine and the finest examples, but without God's direct power, is to build with wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor. 3:12). We not only need to know God's will, we need to have His power. We need the God of peace to equip us in every good thing to do His will.

So God gives us His ethics and He gives us the power to follow them, to live them out. Christian growth and obedience have nothing to do with our own power. Christian growth and obedience are by God's power, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. The greatest display of divine power in the history of the universe was at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when God brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant. God is the God of peace, in that He has established peace

with man through the blood of the cross  
(Col. 1:20).

By that cross an eternal covenant was  
made (cf. Zech. 9:11; Ezek. 37:26).

So the blood of Jesus our Lord is eternally  
powerful (unlike the repeated, temporary  
Old Covenant sacrifices) and satisfactory to  
God, thus He brought Him up from the  
dead.

*It is the God of this power  
and the power of this God that  
enable those who love Him  
to do His will.*

*"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider  
anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is  
from God" (2 Cor. 3:5).*

The thing we must contribute to the

*Christian life is willing yieldedness. All we have to do is open the channel of our wills and let God's power work through us.*

*"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10).*

*We can work out our salvation because God is at work in us "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).*

*Because Christ does the work, He deserves the credit and praise, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **A Short Postscript** (Hebrews 13:22-25)

But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if

he comes soon, I shall see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. (13:22-25)

### **Exhortation**

The writer gives a characterization to his epistle. He calls it this word of exhortation. (Cf. Acts 13:15 where this phrase is used as the designation for a sermon.) The book of Hebrews is a great treatise preached with a pen. It is an urgent call to the readers to come to single-minded devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ and to complete satisfaction with the New Covenant. The high and lofty doctrinal themes are the foundation for this primary exhortation.

Then, almost in an apologetic manner, he encourages the readers to bear with what he has written, to receive with receptive minds and warm hearts what he has said—in contrast to those in 2 Timothy 4:3 (whom Paul describes using the same verb, *anechō*) who do "not endure [bear with] sound doctrine."

The epistle has been straightforward, confrontive, uncompromising, somewhat complex, and taxing to mind, emotion, and will. Yet, even so, it is written... briefly. *Brachus* (briefly) means short, or in a few words. The whole letter (under 10,000 words) is shorter than Romans or 1 Corinthians and can be read in less than an hour. If the writer had dealt fully with the great themes he

discusses, the letter would have been inconceivably long. But it is amazingly short in comparison to the eternal and infinite truths it contains.

### **Follow-Up**

Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you. (13:23)

They needed to know that one of God's choice servants, our brother, Timothy (who must have been well known to them) has been released. Although the term *apoluō* (released) has a variety of meanings, it is most frequently used in the New Testament in relation to releasing from custody prisoners who were under arrest or in prison. The historical detail of Timothy's imprisonment is unknown. We are not surprised that he, like his teacher, Paul, was put in jail for preaching Jesus. Timothy seemed to be faltering in his faithfulness when Paul wrote his second epistle to him. Thus, in 2 Timothy 1:6-2:12 and 3:12-14, the apostle encourages him to endure persecution and not to fear it. It is likely that Hebrews was penned soon after 2 Timothy, and we see that this man of God had responded well to Paul's previous exhortation.

The writer's hope was that Timothy would soon join him, and that together they would visit the readers. Here we see a clear illustration of the importance of following up with personal ministry those who are taught. Such ministry

was an oft-expressed desire of the apostle Paul (see Rom. 15:28-29).

### **Greeting**

Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. (13:24)

The readers had already been exhorted to obey their leaders (v. 17), and now they are asked to convey greetings to them and to all the saints who were part of that fellowship in Christ. The mention of all of your leaders supports the other New Testament teachings of the plurality of elders (cf. Acts 20:17-38) who lead the people of God.

Those from Italy greet you may indicate that the group to which he wrote was in Italy, or simply that some Italian Christians were with him and sent their greetings.

