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A Festschrift  
for  
Dr. Earl D. Radmacher





# EARL D. RADMACHER: MAN OF GRACE

STEPHEN R. LEWIS

Guest Editor  
*Englewood, CO*

Earl Dwight Radmacher was born over eighty years ago in Portland, Oregon just a couple miles from Western Seminary, where, in the providence of God, he would later serve on the theological faculty for thirty-three years (1962-1995) and in administrative positions as Dean of the Faculty (1964-1965), President (1965-1990), and Chancellor (1990-1995). In 1995 he was designated President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus.

His parents, who were immigrants from Romania and Austria, settled in Portland in 1913 where they brought eight children into this world, Earl being the last. The whole family was very active in local churches, so every Sunday found Earl spending all day in church—Sunday school, morning worship, potluck lunch at the church, recreation break, youth service, evening service, and after service. Even though he had heard the gospel preached Sunday after Sunday, he did not personally receive Christ as his Savior until he was fourteen years of age. He has often stated that sitting in church Sunday after Sunday doesn't make one a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes one a car.

At that juncture in his life, Earl came in contact with another Earl—Earl Gile—a faithful Sunday school teacher who lived right across the street from the grade school he had attended, and he opened up his home as an outreach to boys from the school. Mr. Gile's church rented the school gymnasium on Thursday nights and made it available for boys to play basketball if they came to Sunday School on Sundays. That sounded like a good deal, so he went. Shortly after that the teacher announced a forthcoming boys' camp at Twin Rocks Beach,

Oregon. He decided to go; and there, at fourteen years of age, he came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Although the church that Earl attended preached the gospel faithfully, they didn't go beyond the gospel to build up believers in the faith. He has often said, "As a believer, I didn't need a birth message, but I did need a growth message. That being absent, I tended to flounder, and my growth in Christ was stunted. Thus, the high school years were a disaster as far as the things of Christ and spiritual growth were concerned."

As graduation time neared, he took the normal batch of tests to determine which line of work he should pursue. The tests indicated mathematics or mechanics, so he decided to go the route of mathematics and combining it with finance, by starting a career in a savings and loan institution. He started as a file clerk and worked up to an investment statistician that year.

His plans in the investment business were dramatically interrupted when a new evangelist on the scene, Billy Graham, visited Portland in August of 1950. A friend invited him to go to the meeting and, although he had little spiritual appetite at the time, God seemed to press him toward the affirmative. As the poet Francis Thompson has written: "He tracked me down the corridors of time." As it turned out, Earl not only went that night but every night thereafter for six weeks. The only meeting he missed was the women's meeting (they wouldn't let him in!).

After listening to the powerful preaching of Billy Graham for six weeks, at the conclusion of the last service, he found himself standing to his feet, going forward, grabbing Cliff Barrow's hand, and telling him that God had called him to preach. His next question was, "What do I do now?" Cliff said, "You go to college and prepare" and he recommended his alma mater in South Carolina.

Once again, God had a man prepared to help him take the next step. As the tabernacle cleared out, he saw a man he hadn't seen since grade school. In the beautiful providence of God, this man, Jerry Burleson, was going to the same college in South Carolina that Cliff Barrows had recommended, and he was looking for one more rider. Although it was just two weeks before Fall semester, Jerry assured him that they would accept him on probation through his recommendation. He worked nights for

two weeks training another person for his job so that he could leave with the good graces of his employer.

Earl was very honorable when he resigned his position at Equitable Savings before going to Bob Jones University. The man he talked with when he resigned wasn't a believer, but kept emphasizing what Earl had said: "If GOD has called you, then we will work with you to help you train someone else." When Earl spoke at Portland Rotary many years later, after he became President of Western, the same man came up to him after Earl's speech, hugged him vociferously, and told him that he was now a believer.

Earl had the good sense to marry Ruth Mattison, from Pennsylvania, whom he met at Bob Jones. They just celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary as they were married August 28, 1953. They have the following children and grandchildren: Rebecca Radmacher Brown, (married to David Brown) who lives in Richmond, Virginia; Timothy Dwight Radmacher (married to Tammy), who lives in Corbett, Oregon, with grandchildren Bronwyn Marie and Ian Mattison; Jonathan Mark Radmacher (married to Tracie Reiling) with grandchildren, Ruby Coy Radmacher Willis and Violet June Radmacher Willis; Daniel Earl Radmacher (married to Brenda), lives in So. California with grandchildren Drake Wickham and Ivy Katherine.

Twelve years and four degrees later (Bob Jones University, B.A., M.R.E.; Dallas Theological Seminary, Th.M., Th.D.), together with broad opportunities of experience in preaching and teaching, overseas missions and military chaplaincy, local church pastor and parachurch ministries, rural and urban outreaches, Earl ended up not in the pastorate, but in the training of evangelists, pastors, and teachers at Western Seminary. Dr. Radmacher served on the theological faculty at Western Seminary (both in Portland, Oregon and Phoenix, Arizona) for over 35 years and in administrative positions as President and Chancellor. In 1995 he was designated President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus. Dr. Radmacher was Founder and President of Grace Seminary of the Northwest in Salem, Oregon, and now serves as the Chancellor of Rocky Mountain Bible College and Rocky Mountain Seminary in Denver, Colorado. His years in public ministry have involved traveling over ten million miles and

preaching and teaching over twenty thousand hours in over a thousand Bible conferences and thousands of churches.

Dr. Radmacher edited *The Nelson Study Bible NKJV*, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*; *Nelson's Student Bible Commentary*; *Nelson's Compact Series: Compact Bible Commentary*; *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*; and *Can We Trust The Bible? Leading Theologians Speak Out on Biblical Inerrancy*.

He is the author of *What to Expect from the Holy Spirit*, *The Nature of the Church*, and *Salvation*.

He is the co-author of *Celebrating the Word* (Western Seminary), *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus* (with Gary Derickson); *The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation* (with Zane Hodges); and his latest *Ephesians, Life and Love in Christ* (with Dr. Richard S. Beal).

Dr. Radmacher has often stated, "In my wildest dreams sixty-plus years ago, I could never have imagined the exciting plans that God, in His sovereign grace, had for me." Though his health is poor due to heart problems, Dr. Radmacher is still alive, alert, and anticipating Christ's soon return at the time of this writing. His life mission is found in 2 Tim 2:15, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." His personal life verse is 2 Cor 3:18,

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The editors would like to offer this *festschrift* in honor of Dr. Radmacher's life and ministry. Each article was written by someone influenced by his teaching. No doubt, Dr. Radmacher will be surprised both by this *festschrift*, and by the fact that it includes an article of his, written nearly 20 years ago, for an unpublished *festschrift* intended for Zane Hodges. It is one more example of a legacy that will bear fruit in eternity.



