

Week 8 Devotional™ Reading

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Hebrews

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The Good Things to Come

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. – Hebrews 10:1-10 ESV

The law, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrifices – they were all just a shadow, a feint outline of something far greater to come. They were a facade, not the real thing. They were intended to be a temporary representation and a daily reminder of man's need for something better and more lasting. The sacrifices were ongoing and necessarily repetitive, because they could never fully bring forgiveness of sin. They could not remove the guilt of sin. They could not make someone permanently and completely right with God. In his commentary on Romans, W. H. Griffith Thomas writes, "Some one has well said: 'The blood of animals cannot cleanse from sin because it is non-moral. The blood of sinning man cannot cleanse because it is immoral. The blood of Christ alone can cleanse because it is moral'" (W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary*). The blood of animals was insufficient. The blood of men was contaminated by sin. Something better was needed.

The author, quoting from Psalm 40, attributes these words, penned by King David, to Jesus. "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart'" (Psalm 40:6-8 ESV). Jesus came to do the will of His Father in heaven. As Paul states, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8 ESV). Jesus died, not as some kind of a martyr, but as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 ESV). Jesus was the sinless, unblemished Lamb, whose sacrifice fully satisfied God's judgment against the sins of mankind. And unlike the animal sacrifices that had to be offered year after year, the sacrifice of Jesus was once and for all. It never had to be repeated. No other deaths were going to be required to satisfy the just demands of God. But to enjoy the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice, each individual must place their faith in Him as their sin substitute. Peter tells us, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the

righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18 ESV). We must acknowledge our unrighteousness, our lack of a right standing with God due to our sin. We must also accept the sacrifice of Jesus as payment for our sin penalty. There is nothing we can do to satisfy or appease God through our self-effort or attempts at self-righteousness. Paul would have us remember that God “has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault” (Colossians 1:22 NLT). The sad reality is that there are those who believe their right standing with God is dependent upon their own human effort. They spend their days trying to earn favor with God by keeping some set of rules or engaging in some ritualistic behavior in order to keep God happy. They struggle with the idea that someone else could pay for their sins. They wrestle with the idea of Jesus being the Son of God and sacrificing His life on their behalf. They mistakenly view Jesus as nothing more than a model to be followed, a good man who somehow managed to live a sinless life. And they wrongly assume that if Jesus could do it, so can we. That is not the message of the gospel. Paul makes this clear when he writes, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 ESV). He doesn’t say, “but God shows his love for us when we figure out how to live without sin.” No, God loved us in the midst of our sinfulness, and He proved it by sending His Son to die for us. The whole sacrificial system makes no sense if this is not the case. The law, the sacrifices, the priesthood – none of it makes sense if Jesus was not the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus came to do the will of His Father, which included His death on the cross. But as the author of Hebrews writes, “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10 ESV). Under the old covenant, it was the will of God that men offer up sacrifices, the blood of bulls and goats, in order to atone for their sins. But ultimately, those sacrifices were not enough to satisfy the righteous, holy, and just demands of God. He had given His law in order to show men that they were incapable of living righteous lives and obeying His commands. They lived in a constant state of sin. He gave the sacrificial system in order to provide temporary relief from the guilt and condemnation of sin. Without the sacrificial system, men could not enjoy restored fellowship with God. Their sins had to be atoned for. But again, those things were simply a shadow, a glimpse of something far greater to come. Jesus was not just another man who figured out how to live a sinless life. He was the Son of God, who came in human flesh and lived without sin because He was divine. Because He was born of the Spirit, He had no sin nature. He alone could be the sacrifice for which God was looking. He alone could be the payment that would satisfy and propitiate God. Nothing else would do. No other sacrifice would work. No amount of human effort, rule keeping, good works, and righteous deeds will appease the wrath of God. Only the sinless sacrifice of the Son of God. Which is why Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 ESV). Notice that He did not say, “No one comes to the Father unless they live like me.” He didn’t say, “No one comes to the Father unless they model their lives after me.” No, He said we must go *through* Him by placing our faith in His work on the cross, not our works on this earth.