### **Benediction**

Grace be with you all. (13:25)

The epistle ends with a simple, yet lovely conclusion in the form of a plea for God to grant grace to the readers (cf. Titus 3:15), as He does for all His children through the One who alone can give grace—the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **The Inferiority of Judaism**

(Hebrews 12:20, 21)

The Divine law was, for the substance of it, originally written in the hearts of mankind by God Himself, when their federal head and father was created in His own image and likeness. But through the fall it was considerably marred, as to its efficacious motions in the human heart. The entrance of sin and the corruption of our nature largely silenced its authoritative voice in the soul. Nevertheless, its unchanging demand and dread penalty were secured in the consciences of Adam's depraved posterity. The law is so inlaid with the principles of our moral nature, so engrafted on all the faculties of our souls, that none has been able to completely get from under its power. Though the wicked find it utterly contrary to their desires and designs, and continually threatening their everlasting ruin, yet they cannot utterly cast off its yoke: see Romans 2:14, 15. Hence it is that, even among the most degraded and savage tribes, a knowledge of right and wrong, with some standard of conduct, is preserved. Not only was the impression of the Divine law upon the human heart largely—though not totally—defaced by Adam's apostasy, but from Cain unto the Exodus succeeding generations more and more flouted its

authority, and disregarded its requirements in their common practice.

Therefore, **when God took Israel into covenant relationship with Himself and established them into a national Church, He restored to them His law, in all its purity, majesty, and terror. This He did, not only to renew it as a guide unto all righteousness and holiness, as the only rule of obedience unto Himself and of right and equity amongst men, and also to be a check unto sin by its commands and threatenings, but principally to declare in the Church the eternal establishment of it, that no alteration should be made in it, but that all must be fulfilled to the uttermost before any sinner can have any acceptance with Him.**

As the Law was the original rule of obedience between God and mankind, and as it had failed of its end through the entrance of sin, the Lord had never revived and proclaimed it in so solemn a manner at Sinai, had it been capable of any abrogation and alteration at any time. Nay, He then gave many additional evidences of its perpetuity and abiding authority. It was solely for the promulgation of His law that the presence of God appeared on the mount, attended with such dreadful solemnity. The Ten Commandments were the only communication which God then gave directly unto the people themselves—those institutions which were to be repealed at a later date (the ceremonial laws) were given through Moses! Those ten

commandments were spoken directly unto the whole nation with a Voice that was great and terrible. Later, they were written by His own finger on tables of stone. Thus did God confirm His law and evidence that it was incapable of dissolution. How it has been established and fulfilled the Epistle to the Romans makes known.

The different forms which the Lord's appearances took in O.T. times were always in accord with each distinct revelation of His mind and will. **He appeared to Abraham in the shape of a man (Gen. 18:1, 2), because He came to give promise of the Seed of blessing and to vouchsafe a representation of the future incarnation. To Moses He appeared as a flame in a bush which was not consumed (Ex. 3), because He would intimate that all the fiery trials through which the Church should pass would not consume it, and that because He was in it. To Joshua He appeared as a man of war, with drawn sword in His hand (Josh. 5:13), because He would assure him of victory over all his enemies. But at Sinai His appearing was surrounded by terrors, because He would represent the severity of His law, with the inevitable and awful**

## **destruction of all those who lay not hold of the promise for deliverance.**

The place of this glorious and solemn appearing of the Lord was also full of significance. It was neither in Egypt not yet in Canaan, but in the midst of a great howling desert. Only those who have actually seen the place, can form any adequate conception of the abject dreariness and desolation of the scene. It was an absolute solitude, far removed from the habitation and converse of man. Here the people could neither see nor hear anything but God and themselves. There was no shelter or place of retirement: they were brought out into the open, face to face with God. Therein He gave a type and representation of the Great Judgment at the last day, when all who are out of Christ will be brought face to face with their Judge, and will behold nothing but the tokens of His wrath, and hear only the Law's dread sentence announcing their irrevocable doom.