# THE WISDOM OF GOD IN ASSEMBLING

EARL D. RADMACHER

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Distinguished Professor of  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

There is nothing more important to God than *relationship*. From all eternity God Himself has perfectly modeled relationship in the very nature of the triunity of His being. When He created mankind, He created us in His image. Moses, reflecting on the events of the sixth day of creation, wrote, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;...’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:26–27). Thus, mankind was to experience relationship and belongingness even as modeled by their Creator.

Their commission to have dominion over the creation was not to be carried out in isolation, but in relation. “God blessed *them*, and God said *to them*, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it’” (v. 28, italics added). This is reinforced by the second account of creation, when the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (2:18). Thus, God took Adam through the educational experience of doing a virtual taxonomy on all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, but “for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him” (2:20). There was the absence of genuine relationship and, consequently, fellowship.

The Lord God became the first surgeon and solved the problem of the absence of needed relationship by using the anesthetic of a very “deep sleep,” taking a portion of Adam’s side and forming

a woman, whom He then brought to him. Ronald Allen catches the excitement of Adam's response to this new relationship: "*This is now* means 'At last *bone of my bones*.' Adam's wording is poetic and exalted—seeing Eve was a shocking and exhilarating experience because the match was perfect."<sup>1</sup> Not only did God create mankind to exist in a relationship providing for the basic human need of belongingness, but He also *modeled* perfect relationship from all eternity and *practiced* it with His creation. The Genesis account of activity in the Garden of Eden makes it clear that the Creator Himself sought close relationship with the first family, "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (3:8). But tragedy struck! The priceless fellowship that Adam and Eve enjoyed with God was severed by sin. Estranged and full of fear, the first couple cowered among the trees—the result of ruptured relationship from their Creator. Yet God in grace found a way to bridge the chasm of estrangement and bring sinners back into fellowship with Him and with one another.<sup>2</sup> The whole of the Bible is *His* story of our *rescue* from eternal estrangement and our deliverance to eternal fellowship that will never be broken.

This mighty deliverance which we call *salvation* has past, present, and especially future dimensions, which are graphically portrayed throughout the Scriptures. It begins with God's striking declaration of righteousness upon those who do nothing more than simply believe in the integrity of His offer of eternal life through the gift of His Son. The man who exemplifies the faith resulting in the imputation of Christ's righteousness is Abraham, the father of God's covenant people in the OT. Paul states:

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? *Abraham believed God and*

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald B. Allen, "Genesis," *Nelson Study Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 9.

<sup>2</sup> In his popular work, *Reality Therapy*, William Glasser stresses that people have two basic needs, namely, the need to love and be loved and the need to feel worthwhile to oneself and to others. He goes on to say that these two basic needs can only be fulfilled with others, preferably many others. See William Glasser, *Reality Therapy: A New Approach to Psychiatry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

*it was accounted to him for righteousness.* Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works (Rom 4:1–6, italics added).

In the previous chapter, Paul spoke regarding the price God paid to provide this salvation, so that sinners would be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His *blood*” (Rom 3:24–25, italics added). In light of this, what could be more crucial to Christians than the careful cultivation of their salvation, which has not only been initially purchased at such a great price but has unimaginable potential for development? “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” Paul admonished the church in Philippi, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12–13).

The Epistle to the Hebrews is unique in that it offers powerful motivation for such cultivation. Jesus had taught the disciples that the return on their investment would be one hundredfold (Matt 19:29). Little wonder that the writer’s first warning is that “we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation” (Heb 2:1–3a). From that point on, the writer not only urges the brethren to develop their present salvation but he also carefully describes the present ministry of our High Priest, who works on our behalf “at the right hand of God” (10:12). Although “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (9:14), “He is also able to save [present tense] to the uttermost those who come [present tense] to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). Thus, the writer reminds “those who will inherit salvation” (1:14) that “to those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear [future tense] a second time, apart from sin, for salvation [future tense]” (9:28b).

I believe it is quite clear that the salvation discussed in this book, therefore, is not justification salvation, which the audience already possesses, but sanctification salvation, which will

have major significance for their glorification salvation. As Christians, we are becoming what we will be in the life to come (glorification salvation) by what we do today (sanctification salvation) with what God has given us (justification salvation). Today is a day of becoming; then is a day of being what we have become. Today is a day of change; then is a day of no change. Moses is listed as one of many who had the right perspective on this: “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, *for he looked to the reward*” (Heb 11:24–26, italics added).

With this understanding in mind, let us approach Heb 10:19–25—the passage which is perhaps the writer’s high point<sup>3</sup> of exhortation for protection against “drift” (2:13) and of encouragement to progress unto maturity (6:1–3) in salvation. The passage is clearly divided between the *privileges* of relationship and fellowship with God (vv 19–21) and the *responsibilities* of relationship and fellowship with God’s family (vv 22–25).

## II. THE PRIVILEGES OF RELATIONSHIP

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God (Heb 10:19–21).

### A. THE CONNECTION OF THE PASSAGE (HEBREWS 10:19–25) TO THE BOOK

The inferential principle, “therefore,” sums up the entire argument of the book to this point and makes direct address to the “brethren”<sup>4</sup> in regard to their privileges and responsibilities

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<sup>3</sup> A. M. Stibbs, “Hebrews,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed., ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 1209, notes, “These verses summarize the positive appeal of the whole Epistle.”

<sup>4</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 318, states that the title *brethren* “is an impressive recognition of the new fellowship established

in Christ. Teachers often tell their students, “When you see the word ‘therefore,’ you must go back and see what it is there for.” This is particularly true here. When one does go back, the tendency is to stop at the beginning of chap 8, which is the crowning affirmation of the doctrinal development. But one must not stop there because the clear connection is seen in the parallel formulation of Heb 4:14–16:

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but was in all *points* tempted as we *are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.<sup>5</sup>

Upon reading this, one is immediately impacted with the fact that our central passage (Heb 10:19–21) is virtually a repeat. The writer could have gone right on from 4:16 to 10:19 without a break in thought. Thus, the natural question is, why is there a five-chapter interruption? In order to get an answer to that question, it is necessary to go back in history almost two thousand years. The recipients of this letter, and their parents, their grandparents, and their great-grandparents as far back as they could think had grown up under a system of laws that said quite the opposite. God had given careful instructions to Moses concerning who could enter the Holiest behind the veil of the tabernacle. Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and only one person, the high priest, and only after commanded washings and sacrifices, entered the Holy of Holies (cf. Heb 9:1–10). Any disobedience to these rules would result in instantaneous death as evidenced in the case of Nadab and Abihu (cf. Lev 10:1–3). One cannot read those chapters without being struck by the repetition of “lest you die.”