Fully Forgiven

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. – Hebrews 10:11-18 ESV

Year after year, sacrifice after sacrifice, the Israelites followed God's instructions regarding His pattern for receiving atonement for their sins. The Hebrew word for atonement is *kaphar* and it means "to cover." In the sacrificial system, atonement was achieved when an innocent, unblemished lamb, bull or goat was sacrificed, and its blood was shed. That blood was then sprinkled on the altar and used to "cover" the sins of the guilty party. The death of an innocent animal was used to pay for the sins of a guilty individual. The sacrifice, the shedding of blood, atoned for the sins, essentially hiding them from God's eyes. But this process was only partial in nature. It could not completely remove the guilt of sin and the penalty of death pronounced by God on all who sin. Each sacrifice was temporary in terms of its effectiveness and limited in duration. Every day, the priests had to stand ready to offer additional sacrifices on behalf of the sins of the people. Why? Because they could not stop sinning against God. They were incapable of keeping His divine laws and holy decrees. And the sacrifices they offered could "never take away sins" (Hebrews 10:11 ESV) – at least not completely or permanently.

But when Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross, it was a one-time deal. It never had to be repeated. And because His sacrifice was effective, He was raised back to life by His heavenly Father and restored to His rightful place next to God in heaven. "For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14 NLT). Quoting from the prophet, Isaiah, the author of Hebrews reminds His Jewish readers that God had long-ago predicted the moment when something new and better would happen.

"But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." – Jeremiah 31:33 NLT

The day was coming when God would make a new covenant with the people of Israel. Rather than having to rely on some kind of external code of conduct (the law), they would have God's will planted right in their hearts. The motivation to obey God would come from inside, not outside. And on top of that, God promised to provide permanent forgiveness for sins.

"And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins." – Jeremiah 31:34 NLT

No more temporary, partial atonement. God was going to provide a sacrifice that would take care of man's sin problem once and for all. And "where there is forgiveness...there is no longer any offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:18 ESV). Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, offering His body and blood as the payment for man's sin debt to God, there is nothing more required of man in order to be made right with God. That does not mean that those who place their faith in Christ's sacrificial death are free to live however they want to live. Paul dealt with this misconception in his letter to the believers in Rome. "Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2 NLT). Paul went on to shoot further holes in this misguided and dangerous assumption. "Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living" (Romans 6:15-16 NLT). We are free from the law (rules and regulations) when it comes to our salvation. But we are not free to live as we choose. As children of God, we are expected to live lives in keeping with our new status. That is why Peter tells us, "So think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy" (1 Peter 1:13-15 NLT).

We no longer have to obey God's law in order to be made right with Him. We obey God because we HAVE been made right with Him through faith in His Son. We obey out of love, not obligation. We pursue righteousness, not in order to earn favor with God, but out of gratitude for the favor He has shown us by sending His Son to die for us. Go back to verse 14. Look at what it says. "For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy." We are already seen as righteous in God's eyes. And yet, we are in the process of being sanctified or continually set apart for His use. We are *positionally* holy and we are being made *progressively* holy.

We are already right with God, but at the same time, God is transforming us into the image of His Son. That is why we are commanded to put off the old nature and put on the new. We are to die to ourselves daily and to live for Christ. We are in a continual process of transformation that will one day be completed by our glorification by God. At that point in time we will receive new redeemed bodies and complete freedom from effects of sin and the threat of death. But Paul would have us remember:

And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. – 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 NLT

Our salvation is God's doing, not ours. In his letter to the Romans, Paul describes it as "the gospel of God." He further defines it as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17 ESV). Faith in our own human effort? No. He is talking about faith in the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Our salvation is based on God's plan, Christ's work, and the Spirit's power. We brought nothing to the table. Paul paints a vivid picture of just how amazing the grace of God and the gift of His Son really is. We have been fully forgiven. Our debt has been paid. Our future is secure. And our response is to live in willful, joyful obedience to the One who made it all possible.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." – 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 ESV