Sinai was surrounded by a barren and fruitless wilderness, wherein there was neither food nor water. Accurately does that depict the unregenerate in a state of sin: the Law brings forth nothing in their lives which is acceptable to God or really beneficial to the souls of men. The Mount itself produced nothing but bushes and brambles, from which some scholars say its name is derived. From a distance that vegetation makes an appearance of some fruitfulness in the place, but when it be more closely

examined it is found that there is nothing except that which is fit for the fire. Thus it is with sinners under the law. They seem to perform many works of obedience, yea, such as they trust in and make their boast of; but when they are weighed in the Divine balance, they are found to be but thorns and briars, the dead works of those whose minds are enmity against God. **Nothing else can the law bring forth from those who are out of Christ: "*From Me is thy fruit found*" (Hosea 14:8)** is His own avowal.

Nor was there any water in the desert of Horeb to make it fruitful. Pause, my reader, and admire the "wondrous works" (Ps. 145:5) of God. When we are given eyes to see, we may discern the Creator's handiwork as plainly in the desolate wastes of Nature as in the fertile fields and gardens, as truly in the barren and forbidding mountains as in the fruitful and attractive valleys. He whose fingers had shaped the place where His Son was crucified as "a place of a skull" (Matthew 27:33), had diverted from the desert of Horeb all rivers and streams. That water upon which the people of God then lived, issued from the smitten rock (Ex. 17:6), for it is only through Christ that the Holy Spirit is given: see John 7:28, 39, Acts 2:33, Titus 3:5, 6. They who reject Christ have not the Spirit: see Romans 8:9, Jude 19.

We may further observe that, the appearing of the Lord God at the giving of the Law was on the top of a high mountain, and not in a plain: this added to both the glory and the terror of it. This gave a striking adumbration of the Throne of His majesty, high over the people, who were far below at its base. As they looked up, they saw the mount above them full of fire and smoke, the ground on which they stood quaking beneath their feet, the air filled with thunderings and lightnings, with the piercing blasts of the trumpet and the voice of the Lord Himself falling on their ears. What other thought could fill their minds than that it was "a fearful thing" to be summoned to judgment before the ineffably Holy One? **O that the preachers of our day could say with him who had experienced the reality of Sinai in his own soul, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).**

*The Lord's appearing on mount Sinai was only a temporary one—in contrast with His "dwelling" in Zion (Isa. 8:18).*

This shadowed-forth the fact that the economy there instituted was but a transient one—though the Law there promulgated is eternal.

**Those, then, who turn unto Sinai for salvation are left entirely unto themselves. "God dwells no more on Sinai. Those who abide under the law (as a covenant) shall neither have His presence nor any gracious pledge of it. And all these things are spoken to stir us up to seek for an interest in that blessed Gospel-state which is here proposed to us. – Puritan John Owen**

And thus much we have seen already, that without it there is neither relief from the cure of the law, nor acceptable fruit of obedience, nor pledge of Divine favor to be obtained" (John Owen, whom we have again followed closely in the above paragraphs).

Before turning to the final lines in the graphic picture which the apostle gave of the appearing of the Lord at Sinai, let us again remind ourselves of his principal design in the same. The immediate end which the apostle had before him, was to persuade the Hebrews to adhere closely to the Gospel, his appeal being drawn from the evident fact of the superlative excellency of it to the law. In particular, he was here enforcing his former exhortations unto

steadfastness under afflictions, to an upright walk in the ways of God, to the following of peace with all men, and to persevere diligently that they failed not of the grace of God. This he does by pointing out that ancient order of things from which they had been delivered, for such is the force of his opening words "ye are not come unto" etc. (verse 18).

"For they could not endure that which was commanded" (verse 20). Having mentioned in the preceding verses seven things which their fathers came unto at Sinai, the apostle now describes the effects which those startling phenomena produced upon them. The first was, the people "entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more" (verse 19), the reason being "for they could not endure" it. The display of God's terrible majesty, the distance from Him they were required to maintain, and the high spirituality of the Law then promulgated, with its fearful penalty attending the least infraction of it, completely overwhelmed them. So it is still: a view of God as a Judge, represented in fire and blackness, will fill the souls of convicted sinners with dread and terror. No matter how boldly and blatantly they have carried themselves, when the Spirit brings a transgressor to that Mount, the stoutest heart will quake.