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in Christ. By using it the writer appeals to his readers to consider what they have received as Christians.”

<sup>5</sup>“Now *this* is the main point of the things I am saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:12).

The message to the people was, in effect, “Don’t you dare draw near to the Holiest lest you die.” In fact, this message was so emblazoned on their minds that the Jewish tradition tells us that they tied a rope to the foot of the high priest when he went into the Holiest just in case he dropped dead while he was there. Those Jews were thinking, “If he drops dead while he is in there, who will go in to get him?” They could picture a stack of dead bodies at the entrance of the Holiest; thus, they tied a rope to the high priest, so they could pull him out. Now, it is not Scripture. It is only tradition, but it does reveal the sobriety with which they took the prohibition. This may, perhaps, enable one to see why the invitation to the people to “come boldly” was in such striking contrast to their background of fear.

Hebrews 5:1–10:18 provides for the reader a careful doctrinal explanation for the marvelous possibility and privilege of entrance into the holiest by every child of God any time, and as often as we desire, wherever we may be without any further sacrifice. Indeed, “there is no longer an offering for sin” (10:18). And no one has summarized the essence of those five chapters more concisely than John the Baptist in his famous one-line sermon: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) Notice, not “*a* lamb” but “*the* Lamb”; “of God,” not “of man”; “takes away,” not “covers” until the next Yom Kippur; “the sin of the world,” not “the sins of a nation.” Praise be to God for His matchless grace!

## B. THE PRIVILEGES EXPLAINED

The present participle “having” is causal (“because we have”), drawing a conclusion from the whole preceding argument. It has two complementary objects portraying the new *way* of access and the *new person* for access, which make possible the “boldness” for approach. In contrast to the restrictions surrounding the entrance into Israel’s earthly sanctuary, the regenerated and justified persons have received authorization for free right of access “by the blood of Jesus.” It should be noted that the “boldness” is not brazenness but confidence in coming into the Holiest of All—the very source of grace.

### C. THE PRIVILEGE OF A BRAND-NEW WAY

This is a “new” way because Jesus inaugurated it “through the veil.” This imagery goes back to the tabernacle, because it was through the veil that hung before the Most Holy Place that the high priest passed into the very presence of God. No one else dared pass through upon pain of death. How climactic it was, then, when Jesus shouted, “It is finished,” from the cross and God the Father rent the veil from top to bottom, showing His satisfaction with the sacrifice of His Son! The authorization for entrance is “by the blood of Jesus.” The veil that separated those “redeemed by the blood of the Lamb,” therefore, from the presence of God remains rent as a result of the entrance of Jesus.

Notice the emphasis on the personal, human name “Jesus.” Of all the post-exaltation writing, only Hebrews repeatedly focuses upon this designation of our Lord.<sup>6</sup> It is the particular name of his incarnation—the name of humiliation and condescension down from His glory. It was through this name that He identified with those He came to save and bring back into eternal relationship and fellowship with Himself. And the “blood of Jesus” is a graphic expression of His sacrifice, which opened the “new and living way” into the Holiest (9:12, 14; 10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:12, 20).

### D. THE PRIVILEGE OF A UNIQUE HIGH PRIEST

Again, the writer reminds us that the privilege of access is not only “new” but also “living.” What a revelation this was to those who remembered thousands of dead animals offered on Jewish altars. But Jesus, our Sacrifice, is alive to die no more. He “always lives” (7:25) to make intercession for us. It is this “living” characteristic of the “way” that leads us to consider the second facet of our privilege. We *have* a great High Priest (4:14, 15; 10:21) “who has passed through the heavens” and is “over the house of God.” He has ascended from the “lowly Jesus,” if you please, to the One who is in charge of the whole house of God. In the old covenant “there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood” (7:23–24). Our Redeemer, who purchased us on the cross of Calvary, is the

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<sup>6</sup> See Heb 2:9; 4:14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:9; 12:2.

same One who has ascended to be our Intercessor. He knows us from beginning to end. Surely, He is “the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2).

One of the first things that our ascended, exalted Lord did as “Captain” (Heb 2:10) of our salvation was to create a new community of faith, metaphorically designated as the Body of Christ. The Apostle Paul explained, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by [Greek, *en*] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12–13). The members of this new redemptive community are so closely related to one another that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (12:26). This is possible because the Head of the body placed all the members in the care and safekeeping of the Spirit (12:13) so that within the community of believers “there should be no schism...but *that* the members should have the same care for one another” (12:25).

Paul also explained that our ascended Lord provided us with all the necessary tools for maintaining unity in the community: “When he ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men” (Eph 4:8). No one is left out. Every member has divine placement in the body, for “God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased” (1 Cor 12:26). And every member is uniquely gifted to serve others as the Apostle Peter taught: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 4:10).

Not only do we have divine placement in the body, and divine gifts to serve one another, but we have divinely-appointed ministers for the *purpose* of “equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [Greek, *teleion*] man, to the measure of the stature of Christ” (Eph 4:12–13). This *purpose* is being directed by the ascended Head “from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective



working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:16).

All of these privileges of relationship with one another and with our High Priest, the Captain of our salvation, are the resources that we bring as we use our privilege of free access right into the Holiest. Thus, he who has saved us from the penalty of sin is able to keep on saving us to completion from its power as we keep on coming to Him. These matchless privileges made available to every believer, then, cry out for implementation; thus, the dependent clause of vv. 19–21 is quickly followed up with three exhortations in the present tense, giving the believer-priests a proper *response* for developing needed relationships in the Body of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:22–25, italics added).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Lynn Allan Losie, vol. 47b, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 285, states, "In the rhetorical structure of 10:19–25, the parallel assertions in vv. 19–21 furnish the basis for three significant cohortatives in the present tense, which follow in vv. 22, 23, and 24 respectively."

<sup>8</sup> One cannot help noting the famous Pauline trilogy of faith, hope, and love in this passage. The same triad appears in Heb 6:10–12, in reverse order.

### III. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF RELATIONSHIP

Christians need to seize this opportunity of access to God. Westcott states, "These privileges of Christians are to be used. They must personally exercise their right of access to God."<sup>9</sup> As marvelous as these privileges are, they are of very little practical value if we do not use them. Of all the privileges that Christians have, which one is the very last that we would surrender? The obvious answer for a Christian must be "my contact with God." Someone has said, "The tallest person on earth is the one who can reach heaven on his knees." Yet, how often do we succumb to the bad habit of treating precious privileges tritely? This is especially true for those of us who live in the American economy, where we have so much. Our path to the throne of grace tends to get neglected and covered with the weeds of our culture.

