

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part twenty-eight

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JESUS CHRIST - THE ETERNAL REPLACEMENT OF AN EARTHLY PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews 7:17-28 - "For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." [18] For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness [19] (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. [20] And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, [21] but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" [22] This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. [23] The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, [24] but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. [25] Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. [26] For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. [27] He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. [28] For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever."

There is a contentious contemporary issue in our text that is easily missed. When we engage in any discussion of religion and meaningful access to God, how shall we evaluate the present religious options? How shall we get to God? Is it all just a matter of personal opinion? Whose opinion is trustworthy? Everyone has something to say. Religious theories all compete in the marketplace of ideas.

The result in our day is everyone has a right to express any choice at all as a *"person of faith."* If you have faith - however you choose to *define* that faith - your ideas are pretty much as valid as any others.

This has everything to do with our text. Our writer builds a case in today's text for the *replacement* of one religious devotion with another. One is vastly superior to others. Our writer knows his audience of Jewish believers is being pressured to abandon their commitment to Christ, the world's Messiah, and replace that commitment with a return to the Judaic devotion to the law of *Moses*. So which is better - Christianity or Judaism? Even to *ask* the question is politically incorrect.

Enter our text. Our writer has no problem at all telling his readers a return to Judaism would be a tragic mistake. He has no qualms of political correctness that all religions must be treated as equally valid and true as long as they're sincerely held. Hence, he urges his readers not to abandon faith in the living Christ for something *"weak and useless"* (7:18). Imagine the nerve of calling someone's devoutly held faith as *"weak and useless!"* And that under the divine inspiration of the Spirit of God Himself.

1) **ETERNAL LIFE CAN ONLY BE ACCESSED BY AN ETERNAL PRIESTLY INTERCESSOR. AND JESUS THE CHRIST IS THE ONLY ONE DIVINELY PROVIDED**

Hebrews 7:15-21 - "This becomes even more evident when *another priest arises* in the likeness of Melchizedek, [16] who has become a priest, *not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent*, but by *the power of an indestructible life*. [17] For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." [18] For on the one hand, a former commandment is *set aside because of its weakness and uselessness* [19] (for the law made *nothing perfect*); but on the other hand, a *better hope is introduced*, through which *we draw near to God*. [20] And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such *without an oath*, [21] but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "*The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'*"

This is the last mention of that mysterious Old Testament priest, *Melchizedek*. And it's easy to miss that our writer is not actually writing about Melchizedek in these verses. That illustration has almost fulfilled its purpose. Our writer is now zeroing in, not on Melchizedek, but "*...another priest in the likeness of Melchizedek....*" (15).

The focus is now exclusively on Jesus, the Christ. And there is really only one idea - presented in *verse 16* - that our writer is going to examine and apply and re-apply from different angles for the rest of this chapter. Here's the central point - **Hebrews 7:16** - "*....[Jesus] who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent,*

but by the power of an indestructible life."

Here's all you need to see. Contrast the *two approaches* - the *two different qualifications* - into those two priestly roles. First, the *"legal requirement,"* and second, the *"power of an indestructible life."* That's our writer's central point. There is the *legal requirement* of what he calls *"bodily descent"* (16). That simply means all those Old Covenant priests got their role - their job - by the *legal requirement from Moses* that they all be descendants of *Levi*. That's what they had going for them, and nothing else. They were not fundamentally different in any way from any of the other descendants of Abraham.

Then our writer contrasts these priests who met the *"legal requirement"* of Levitical descent with *another Priest* who entered His priestly role on the basis of effective *power* - *"...the power of an indestructible life"* (16).

And immediately you can see where our writer is going - even before the rest of today's text is examined. Not all roads to God are the same. One is *powerful*. The others are *not powerful*, but merely the result of human regulations and policy.

And here's what that means. There is nothing open-minded in treating all options as equal. This is spiritual and eternal insanity. Some systems of religious observance are sustained by regulations and rituals and teachers. And they may all contain moral instruction and other good things. But only *one* Mediator has visibly manifested the *"power of an indestructible life"* (16). So only one can bring people to a holy God *eternally*. That's the politically incorrect assessment of the Spirit of God in this text.

2) OUR WRITER PRESSES ALL CHRISTIANS TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE OLD COVENANT LAW WAS "WEAK AND USELESS" AND HOW CHRIST'S ATONING WORK SET IT ASIDE

So there's a *why* question, and then a *how*:

Hebrews 7:18-19 - "For on the one hand, *a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness* [19] (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a *better hope* is introduced, *through which we draw near to God.*"

First, the *why* question - *Why was the Old Covenant priestly/sacrificial system "weak and useless"* (18)? And there's a difficulty with these words because the law being described as *weak and useless* was prescribed by God Himself.

The problem isn't with the Old Covenant law. The Apostle Paul tells us the law is holy and good. The problem is this holy law is given to people full of sin. This holy law is given to people who are fallen and corrupted by original sin to their very core. This is so important. We are sinners by nature *before we even receive* the law of God. So this holy law only serves to *define and measure* the sin already present in my nature. It cannot *remove* it.

Our writer will make this painfully clear in Hebrews 10:3-4 - "But in these sacrifices there is a *reminder of sins* every year. [4] For it is *impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*"

I said our writer deals with a *why* question and a *how* question. The *why* question we've been considering. *Why* was the former covenant set aside? And the answer is the Old Covenant was *weak and useless* in terms of helping sinners with their guilt.