When God deals with men by the Law, He shuts them up to Himself and their own conscience. As we pointed out in an earlier paragraph, God gave the Law to Israel neither in

Egypt nor in Canaan, but in a desert, a place of absolute solitude, remote from the commerce of men. There the people could neither see nor hear anything but God and themselves. There was no shelter or place of retirement: they were brought out into the open, face to face with Him with whom they had to do. So it is now: when God has designs of mercy toward a sinner, when He takes him in hand, He brings him out of all his retreats and refuges, and compels him to face the just demands of His Law, and the unspeakable dreadful manner in which he has hitherto disregarded its requirements and sought to hear not its accusations.

*When the Law is preached to sinners—alas in so many places today that which gives "the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20) is entirely omitted—it usually falls upon the ears of those who promptly betake themselves to various retreats and reliefs for evading its searching and terror-producing message. They seek refuge in the concerns and amusements of this life in order to crowd out serious and solemn thoughts of the life to come. They listen to the bewitching promises of self-pleasing, "the pleasures of sin for a season." Or, they put far forward in their minds the "evil day," and take security in resolutions of repentance and reformation before death shall come upon them. They have many other things to engage their attention than to listen to the voice of the Law; at least, they persuade themselves it is not yet*

*necessary that they should seriously hearken thereto.*

But when God brings the sinner to the Mount, as He most certainly will, either here or hereafter, all these pretenses and false comforts vanish, every prop is knocked from under him: to hide away from his Judge is now impossible. "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place" (Isa. 28:17). Then it is that the sinner discovers that "the bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself on it: the covering narrower than he can wrap himself in it" (Isa. 28:20). He is forced out into the open: he is brought face to face with his Maker; he is compelled to attend unto the voice of the Law. There is neither escape nor relief for him. His conscience is now held to that which he can neither endure nor avoid. He is made to come out from behind the trees, to find his fig-leaves provide no covering (Gen. 3:9-11).

As the stern and inexorable voice of the Law enters into his innermost being, "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12), the poor sinner is paralyzed with fear. The sight of the Divine Majesty on His throne, overwhelms him: the terms and curse of the Law slay his every hope. Now he experiences the truth of...

## Romans 7:9-10

*"For I was alive (in my own estimation) without the law once; but when the commandment came (applied in power to the conscience by the Spirit) sin revived (became a living, raging, cursed reality) and I died (to all expectation of winning God's approval). And the commandment, which was unto life, I found unto death."*

*Like Israel before Sinai, the sinner cannot endure the voice of the Law. The Law commands him, but provides no strength to meet its requirements. It shows him his sins, but it reveals no Savior. He is encompassed with terror and sees no way of escape from eternal death.*

*That is the very office of the Law in the hands of the Holy Spirit: to shatter the sinner's unconcern, to make him conscious of the claims of the holy God, to convict him of his lifelong rebellion against Him, to strip him of the rags of his self-righteousness, to slay all hope of self-help and self-deliverance, to bring him to the*

realization that he is lost, utterly undone,  
sentenced to death.

*"Which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more; for they could not endure that which was commanded" (Heb. 12:19-20).*

When the Holy Spirit applies the Law in power, the sinner's own conscience is obliged to acknowledge that his condemnation is just. And there the Law leaves him: wretched, hopeless, terror-stricken. Unless he flees and flies for refuge to Christ he is lost forever. Reader, suffer us please to make this a personal issue. Have you ever experienced anything which corresponds, in substance, to what we have said above? Have you ever heard the thunderings and felt the lightnings of Sinai in your own soul? Have you, in your conscience, been brought face to face with your Judge, and heard Him read the fearful record of your transgressions? Have you received by the Law such a knowledge of sin

that you are painfully conscious that every faculty of your soul and every member of your body is defiled and corrupt? Have you been driven out of every refuge, and relief and brought into the presence of Him who is ineffably holy and inflexibly just, who "will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:7)? Have you heard that dread sentence "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10)? Has it brought you down into the dust to cry, "I am lost: utterly, hopelessly lost; there is nothing I can do to deliver myself"? The ground must be ploughed before it can receive seed, and the heart must be broken up by the Law before it is ready for the Gospel.