My wife helped me with this problem years ago, in college, when we were courting. I was a student government officer who had the important duty of carrying the notes between the dormitories of the men and women. (Only a student at that college could fully appreciate the significance of that duty.) Because of the nature of my job, I had first access to the notes; thus, I could readily find my girlfriend's note, which was always very thick and scented with a particular perfume—"My Sin." One particular night, however, I could not find it, so I moved under a street-light and began to dig through the notes. Sure enough, there it was! But the envelope was very thin and there was no scent at all. Nervously, I opened the envelope. There was just one sheet with only two sentences, beginning simply "Dear Earl." Not the normal "Dearest" or "My Darling" or "My Sweetheart" or something else that I could feast on while floating back to the men's dorm. The two sentences read, "I am tired of being taken for granted. I cannot handle continuing this way." Signed, "Ruth."

What was the problem that Ruth had? Well, everywhere I went in keeping with my responsibilities, I just expected Ruth to follow along. Finally, she got tired of being a tag-along. In the words of the play *My Fair Lady*, I had "grown accustomed to her face." And she did not like that. Thus, I began to warm up paths that had long since grown cold and to woo her and win her all

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<sup>9</sup> Westcott, *Hebrews*, 321.

over again. In the process, I learned a good lesson: *do not treat precious privileges tritely, lest you lose them*. Now, I have never received a letter from God saying, “I am tired of being taken for granted. You have had it.” Signed, “God.” God would have far more reason to send it to me than Ruth ever did, but He cannot. Why?

There are some things that God cannot do. One is that He cannot lie. Not only *must* He be faithful to His promises, He *delights* in fulfilling His promises to us. But should His faithfulness to us cause us to be less faithful or more faithful? Surely, every believer would respond, “more faithful,” from his heart. That being true, we should be asking, “What would be a more faithful use of the privileges God has provided?” The answer to this is given in the following exhortations, which provide three spiritual exercises for believer-priests.

Such outstanding privileges as introduced in Heb 4:14–16 and repeated in 10:19–21 cry out for implementation; thus, our God explains a faithful use of the privileges in three exhortations (10:22–25). Each exhortation has a different verb in the present tense that seems to indicate a separate thought, which we will follow. There is a logical relation between them, however, which may be likened to a series of spiritual exercises: the upward exercise, the forward exercise, and the outward exercise. The first two are between believers (individually and corporately—“let us”) and God, whereas the last reaches out to the community of God.

#### IV. THE UPWARD EXERCISE OF FAITH IN THE PERSON OF GOD

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). Notice that faith, not love, is an absolutely basic beginning point.<sup>10</sup> Faith is the foundation; love is the capstone. All of our actions come out of the thoughts of our heart. In the Bible, the heart is considered the seat of reflection (deepest thoughts), whereas the viscera are the seat of affection (emotions). Jesus plainly taught that “those

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 11 and particularly 11:6: “He who comes to God must believe that He is.”

things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart” (Matt 15:18). Those who responded to the message of Peter “were cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37). And Lydia responded to the message of Paul when God “opened her heart” (Acts 16:14). It is the “pure in heart” who see God (Matt 5:8).

Right actions are the result of right thinking, and right thinking finds its source in right thinking about the person, words, and works of our God. When God says, “Draw near,” He is saying, “Get to know Me.” We cannot trust a person any more than we know him and we cannot trust God any more than we know Him. When we have right thinking about God, we have proper object for faith. Our faith will only be as good as its object. It may be safely said that if we never had a wrong thought about God, we would never sin. As we “draw near to God,” it needs to be with a “sincere heart” and we will experience “full assurance of faith.” David said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psa 66:18). And Isaiah warned Israel, “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood” (Isa 1:15).

This relationship is based upon the “sprinkling of the hearts” and “bodies washed.” The former speaks of the effect of the blood of Jesus on our innermost being when we were born into the family of God (see Rom 3:24–25). The latter is surely the outward sign of baptism evidencing our obedient response to that inward reality (see Matt 28:19–20; Acts 2:38, 41). As believers obey the commandments of Christ, they experience deeper and deeper intimacy with God. Jesus taught, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). The hymn “Trust and Obey” has captured this two-fold basis for *experiencing* the love and presence of God: “Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.”<sup>11</sup>

This first and most basic spiritual exercise, then, is the believer’s upward response to the invitation of God our Father to enter into the Holiest—to come boldly into His awesome presence where Jesus has preceded us to make the introduction. “Come into My presence and get to know Me,” says the Father,

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<sup>11</sup> J. H. Sammis, “Trust and Obey” (1886).

“because the more you know Me, the more you will be able to trust Me.” This needs to happen both individually and corporately. It is instructive to note the corporate activity of the first church: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Each of these activities is preceded by a definite article evidencing that they were corporate activities of the church—the community of believers.

## V. THE FORWARD EXERCISE OF HOPE IN THE PROMISES OF GOD

“Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). The upward exercise of growing *faith* in the *Person* of God (knowing that “He who promised is faithful”) prepares the believer for greater *hope* in the *promises* of God. I will only be able to trust the promises of God to the extent that I know experientially the person of God. Our knowledge that “it is impossible for God to lie” provides “strong consolation” for those “who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us” (6:18). Commenting on the word “faithful,” Lane assures, “The writer here succinctly recapitulates the emphasis of the utter reliability of God as set forth in 6:17–18; the promise is absolutely certain because ‘it is impossible for God to lie’ (6:18). He will keep faith with the community. The factor of uncertainty lies exclusively with the community, in their tendency to waver in their commitment...”<sup>12</sup>

This motivational force of the eschatological hope set before us brings to mind the pattern life of Jesus, who “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). Christ did not look forward to the cross. He “despised the shame” and “endured the cross” because His focus was on the crown. In like fashion, He motivated the churches of Revelation: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (3:21).

It is this kind of hope that enables believers to “rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Matt 5:12) in the midst of persecution. Hebrews 11, presenting the Hall of Fame of Faith, gives the

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<sup>12</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, 289.

following topic sentence: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11:1). Faith treats things hoped for as reality. Hope for the unseen “reward” of reigning with Christ at His return caused Moses to refuse “to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasure of sin” (11:24–25). The unseen “weight of glory” caused the apostle Paul to endure the deprivation, persecution, and suffering listed in 2 Cor 11:16–30. His secret is given earlier:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal (2 Cor 4:16–18).

It was this passage that caused C. S. Lewis to name his book on future reward *Weight of Glory*. As a matter of fact, this is the most frequently mentioned motivation for endurance by Jesus and the apostles in the NT. This pattern—faith and hope—is brought together in Heb 11:6: “But without faith *it is* impossible to please Him. For he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Today, multitudes continue to be added to the ranks of faithful soldiers who will one day reign with the Lord Jesus Christ in His coming magnificent messianic reign (see Rev 19:6–8). Indeed, “To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb 9:28).