Hold Fast

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. – Hebrews 10:19-25 ESV

There should be a proper response when we consider all that Jesus has done for us.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. – Hebrews 5:8-10 ESV

...he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, this securing an eternal redemption. – Hebrews 9:12 ESV

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. – Hebrews 9:28 ESV

His sacrifice on our behalf should provide us with a confidence to come into the very presence of God, with “our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22 ESV). When Jesus died, the veil in the temple that acted as a barrier into the Holy of Holies, was torn in two. “Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:50-51 NLT). That event was incredibly significant, because it removed, for all time, the veil of separation between man and God. Up until that time, the only person who could enter the Holy of Holies, where God’s presence was said to dwell, was the high priest. And his access was limited to a single day each year, the Day of Atonement, and he could enter only having sacrificed an animal for his own cleansing. If he failed to do so, he would die. And no one else was allowed into the presence of God. But that all changed when Jesus died. The veil was torn, and the barrier to God was removed. It was as Jesus had claimed: “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9 ESV). Those who have placed their faith in Jesus as their sin substitute can now enjoy access to God. As His sheep, they can enter into His presence without fear of death or rejection. They can go in and out and find pasture.

But this newly available access to God, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus, should create in us not only a confident assurance, but a desire to live in obedience to His will. The author tells

us to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together” (Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV). We are to pursue righteousness, not in the hopes of gaining God’s approval, but in gratefulness for the fact that we are already approved in His eyes. Our hearts have already been sprinkled clean. Our bodies have been washed with pure water. We stand before Him as holy. This does not mean we are without sin. Each of us still retains his old sin nature. We still have the capacity and propensity to sin. But our sins can no longer keep us apart from God. We have been extended forgiveness. We have been fully acquitted. And we have His promise that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 ESV). We have access into the Holy of Holies, at all times, where we can receive mercy, grace, and forgiveness – never condemnation.

So, the author of Hebrews tells us to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23 ESV). This is the same thought he expressed back in chapter six when he said, “we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain” (Hebrews 6:18-19 ESV). Earlier in that same chapter, he wrote, “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12 ESV). We must keep our focus on the promise to come. Our hope is to be based on the completed work of Christ. He is coming again. That is why the author tells us, “so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28 ESV). He came, but our hope is based on the fact that He is coming again. And we are to hold fast to that reality. It is to provide us with the motivation we need to remain faithful until the end. It is to give us the encouragement we need to live obediently and not complacently. The apostle John reminds us, “And now, dear children, remain in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from him in shame. Since we know that Christ is righteous, we also know that all who do what is right are God’s children” (1 John 2:28-29 NLT). It is our hope in Christ that gives us the help we need to live godly lives as we wait for His return. It is our faith in His return that provides us with the determination to remain faithful till the end. We must hold fast. We must finish strong. We must fight the good fight and finish the race set before us – “for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23 ESV).

No Shrinking Back

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. – Hebrews 10:26-39
ESV

Because of all that Jesus has done for us and made available to us, we should have confidence, a secure assurance that we have access into God's presence because we have been right with God. But we must "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23 ESV). We have a part to play. Among all the distractions and difficulties of this world we must keep our eyes focused on the hope to come: the return of Christ and our final glorification. As followers of Christ, we will find the going tough at times this side of heaven. Living as a Christian requires faith, because so much of what we have been promised in Christ is yet to be fulfilled. Chapter 11 will give a glimpse of what faith looked like for the Old Testament saints. Each of the ones mentioned is recognized for having had faith – "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 ESV).