In addition to the other terror-producing elements connected with the institution of Judaism, the apostle mentions two other features. "And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart" (verse 20). To increase the reverence which was due to the appearing of Jehovah on Sinai, the people were required to keep their distance at the base of the mount, and were strictly forbidden an approach beyond

the bounds fixed to them. This command was confirmed by a penalty, that every one who transgressed it should be put to death, as a disobedient rebel, devoted to utter destruction. This restriction and its sanction was also designed to produce in the people awe and terror of God in His giving of the Law.

That to which the apostle referred is recorded in Exodus 19:12, 13, "Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live." As Owen well suggested, the prohibition respecting the cattle of the Israelites not only made the more manifest the absolute inaccessibility of God in and by the Law, but also seemed to intimate the uncleanness of all things which sinners possess, by virtue of their relation to them. Everything that fallen man touches is defiled by him, and even ***"the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord"*** (Prov. 15:8).

The punishment of the man who defiantly touched the Mount was death by stoning, that of a beast by stoning or being thrust through with a dart. In either case they were slain at a distance: no hand touched the one who had offended. This emphasized the heinousness of the offense and the execrability of the offender: others must not be defiled by coming into immediate contact with them—at

what a distance ought we to keep ourselves from everything which falls under the curse of the Law! How the whole of this brings out the stern severity of the Law! "If even an irrational animal was to be put to death in a manner which marked it as un-clean—as something not to be touched—what might rational offenders expect as the punishment of their sins? and if the violation of a positive institution of this kind involved consequences so fearful, what must be the result of transgressing the moral requirements of the great Lawgiver?" (John Brown).

"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (verse 21). The apostle now turns from the people themselves, and describes the effect upon their leader of the terror-producing phenomena that attended the institution of Judaism. Here was the very man who had dared, again and again, to confront the powerful monarch of Egypt and make known to him the demand of God, and later announced to his face the coming of plague after plague. Here was the commander-in-chief of Israel's hosts, who had boldly led them through the Red Sea. He was a holy person, more eminent in grace than all others of his time, for he was "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Now if such a man was overcome with dread, how terrible must be the severity and curse of the Divine Law!

Furthermore, let it be carefully borne in mind that Moses

was no stranger to the Lord Himself: not only was he accustomed to receive Divine revelations, but he had previously beheld a representation of the Lord's presence at the bush. Moreover, he was the Divinely-appointed intermediary, the mediator between God and the people at that time. Yet none of these privileges exempted him from an overwhelming dread of the terror of the Lord in the giving the Law. What a proof is this that the very best of men cannot stand before God on the ground of their own righteousness! **How utterly vain are the hopes of those who think to be saved by Moses (John 9:28)!**

*Surely if there be anything in all the Scriptures which should turn us from resting on the Law for salvation, it is the horror and terror of Moses on mount Sinai.*

"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." The fact that there is no record given in the O.T. of this particular item, occasions no difficulty whatever unto those who believe in the full inspiration of Holy Writ. Nor is there any need for us to have recourse unto the Romish theory of "unwritten tradition," and suppose that a knowledge of the terror of Moses had been orally preserved among the Jews. That which had not been chronicled in the book of Exodus, was

here revealed to the apostle by the Holy Spirit Himself, and was now recorded by him for the purpose of accentuating the awfulness of what occurred at Sinai; and this, that the Hebrews should be increasingly thankful that Divine grace had connected them with so different an order of things.