## VI. THE OUTWARD ATTITUDE OF LOVE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:24–25). With this exhortation we come to the outward exercise of *love*

for the *people* of God which is the capstone of all that has come before.

Love for the brethren is the finished product of all our exercise. In summary, then, as we continue to draw near to God, the object of our faith will expand. And as our faith in the character of God expands, we will experience greater hope and confidence in the promises of God. And as hope fills our being, we will have multiplied opportunities to encourage the people of God. The upward exercise of faith in the *person* of God leads to the forward exercise of hope in the *promises* of God, which opens the opportunity of the outward exercise of love for the *people* of God.

This third exhortation moves from the vertical to the horizontal exercise in Christian living within the community. Because this is the result—the culmination toward which the other exhortations have been moving, let us look at each word carefully. First, there is a necessary survey to be conducted. The verb “consider” is in the present tense and may be rendered “let us keep on caring for one another.” It is to be a continual activity within the assembly. Furthermore, it is a strong verb and carries the idea of “pay attention to” or “have an intelligent insight into” one another. The “one another” admonitions are very common in the New Testament because God does not develop His people in isolation from each other but in relation to each other. Although the actual word is only used here in Hebrews, the concept is seen throughout the Epistle. Ellingworth notes that “Hebrews emphasizes almost exclusively the responsibilities of Christians for one another, within the believing community (6:10; 10:25; 12:15ff.).”<sup>13</sup>

One hundred and fifty years ago Westcott spoke pointedly of this: “The well-being of each believer is bound up with the well-being of the whole body. He is therefore constrained to give careful heed to others in the hope that he may rouse them to nobler action; and again that he may himself draw encouragement and inspiration from noble examples.”<sup>14</sup> Eighteen hundred years before Westcott, this was exactly the truth given by Paul to the church at Corinth that we have noted previously. “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 526.

<sup>14</sup> Westcott, *Hebrews*, 324.

is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor 12:26). This truth was particularly crucial to the recipients of Hebrews, who in AD 67 faced the darkening war clouds that would lead to the decimation and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans. But it is also important for us to live in a time of depersonalization, privatization, and loneliness that all contribute to isolation rather than relation—a basic need that God our Creator built into us.

In his best seller, *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah, Professor of Sociology at the University of California in Berkeley, claimed that the greatest disease in America today is individualism. In other words, our society is moving in direct opposition to the way our Creator made us to function. *We move in that direction to our detriment.*

In 1980, Professor Ted Peters, Pacific Lutheran Seminary, writing in *The Futurist* magazine predicted,

There is now a strong trend—which I believe will continue—toward treating the moral and spiritual dimensions of life as commodities to be acquired and disposed of according to the tastes and whims of shoppers in the religious marketplace.<sup>15</sup>

He continued that we were moving into the future

with loyalty to a concept of the human being as an autonomous and independent self, responsible for creating its own values and priorities, subject to no external authority, and charged only with the task of freely fulfilling its own self-defined potential for living.<sup>16</sup>

In summarizing his projection he stated:

Members of the viewing public will soon be able to sit at home and watch the religion of their choice; and, in addition, by pushing buttons on a handheld console, they will be able to order a book being recommended or make a financial pledge. It will be religion without geographical proximity, without eye-to-eye contact, without

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted by William J. Petersen, "The Future of Religion—A Consumer Product, Packaged and Purchased," *Evangelical Newsletter* 7, no. 23 (1980).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



personal commitment, without fellowship. It will be religion totally at the consumer's disposal.<sup>17</sup>

Not only have Professor Peters's predictions materialized, they have advanced to the danger stage in the church. Thus, we must return to the essence of this exhortation.

The stated purpose of this ongoing insightful care for one another is "in order to stir up [*eis paroxysmon*] love and good works" (Heb 10:24). None of the modern translations get to the heart of the word *paroxysmos* as well as the verb "provoke" of the King James Version. Yet, this seems to have a startling sound and, understandably so, because we so often use it in a negative sense with intense emotion and often anger. In fact, the only other occurrence of it in the NT refers to the sharp contention that arose between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. It was so intense that they "split asunder" (KJV), never to minister together again (Acts 15:39). Thus, the word transliterated as *paroxysm* in English carries synonyms such as "exasperate," "irritate," and "provoke." In the medical world it is used of a convulsion.

That Hebrews uses this word in a good sense makes it even more striking. Our careful and insightful consideration of one another is to produce a paroxysm, if you please, of "love and good works." How can this be? It is because of the previous vertical exercises of faith in the person of God and hope in the promises of God (both can be done alone), so that we can be effective in the horizontal exercise of love (which can only be done with others) for the people of God. With one hand securely gripping the Holiest, I can reach out with the other hand and create a connection with the unlimited resources of Almighty God resulting in "love and good works."<sup>18</sup> At this point we need to remember what Jesus said about good works: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). When we obey the Lord's commandment to "love one another" (John 13:34–35) we can be confident that the good works will be forthcoming. That

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 527, observes that "love and good works" is a virtual hendiadys, since "the good works are the direct expression of the love."

is strategic because it is the greatest apologetic for Jesus Christ to the world (John 13:35).

“This will never happen, however,” says F. F. Bruce, “...if they keep one another at a distance. Therefore, every opportunity of coming together and enjoying their fellowship in faith and hope must be welcomed and used for mutual encouragement.” In keeping with this wisdom, v 25 brings us to the climax of the passage by revealing the occasion *where* and *how* this attention to one another is likely to be stimulated. The writer makes his point both negatively and positively with two explanatory participles<sup>19</sup>—“by not *forsaking* the assembly, as the habit of some is, but by *encouraging* one another.” The word translated “assembling” (Greek, *episynagōgēs*) is a noun that refers to the physical meeting of the local church. The word occurs only twice in the NT and the other occurrence refers to our “gathering together” unto Christ at His coming again—a gathering of the church universal where no Christian will be missing (2 Thess 2:1).

Unfortunately, attendance was not a top priority for some of the Hebrew Christians (“as *is* the manner of some”). The fact that their failure to take an active part in the meetings had become a “habit” or “custom” (*ethos*) seems to correlate with the indifference and apathy noted throughout the Epistle (Heb 2:1–3; 3:7–15; 4:1; 5:11–14; etc.). In any event, the writer charges them with “forsaking” the assembly, which translates a word taken right out of the military world of his day. It meant “deserting, leaving in the lurch, leaving alone on the field of contest.” It was what we mean by AWOL. In our day, when there is a growing absenteeism from the meeting, someone might question, “Without leave from whom? Is someone taking attendance?” Yes, and the answer is “God”! God is keenly interested in fidelity to His commands, for they are always grounded in wisdom and are for the good of His church.