This section of chapter 10 is difficult. There are many different interpretations as to what the author is saying and who he is referencing in these verses. There are those who use this passage to prove that Christians can lose their salvation. There are others who say it is referring to Christians who "fall away" from the faith and risk losing their rewards at the judgement seat of Christ. I am not sure either view is correct. The author is writing to a congregation made up primarily of Jews who have heard the good news of Jesus Christ and expressed faith in Him as their Messiah and Savior. Up until this point, the author has been diligently attempting to help his Jewish audience to understand the superior value of Jesus and His sacrifice on their behalf. He has spent nine chapters contrasting the old and new covenant, presenting Jesus and the new covenant in His blood as not only superior, but singular in its effectiveness. Through His

death on the cross, Jesus accomplished for man what the Law could never have done. His sacrifice provided a means by which sinful men could be made right with a holy God.

But there were evidently those in the author's audience who were having second thoughts about the efficacy of saving work of Jesus. They were having doubts as to whether His death was enough. So, they were reverting back to their old habits of relying on the law. They were evidently offering sacrifices in order to cover over their sins, which meant that they were still sinning. The author starts off this section by saying, "for if we go on sinning deliberately" (Hebrews 10:26 ESV). What he has in mind are those sins that are willful and planned, not those that are committed out of ignorance or weakness. It would seem that there were those who were sinning on purpose and relying on the old sacrificial system to atone for those sins. The author accuses them of having "trampled underfoot the Son of God" and having "profaned the blood of the covenant" (Hebrews 10:29 ESV). In falling back to the old covenant as their source of atonement, they were saying the sacrifice of Jesus was not enough. They were essentially rejecting His offering as not having fully appeased the wrath of God. The author warns them that if they reject Christ's sacrifice, there "no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26 ESV). If Jesus is not enough, then all that remains is judgment.

So, to whom is the author referring? Is he warning Christians from falling away from the faith and losing their salvation? That interpretation would contradict too many other passages that promise believers the assurance of their salvation. Jesus Himself said, "And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day" (John 6:39 NLT). "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand." (John 10:28-29 NLT). Paul tells us, "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:6 NLT). Jesus' sacrifice was fully sufficient and completely effective. It accomplished the will of the Father by paying in full the debt that was owed as a result of man's sin. He died once and no other sacrifice is needed. The problem the author is warning about is the very real possibility of someone hearing the good news regarding Christ's sacrificial death, seemingly accepting it, but then later determining it was not enough. The issue is one of confidence. The author uses this word two times in chapter ten. In verse 19 he tells his readers, "Therefore brothers, since we have this confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus..." Then in verse 35 he warns, "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward..."

Saving faith is enduring faith. It lasts. But there have always been those who seem to express faith in Jesus, but then, when the troubles and trials come, they turn away. They reject the truth. They determine that Jesus is not enough, and the promise of salvation is not sufficient. Unwilling to wait for the final fulfillment of God's promise they seek their satisfaction in this life. They refuse to believe that their sins are forgiven. They fall back on to a life of works and self-righteousness, or simply reject the idea that they can be made right with God altogether. The author warns that these individuals face the judgment of God. He gives the very sobering warning, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31 ESV). It

would seem that his talk of God's vengeance and judgment has nothing to do with believers, but with those who never fully believed in the first place. He makes this clear when he reminds his readers of their "former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated" (Hebrews 10:32-33 ESV). In other words, they had been through difficulty in the past, and they had endured. They had remained faithful and he reminds them, "you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one" (Hebrews 10:34 ESV). These people had **not** rejected the saving work of Jesus at the first sign of trouble. Why? Because their faith was real. Their hope was in something greater than a trouble-free life. Their confidence was in the promise of God of a great reward to come, not their best life now. So, the author encourages them, "you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised" (Hebrews 10:36 ESV). The one who "shrinks back" will have no reward. God has no pleasure in him. But the author makes it clear that "we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls" (Hebrews 10:39 ESV). True believers believe the truth and endure. They have confidence and continue to hold fast regardless of the circumstances.