***The scope and design of the whole of our passage should now be obvious to the reader. The purpose of the apostle was to show again how inferior Judaism was to Christianity.***

This he here does by taking us back to Sinai, where Judaism was formally instituted by the appearing of Jehovah at the giving of the law, and where the Mosaic economy was established by a covenant based thereon. All the circumstances connected with its institution were in most striking accord with the leading features and characteristics of that dispensation. At that time the nation of Israel was in a waste, howling wilderness, standing in speechless terror at the foot of the Mount. There Jehovah manifested Himself in His awful holiness and majesty, as Lawgiver and Judge; the people at a distance fenced off from Him.

***How profoundly thankful should Christians be that they belong to a much more mild and gracious***

## *order of things!*

Sinai was "the mount that might be touched" — a symbol of that order of things which was addressed to the outward senses. The "blackness and darkness" which covered it was emblematic of the obscurity of spiritual things under the Mosaic economy, a thick veil of types and shadows hiding the substance and reality now revealed by the Gospel. The people being fenced off at the base of the mount denoted that under Judaism they had no way of approach and no access into the immediate presence of God. The thunderings, lightnings and fire, expressed the wrath of God against all who transgress His righteous Law. The "tempest" was a sign of the instability and temporariness of that dispensation, in contrast with the peace which Christ has made and the permanent and eternal order of things which He has brought in.

*The utter consternation of Moses gave clear proof that he was not the perfect and ultimate Mediator between God and men. All of which plainly*

*intimated the need for something else, something better, something more suited unto lost sinners.*

**A.W. Pink**

**CLOSE:**

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## *One Big Question*

By [Craig Etheredge](#) | [December 17, 2019](#)

I want you to imagine that you are sitting in a group and I am speaking. Now, imagine that I'm holding an apple in my hand...a red, clean, crisp apple.

As I hold it up and everyone is looking I ask, *"How many apples am I holding?"* Faces stare with a matter- of-fact look, wondering why I'm asking such an obvious question. Someone mutters quietly in the back of the room, *"One"*. As I pause and wait for another answer, suddenly a new thought dawns. Eyes widen, smiles break across their faces. Another one answers, more confidently even surprisingly, *"A million!"* Now everyone sees the apple in a whole new way.

In one sense, the first person was right. I am holding only one apple, but within that apple are seeds. Seeds, that if planted and cultivated, could turn into trees that could produce hundreds of more apples containing seeds, that could produce thousands of trees...orchards of trees...millions of apples! While I'm holding one apple, I'm also holding the potential for millions more.

Your life is the same as this apple. You have only one life to live, but bound up in that life is the potential to impact and change countless lives. Who knows how many people could be impacted by your life? only God knows.

At this point, I say something like this, *“The one big question that determines whether this apple remains alone or turns into an orchard of apples is this – Will you consume or will you invest? You can choose to consume this apple and enjoy its flavor for a brief moment. Then, I take a big bite out of the apple. Or I can choose to cut this apple open and invest its seeds, in the hopes that they will produce a harvest to come.”*

This same big question will also determine your impact on this earth. You can choose to consume your life on yourself – pursuing your career, your hobbies, your interests or your plans. Then, at the end of your life, you will have consumed as much of life as possible but left nothing behind. What remains, like an apple core, will be buried and quickly forgotten. But, there is another option. You can choose to invest your life. You can choose to take the things you have learned about following Jesus – knowing Him deeply, and sharing the Gospel with others – and you can strategically, intentionally and consistently invest those things in others. And if you invest your life, you will be amazed at what God will do through you. Paul writes in **(Galatians 6.9 NIV)**, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

This is my prayer for you: I’m praying that you will walk with Jesus deeply and personally, abiding in Him every day. I’m praying that you will reach out to the people in your life who need the message of hope and share all that Jesus has done for you. And, I’m praying that you will invest your life in few who will take what you have given them and pass it on to others. And one day, we will stand together among the orchard of changed lives and praise God that we got a chance to be used for His glory.