On one occasion, Dwight L. Moody was preaching on the laxity in church attendance and a man in the congregation was becoming more and more agitated. At the end of the service,

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<sup>19</sup> Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 105, states, “The construction is a participial one, carrying on the thought of the previous verse, not giving up ‘meeting together.’”

he made a beeline up to the front. “Mr. Moody, I have a bone to pick with you. My Bible says, ‘If your ox falls in the ditch on the Sabbath, you ought to pull it out.’” Moody responded, “Sir, I would like to shake your hand and congratulate you. You have memorized that verse. May I make a suggestion to you? If I had an ox that fell in the same ditch every Sabbath I would either fill the ditch or shoot the ox!” It may be a good idea for many Christians today to shoot some oxen and fill some ditches, so to speak. We need to *stop treating precious privileges tritely* and develop a lifestyle with eternity’s values in view. We need to stop putting things of lesser, transient value ahead of those with great eternal value. And that will happen more and more as our arsenal of hope is filled with the promises of God.

The positive statement about the importance of the congregational meeting concludes the passage: “But exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” The meeting of the community of believers in worship and the preaching of the Word provides the ideal setting for mutual encouragement and admonition. A parallel passage is given in an earlier warning: “Exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). The words “encourage” and “exhort” both translate the word *parakaleō*, which means “to call alongside to help.” The noun form (*paraklētos*) is one of the names of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, Helper or Comforter) and of Christ (1 John 2:1, Advocate). What a beautiful ministry God has allowed every believer to carry out as an extension of the work of God our Paraclete.

On occasion, when preaching on the importance of this ministry, I have dared to sing to the congregation the following chorus:

The more we get together, together, together,  
The more we get together, the happier we’ll be.  
For your friends are my friends and my friends  
are your friends.  
The more we get together, the happier we’ll be.<sup>20</sup>

I no more than get started when smiles come on faces all over the audience. I usually stop in the middle and ask how many people know that song. Almost all the people raise their

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<sup>20</sup> Tom Gardner, “The More We Get Together.”

hands. I then turn to the pastor and say, “Pastor, you have a serious problem. That song was a drinking song. But it has been baptized into Christianity, so it is kosher now.” I never think of that chorus, however, without being reminded of a friend of mine—now with the Lord—who was a circuit judge in Portland, Oregon. He came to Christ as an adult, having been delivered from addiction to alcohol. On one occasion, while sharing the blessings of his life in Christ, he stopped to say,

However, I miss the fellowship of the bar. I could go there about any time, and there was always someone willing to listen to my problems. Furthermore, they didn’t go down to the next tavern and share my secrets. Unfortunately, I have not found it that way in my church.

What a sad story, but too often too true.

## VII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON FAITHFULNESS AND NARCISSISM

I would like to conclude this study with a story of how God combed the kinks out of my thinking thirty years ago with respect to my accountability to my local community of believers. During the many years that I served on the faculty of Western Seminary, I preached in local churches or conferences every weekend. Consequently, the only opportunity to attend my own fellowship with my family was for the midweek prayer and Bible study. On a typical Wednesday night, all six of us got in the car and Rebecca (our oldest) said, “Daddy, let’s sing.” I said, “OK, Becky. You start.” We all joined in and sang. We still had time to do it once more before we got to our church meeting. Singing does something for me, and I really felt lifted up. I bounded up the stairs into the auditorium and got ready for a good study in the Word. Unfortunately, I received nothing but disappointment. Our pastor was not there and we had a visiting speaker. The second piece of bad news was that the visiting speaker was a weak speaker. The third disappointment was that he chose to preach on a passage of Scripture that nobody would have chosen if he only had one time to speak because it was a tough passage. The final blow was that he murdered it. Frankly, I was irritated. And I was taking him apart. No, not on the outside. On

the outside I had a good smile like any good hypocrite, but on the inside I was devouring him. I could hardly wait for him to finish. After what seemed like an eternity, I heard those blessed words—"In Jesus' name, Amen!" I wheeled around in the pew to go out, reached my hand back to grab Ruth's hand. It wasn't there. That irritated me, too. When I turned around to see what had happened to her, I got God's discipline lesson.

Ruth had turned to Mrs. Findley, the 86-year-old lady next to her, and was engaged in a conversation. I still had presence of mind not to butt in, so I listened (impatiently) and heard Ruth's words of encouragement to her. After citing several instances of Mrs. Findley's faithfulness to our church, she came to the crowning one. About six weeks before, we had an ice storm in Portland and most people didn't come to the Wednesday night prayer meeting and Bible study. The couple that normally picked up Mrs. Findley didn't come for her that night. Apparently they didn't consider it safe to go out on the ice, at least not to church. But Mrs. Findley felt it was so important to be there that she walked six blocks on the ice. Ruth had an intensive insight into her and gave the following words: "We have often wanted to thank you for your faithfulness to the Lord and His people in this church." By this time, Mrs. Findley was overcome with emotion. She grabbed Ruth's hand and began to squeeze it. The tears were running down the wrinkles in Mrs. Findley's little old face as she explained, "I have been complaining to the Lord all week long: 'I am just a useless old woman who doesn't do anybody any good. And I have to be carted here and there. Oh, don't misunderstand! There was a time when I did well. I have played the piano and the organ for the services. I have sung in the choir and led the choir. I have taught Sunday school and been department superintendent. I have led the women's missionary society. There is hardly anything in this church that I haven't done except preach from the pulpit, but I am not doing anything now. I am just a useless old woman. Why, Lord, don't you take me home? You have taken my mother and father home. You have taken my husband home and my only sister. Now you have begun taking my own children home, and you haven't taken me home yet.' But tonight, Ruthie, the Lord has used you to answer my prayer. I know now why He wants me to stay here. He wants me to stay here to pray for you."

Oh, my! Did the Lord ever zap me! I shrunk way down. You see, I was really sick with a disease that has become epidemic in America. Technically, it is called “narcissism,” which is translated “self-love.” The first question it asks is not, “What can I give?” but rather, “What do I get?” And that was I that evening. I was there, first and foremost, to get something. And when there was nothing to get, I was angry. Now, don’t misunderstand me! That preacher should have had something to give faithfully from the Word. Paul said, “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:1–2). He then goes on to speak of our future accountability at the Judgment Seat of Christ to determine our eternal reward.