Now the *how* question. *How* does the coming of the Christ set the Old Covenant aside? There's a hint in *verse 19* and then a fuller explanation in *verses 25-27*.

First, the hint - Hebrews 7:19 - "...*(for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.*"

This verse is designed to raise the obvious question. *How can sinners - those who can't even be helped by the holy law of God - how can these sinners "draw near to God"* (19)? Either these sinners aren't as bad as they seem or God isn't as fussy about holiness as we imagined. But those seem to be about the only alternatives.

Then we get the fuller explanation in Hebrews 7:25-27 - "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who *draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.* [26] For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, *holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*

[27] He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself."

Don't over-complicate these words. There are really only *three* points of contrast presented. *First*, the Old Covenant priests were *sinners* and the Christ *isn't*. *Second*, the Old Covenant priests were perishable mortals and Christ "*always lives*" (25). And *third*, those sinful Old Covenant priests offered *brute animals* as a sacrifice over and over, while the Christ offered *Himself once for all*.

And our writer means for us to trace out the fruit of these three important differences because the differences are huge. Only the sacrifice of the Christ can bring the likes of Don Horban "*near to God*."

Hebrews 7:19 - "...(*for the law made nothing perfect*); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which *we draw near to God*."

Hebrews 7:25 - "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those *who draw near to God* through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

But *how* does the sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, "*set aside*" the entire Old Covenant law? How specifically does this work? We need to know this because understanding the details of this isn't academic theology. Knowing these details is the root of *hope and release from a guilty conscience*.

Later on our writer will drill down more deeply into the priestly work of the Christ and the effects it has on our conscience:

Hebrews 9:14 - "...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, *purify our conscience* from dead works to serve the living God."

Hebrews 10:22 - "...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."

Here's how the priestly ministry of Christ brings deliverance to our conscience. All of those Old Covenant priests - and all those for whom they ministered - *knew* they were still totally unable to fulfill the law of God. That's why all those animals had to shed blood and die. *Somehow* those ongoing sinful hearts had to be paying for their failures. The sacrifices had to keep coming.

But all of this changed with the final priestly sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Here was the first sacrifice - the first *ever* - that took every demand of the Holy law of God and perfectly, completely fulfilled it. Every demand of the law has been met perfectly in Christ.

O, I know *I* don't keep God's law perfectly. But Jesus, like *all* priests doesn't just represent *Himself*. He, like all priests, stand before God on my behalf. The difference with Christ is He stands on my behalf before God in *total perfection*. And my conscience, while still a valuable guide for walking in growing sanctification before my Lord, is still a conscience *informed by the Spirit of God* that, in spite of my own present weakness, there stands the perfect righteousness of my High Priest at the throne of God.

The law of God no longer stands before me as a threatening enemy. And God's Word tells me why this is so - **Colossians 2:13-14** - "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us *with its legal demands*. *This he set aside, nailing it to the cross*."

Remember, more than just my sins were nailed to that cross. The "*legal demands*" (14) were nailed there. As a means of obtaining my standing before God, Christ, in His role as my High Priest, "*set aside*" the Old Covenant law as the means of dealing with my sin.

3) **GOD HAS MADE AN OATH THERE WILL NEVER BE ANYTHING ELSE ADDED TO OR REQUIRED BEYOND WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED IN THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY OF CHRIST**

That's the glorious truth in these cumbersome verses - **Hebrews 7:20-24** - "And it was *not without an oath*. For those who

formerly became priests were made such without an oath, [21] but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: ***"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'"***[22] This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. [23] The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, [24] but ***he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.***"

All of those Old Covenant priests came into their role through genetic succession. There was nothing else to it. It was a simple rule of family tree - ***"...For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath...."*** (20).

Not so with the Christ. Just as surely as He rose from the dead and *lives* forever, His work will be *effective* forever - ***"...he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever"***(24).

How can I make this truth as precious as it is? Where will you go when your conscience won't let you rest for sins that remind you of your present frailty? What will help you in the face of temptation? What will fill your heart with compassion for the lost who know not about Christ? What will you say to the accusations of the Devil?

You will have to stand in the fact that Father God *knew the necessity of a continuing priestly work on our behalf*. You will have to know the potency of Christ's redemptive work hasn't diminished one ounce since He first told that thief on the cross he would ***today be with Christ in paradise***. You will have to remember Jesus is the ***"same yesterday, and today, and forever."***

You will have to remind yourself that when John had his vision of the throne of God in heaven he was immediately able to recognize the Lord with whom he had traveled and broken bread so many times. And as soon as John saw his beloved Lord he knew it was Him because of something very specific:

Revelation 5:5-6 - "And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." [6] And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders ***I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain...."***

This is John's visionary picture. And it perfectly portrays the *ongoing* work of the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb for my sin. The effect of that sacrifice has never been diluted by the passing of time or the depth of human sin. People like I can come to God. I still sin. But there has never been another sacrifice offered on my behalf.

4) **IF YOU HAVE NOT BEEN BROUGHT NEAR THROUGH THE FAITH IN THE WORK OF CHRIST YOU ARE STILL FAR AWAY FROM GOD**

Hebrews 7:25 - "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who ***draw near to God through him***, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

The opposite of *near* is *far away*. There is no hope of approaching God for needed grace apart from the work of Christ. If you haven't yet placed specific faith in the priestly atoning work of *this* Redeemer - the Lamb of God, to whom all other Old Covenant sacrifices pointed - you will be both now and throughout eternity, ***far from God***.

The way is open to all today. Draw near.