

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

Sunday, July 15th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2059

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GRACE BE WITH ALL OF YOU

Hebrews 13:20-25 - "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 [our writer *identifies* the only God he is interested in discussing - no other options], [21] equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us [*"in us"* - this is the essential difference in the new covenant] that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. [22] I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. [23] You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. [24] Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. [25] Grace be with all of you."

If you read these words without studying the whole letter to which they're attached you could be forgiven for thinking they were just a loving sign-off - a polite showing of affection between a leader and the flock of God.

But that's not what's happening in our text. These aren't just an emotional gush. They're *related* to the letter preceding them. So this is different from the way we stick a "*Yours Sincerely*" at the end of a letter where the sign-off becomes a standard close to virtually any content whatsoever.

Here's why this matters. The "*God of peace*" introduced in the first verse in our text (20) turns out to be the God of a *particular kind* of peace. He's not merely a *peaceful God* in the sense of being a pacifist God who never gets angry or acts in serious judgment. As it turns out this is a God of a peace attached to "*the blood of the eternal covenant* (20). Our writer wants us to *notice* this. How often do we naturally link *peace* with *blood-shed*? Our writer is *identifying* the nature of our atoning God's work. It's a peace *through* the substitutionary judgment of our sin.

Of course, this comes as no surprise when read in the light of the entire letter. Used as either nouns or verbs the words "*sacrifice*" and "*offering*" have driven the stream of thought more than any other terms by our author. This has been one long treatise on a God who commanded the *shedding of blood* of animals in the Old Covenant and shed *His own* blood for our sins in the New Covenant - **Acts 20:28** - "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."

Notice the way "*God*" and "*his own blood*" are grammatically bound together in this sentence. God shed His own blood. God the Son's death on the cross is not, as so many irreverent quick-tongued writers love to say, an act of "*cosmic child abuse*." It is the united, loving heart of the Trinitarian Godhead spilling His own Incarnational blood to *divinely self-pay for my sin* - "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." The theological thinness of some current church leaders on this deep subject is both tragic and frightening.

There is a logic unfolding in our text. Our writer has just asked his readers to *pray for him* (13:18). Now he wants them to hear *his prayer for them*. Here are some of the wrap-up themes underscored by our writer:

1) WHEN OUR WRITER CONSIDERS THE PEACE OF GOD HE CAN'T DO SO WITHOUT TYING IT TO CHRIST'S RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

Hebrews 13:20 - "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...."

These are strange words. Notice the way the resurrection of Jesus is actually mentioned *before* His shed blood on the cross. This isn't the natural sequence of events.

The peace being bestowed in this benediction isn't mere inward tranquility. It isn't just the removal of the stress of circumstances. This is not a *monastic* peace or the absence of noise or distraction. No. This is a peace tied to the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

And even here our writer pushes us into understanding *why* the resurrection of Jesus brings peace with God. The

resurrection of Jesus brings peace because it is somehow linked to the **"blood of the eternal covenant" (20b)**.

If we don't do some theological connecting of the dots here we have missed the whole message of the letter to the Hebrews. Consider this. There were **ten different people raised from the dead** in the Bible. Do **their** resurrections bring us home to the God of peace? Do they bring peace with God? Yet the Apostle Paul says if **Jesus** didn't rise from the dead **we are still in our sins** - **1 Corinthians 15:17** - **"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."**

Our text in Hebrews today tells us why this is so - why the resurrection of Jesus is so different. Our writer ties all this up with that phrase, **"...by the blood of the eternal covenant" (20b)**. There is, says our writer, a **covenant** - a **binding promise** - that God has made in His loving redemptive pursuit of mankind.

And, as we have studied, there were **pictures** - **imperfect** pictures to be sure - of God's plan all through the Old Covenant. People had their sins temporarily covered through the shed blood of a **substitute**. The unblemished animal would **shed its blood** - or more accurately, **have its blood shed**.

The problem, of course, was these were **temporary** provisions. They required repetition over and over and over again because those animals **stayed dead**. Death still reigned because the actual price of sin was never paid. Then came Jesus - the One called the **Lamb of God**. And He died, as all those sacrifices pictured, as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. This particular sacrifice was **never repeated**. That's why our writer distinctly refers to it as the **"...blood of the eternal covenant" (20b)**.

And this is what our writer is getting at in the mention of peace with God being established **by** the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus rose from the grave **never to die again**. His covenant is an **eternal covenant** because it brings **eternal acceptance and peace with God**. The resurrection of Jesus means I don't have to guess about the **effectiveness** of the new covenant. It is still powerfully in full force. Jesus rose from the grave because the **wages of sin** were permanently paid by our Redeeming God.

2) **BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD WE NOT ONLY HAVE A PERFECT SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS, WE HAVE A LIVING SHEPHERD FOR OUR LIVES**

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, [21] equip you with everything good 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."**

Again, our writer is making a powerful contrast here. He is pointing out the obvious contrast. The lamb or goat brought by the sinner for sacrifice ceased to have any conscious relationship with the one bringing it. Dead sacrifices simply cease to exist. They have a **one time** engagement with the sinner.

Those professing allegiance to Christ - those understanding and trusting in the **"blood of the eternal covenant" (20)** - are not finished with the fruit of His redemption. You have a living **"shepherd" (20)**. You and I continue to benefit eternally and daily from what Jesus does **right now**.