My wife was at that same service and she did not get any more out of the message than I did. But she had a different mindset. She realized she was there by divine appointment (cf. Heb 10:23) and, if there was nothing to get, there was something she could give; thus, she had an intelligent insight into the lady right next to her (cf. Heb 10:24) and said the thing that needed to be said to lift her up to the higher ground in Christ (Heb 10:25). How do I know that was the result? They took Mrs. Findley back to the Baptist retirement home that night. The next morning they got an old pump organ out of the closet and dusted it off. She got her spindly, arthritic fingers going again and she played that organ for a group of old people to sing together for nobody’s good but theirs and God’s. They bought her a large Bible with giant print that she read to a blind lady in the home. And every day, for eight years, she prayed for my ministry. Think about it! Defeated and praying to die at eighty-six. She died gloriously at ninety-four.

Mrs. Findley received eight wonderful years because one woman was where she belonged, on assignment from God, asking not what she could get but what she could give, because of her connection with the infinite sources of God. Not only did this incident change Mrs. Findley’s life, but it also changed my life with respect to our church. It changed my family. We began to realize that it is our privilege to be an active part of the local fellowship of believers. The question to ask is not, Do we have to go to church? but, Do we get to go to church? And how often

should we go? The text is clear: “and so much more as you see the Day approaching” (10:25). This is the wisdom of God in action. It is God’s sovereignly appointed fellowship for doing His work together on earth as we look forward to sharing His reign in the coming kingdom. Thus, the same writer who began by warning that “we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away” (2:1), gave a subsequent warning (10:26-27) illustrating the dangers of drifting away and sinning willfully. May we who know the Lord Jesus continue to develop our salvation so that we will be eagerly waiting for Him, having provoked many others to love and good works.





# **PRAY THAT GOD’S WORD MAY RUN AND BE GLORIFIED: 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-2**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

**A**s he often did, Paul asked for prayer for his ministry of the Word of God:

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith (2 Thess 3:1-2).

Paul speaks of the Word of the Lord as though it were a living, breathing Person. In a sense it is, for this is the Word of the Living Risen Lord. It is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12).

Paul wants the Word of the Lord to run and to be glorified. Imagine God’s Word running. It is charging into and changing people’s lives.

When the Word of God is glorified, God is glorified, for it is His Word. This article will explore how it is that the Word of God can run swiftly.

## II. THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN PREACHING AND TEACHING

Teaching the Bible is work. As 2 Thess 3:1-2 shows, the effectiveness of this work not only depends on the preparation of the speaker and the audience, but it also ultimately hinges on the blessing of God.

Proclaiming God's Word is much more than simply being a charismatic speaker. There are spiritual components of preaching and teaching. And one of those components is prayer.<sup>1</sup> Any preacher, young or old, would be wise to do what Paul does here, elicit prayer support.

The idea here is that God's Word might run *swiftly* (supplied by the NKJV). J. Hampton Keathley, III writes concerning this:

This is the present continuous tense of the Greek word *trechē*, which means literally, "run" but it is used figuratively of "proceeding quickly without hindrance." This is, then, a prayer that God's message will continue to progress swiftly and without hindrance to and within the hearts of men and women as it had done so powerfully among the Thessalonians (see 1 Thes. 1 and 2:13). Note first that the focus here is on the message rather than the messenger for in the final analysis it is the message that transforms people. Again, we get a glimpse of Paul's confidence. It is in God and His precious Word. Second, the very nature of such a request calls to mind the fact that Satan and this world is always at work to throw up hindrances or barriers against the message. If the message is to run swiftly, it must have the

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<sup>1</sup>One example of the importance of prayer in preaching, is that of Dr. Earl Radmacher, who traveled and proclaimed God's Word nearly every weekend for over thirty years. His ministry was bathed in prayer. People back at Western Baptist Theological Seminary were praying for his speaking. People at his home church in Portland were praying. His wife, Ruth, and his children prayed for the Word to run and be glorified. Students that Dr. Radmacher had influenced regularly prayed for him. And he prayed for his own ministry of the Word as well.

sovereign work of God make clear the way (cf. 1 Thes. 2:18 with 3:11-13).<sup>2</sup>

Morris says, “Paul sees ‘the word’ as active and vigorous, moving swiftly to accomplish God’s purpose.”<sup>3</sup> He adds that “the imagery goes back to Psalm 147:15” (“He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly”) and that “the Greek games may also be in mind, for Paul often uses illustrations from these athletic contests.”<sup>4</sup> And he suggests a distinction between running and being glorified: “‘May run’ refers to what the word does in itself, while *be honored* (or ‘glorified’) is concerned rather with its effect on people.”<sup>5</sup>

Hiebert agrees with Morris regarding the allusion to the Greek games (“a metaphor drawn from the race track”)<sup>6</sup> and Ps 147:15, though calling this “an unconscious quotation.”<sup>7</sup> He says that

“Run” and “be glorified” seem to picture it [the Word] almost as an independent force sweeping victoriously through the land. Both verbs are in the present tense; they are not to ask for a single striking triumph but its continual progress...<sup>8</sup>

### III. THE NECESSITY OF DELIVERANCE FROM WICKED MEN WHO OPPOSE GOD’S WORD

For God’s Word to go forth effectively, the preachers and teachers must be able to speak it. In Paul’s case he needed to be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Hampton Keathley, III, “Final Confidences in God’s Grace Expressed (2 Thess 3:1-5).” See: <https://bible.org/seriespage/final-confidences-god%E2%80%99s-grace-expressed-2-thes-31-5>. Last accessed October 5, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Revised Edition, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956, 1984), 140.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971), 331.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Paul on many occasions was imprisoned by such men. At those times he was not free to preach outside the prisons. He preached, but within the prison.

The last word in the Greek in v 2 is *faith* (*pistis*). The first word in Greek in v 3 is *faithful* (*pistos*).

Not all have faith. That is, Paul needed deliverance from unbelievers.

This reminds him that God is always faithful. He was faithful to Paul and to the believers in Thessalonica as well.

Keathley says concerning this second request:

This request is certainly more personal, but it is still related to the first request for the speedy and unhindered progress of the Word for they were messengers of the message. The Word of God is not bound or imprisoned (2 Ti. 2:9) and Satan is impotent against the Word when it is accurately proclaimed. He may deny it, attack it, try to add to it or subtract from it, but his primary attacks must come against those who proclaim it (see 1 Thes. 2:18). He will seek to use those under his influence and who do not have faith to imprison, kill, distract, detain, or in some way through temptation and deception to negate the testimony of the messenger. This had happened in Philippi and in Thessalonica (cf. 1 Thes 2:1; Acts 16:22f). There was undoubtedly the element of self-preservation in this request, but the primary aim is for the purpose of spreading the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

Hiebert points out that this second request, unlike the first, is very personal, “but his motive is not personal ease but the continued proclamation of the gospel. Such deliverance was needed for his effectiveness in diffusing the good news.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, “The request also served to remind the readers that the writers too were facing hardship because of their loyalty to the gospel.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Keathley, “Final Confidences.”