Those Old Covenant sacrifices were counted as provisional **but only until your next sin**. Then the sacrifice had to be repeated. This happened with every sunrise because the atoning provision of the sacrifice only covered **past** sins - not the ones you fell into **next**.

But now we have a **living High Priest** and a **loving Shepherd**. There is **ongoing grace and help** for the repentant sinner - **Hebrews 4:14-16** - **"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."**

"...grace to help in our time of need" (16). What beautiful words! Such was never the provision under the Old Covenant. This is what enables people like us to **"...hold fast our confession" (14)**. How else could we do it? There are a thousand voices telling me to quit. There are reminders - inward and outward - of all the things that disqualify me for continued grace.

But I have a **great loving Shepherd**. He's already proven His commitment to me by laying down His life for this wayward sheep - **John 10:11** - "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd **lays down his life for the sheep.**"

And now you start to see why our writer emphasizes the **resurrection** of Jesus in establishing peace with God. If His own **death** couldn't stop the Son's commitment of grace to me nothing else will.

3) **BECAUSE CHRIST LIVES ETERNALLY HE IS ABLE TO WORK INWARDLY IN A WAY NO OLD COVENANT SACRIFICE COULD**

Hebrews 13:21 - "...**equip you with everything good** 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."

Our writer is almost done. He's wrapping up. But there is something important needing emphasis. He wants to make sure his readers understand this relationship with our Risen Shepherd isn't established by self proclamation. Anyone at all can **say** he or she is a Christian - that he or she **believes** in Jesus.

Our writer reminds there is activity on **both ends** in my relationship with Jesus. It's not something I can merely **make up**. He **equips** those who are His by faith. He **"works in them."** There is a distinct difference made in the life. He steers the whole life in the direction of **"...that which is pleasing in his sight."**

Like you, I still have a long way to go in having Christ formed in me. But make no mistake about it. If I'm professing Christ **pleasing Him** is the number one agenda item of my heart. This Shepherd only takes my life in **one** direction. Never **two**. If I'm clearly still living to please me I may **say** I have a relationship with Jesus, but Jesus knows nothing about it.

4) **TO GROW IN GRACE I AM REQUIRED TO "BEAR WITH" DISCIPLESHIP WHEN IT FEELS DIFFICULT**

Hebrews 13:22 - "I appeal to you, brothers, **bear with my word of exhortation**, for I have written to you briefly."

Whenever I read a verse like this I try to put myself in the author's shoes - **"Please bear with my word of exhortation!"** What would make him say this? He's done his letter. The hard work is over. And as he thinks back over what the Holy Spirit has inspired him to write he feels the need to plead with his readers - with **you and me** - to **"bear with"** his words. What's going on here?

I think I know. Laboring over these words for **58 weeks** gives one a pretty good impression that there are some difficult verses to be pondered. There's sacrificial imagery loaded with bloodshed. There's quotations from half the books in the Old Testament - and I mean the ones we **don't** enjoy reading! There are densely written arguments. There are lists of people long dead. And then there are about five stern warning passages that put the fear of God into our hearts.

I've actually felt some pastoral sympathy for those who have come up to me saying, **"Boy, this is a hard letter, pastor Don. How long did you say we were going to be studying this?"**

"I appeal to you brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation!" And then he actually has the nerve to say his word was **"brief."** I won't even try to get away with that.

Here's what I think our writer is saying - and it's a very important wrap up to **any** sustained study of the Biblical text. **Feeding doesn't always happen where you think it's happening.** There are doctrinal truths that don't land as positive. And we **love** positive! There are warnings that don't land as at all pleasant. And there will be times - many of them, over and over again - where the things you encounter in the Word don't feel **immediately practical**. So Scriptural study isn't always bright and breezy. More videos please!

What do you do then? Our writer says you **"bear with"** what you're reading. You don't stop listening. Let the Holy Spirit be the judge of what you need to hear. Bible study isn't Sesame Street and the Holy Spirit isn't Big Bird. Dig in.

I have about 8700 books in my library. It's a learning experience to open up older ones. I always underline and scribble in my books. They're a mess, actually. And it's a learning experience to go over books long read and see what I underlined twenty years ago.

I wonder what I could have possibly seen in those underlined words. They obviously seemed life-changing at the time. Now they feel trite. And then I see other things that feel weighty now but obviously didn't matter a hoot back then.

My point? We aren't always the best judges of what we need to know. Our writer wants these readers - and you and me - to **"bear with"** his Spirit-inspired words. He's trying to tell us we need to care about what he's written whether we **think** we need to care or **not**. Hearing the Word will always means concentrating on things that don't seem important yet. This is why people skip church. They don't sense that it's making any difference when they do. They don't skip **work** because they won't get **paid**. They will feel the **immediate effects** of their decision.

Hear me church. It is **never** that way with neglecting things of the Spirit. You will rarely if ever **feel any immediate effect** of spiritual neglect or inattention. **This** is what is on our writer's mind when he pleads, **"bear with my word of exhortation!"** He's saying, **"Never allow this to become less consequential than it really is!"**

So our writer is doing what any parent would do with a talk with a young person about the importance of a good education. Or a parent would do taking a small child to the dentist. Or what a pastor would do telling people they need to come to church on Sunday night.

Sorry, that was just too good to pass up. **"Grace be with you all" (25).**