<sup>10</sup> Hiebert, 331.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## IV. OTHER WAYS THAT GOD'S WORD RUNS

Paul does not mention other ways *in this passage* in which God's Word runs and is glorified. However, elsewhere the Apostle states some other ways in which God's Word runs.

### A. PREACHERS NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO THEIR LIVES AND TO APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE (1 TIMOTHY 4:16)

The closing verse of 1 Timothy 4 has long puzzled people because it seems to contradict justification/regeneration by faith alone:

*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine [didaskalia<sup>12</sup>]. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you (emphasis added).*

The confusion evaporates when we avoid the knee-jerk reaction of thinking that Paul is speaking of salvation from eternal condemnation. First Timothy deals with false teachers who were disturbing the church in Ephesus which Timothy was guiding as the Apostle Paul's representative (cf. 1 Tim 1:5-7; 2 Tim 2:2).

Timothy needed to "take heed" of himself, that is, his own walk with Christ, and of the doctrine passed down to him from Paul. By so doing he would save himself and the believers in Ephesus from the false teachers and their accursed beliefs and practices. While neither Timothy nor the believers in Ephesus could lose everlasting life, they could fall under God's curse in this life. That would be avoided if Timothy was careful that his conduct and his doctrine were in accord with apostolic teaching.

Ellicott says,

Timothy was to keep his attention *fixed* both *upon* himself and his teaching; his teaching was to be good (4:6) and salutary (1:10), and he

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<sup>12</sup> This word is most often translated as *doctrine*. About 10% of the time it is translated as *teaching or learning*. Of its 21 NT uses, 15 occur in the pastoral epistles. See also 1 Tim 4:6, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine [*kalēs didaskalias*] which you have carefully followed."

himself was to practically exemplify it both in word and deed (verse 12).<sup>13</sup>

Guthrie sees in Paul's combining of these two elements this principle: "Moral and spiritual rectitude is an indispensable preliminary to doctrinal orthodoxy" in one's preaching.<sup>14</sup>

Sadly many churches today have moved away from a concern about doctrine. Indeed, for many churches doctrine is considered a bad thing. Doctrine divides, they will say. Of course, it is impossible for a church to exist without any doctrine. Whatever is taught is doctrine. But churches can avoid proclaiming key Apostolic doctrines like justification by faith alone, apart from works, eternal security (once saved, always saved), the Rapture, inerrancy, and other doctrines that are viewed as divisive.

In response to this lack of concern for doctrine today, some churches have started calling themselves *doctrinal churches* in order to distinguish them from churches that preach stories, not Scripture.

Even the lifestyle of the pastor is not of major concern in many churches. The pastor is viewed as a motivator, fundraiser, and CEO, but not as a model for the flock. In bigger churches people often have little contact with the pastor and know little about him.

Yet the life the preacher lives directly impacts the power of his message. God's Word only runs swiftly if the preacher is walking in fellowship with God.

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<sup>13</sup> Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Reprint edition (Minneapolis, MN: The James Family Christian Publishers, 1861, 1978), 80. It should be noted, however, that Ellicott understands the salvation in view to be salvation from eternal condemnation and to be dependent on Timothy's faithful lifestyle and ministry (p. 81).

<sup>14</sup> Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Revised Edition, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957, 1990), 111. He too holds that the eternal destiny of Timothy and his listeners was at stake (p. 111).

**B. PREACHERS SHOULD URGE THEIR LISTENERS  
TO RECEIVE THE WORD WITH READINESS (ACTS  
17:11; ACTS 14:46; SEE ALSO JOHN 5:39-40)**

Luke, Paul's traveling companion and coworker, reported on their ministry in Thessalonica and then Berea in Acts 17. In vv 10-12 Luke says,

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away [from Thessalonica] by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

These Jewish unbelievers "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." What things? The things spoken by the Apostle Paul! Certainly if that was important when listening to an Apostle, it is even more important today when listening to pastors and teachers.

Bruce points out, "Their procedure, 'examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so' (RSV), is worthy of imitation by all who have some new form of religious teaching pressed upon their acceptance."<sup>15</sup>

Luke reports this to show the importance of the listener's attitude to the Word. If the listener has the right attitude, then the Word will run and be glorified.

Earlier in Acts, Luke quotes Paul as saying to hard-hearted Jews in Pisidian Antioch, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Those Jews were the opposite of those in Berea.

The Lord Jesus received the same response to His preaching by most of those who heard Him. In John 5:39-40 He said,

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<sup>15</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 347.

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

Willing listeners are ones who have receptive hearts, ones who receive the Word with gladness and who search the Scriptures to see if what is said is true. Unwilling listeners only want to hear what their tradition has already told them. Anything inconsistent with the tradition is given no hearing whatsoever.

Carson says concerning John 5:39-40,

Jesus himself acknowledges, *You diligently study the Scriptures...* Jesus insists that there is nothing intrinsically life-giving about studying the Scriptures, if one fails to discern their true content and purpose.<sup>16</sup>

Preachers should be urging their listeners to receive the Word with a readiness to believe and to do what God says. The Word of God cannot run swiftly if the listeners are stiff-necked.

### **C. PREACHERS NEED TO PREPARE THEMSELVES (2 TIMOTHY 2:15)**

We find no instruction in the NT about how to prepare sermons or lessons. Indeed, we are not even commanded directly to prepare messages. That can only be inferred.

In 2 Tim 2:15, the great AWANA verse, Paul said, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” He then continued, “But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.”

To rightly divide the Word of truth requires diligence. It is not something which simply happens.

In a chapel message on 2 Tim 2:15, given at Dallas Theological Seminary on March 11, 1997, Dan Wallace said, “For us to grasp the *full* intent of Paul’s message, that sacred deposit...

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<sup>16</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 263.



*requires—absolutely requires—diligent study.*”<sup>17</sup> He then added this warning:

But there’s an unhealthy component here, too. For a variety of reasons—overreaction to the Dallas Seminary of yesterday, the influence of postmodernism, whatever—the Scriptures are increasingly becoming marginalized in our thinking. It’s as if we have decided that exegesis must be a *bad* thing because we know too many good exegetes who are spiritual casualties. But the antidote is *not* to take back our minds and give God *only* our hearts!

We know God through his Word. If we marginalize the Word, we marginalize God. And this is the second way in which we may fail Paul’s command here, for he says, “Present yourself approved *to God*.” Friends, the single most disturbing thing I see on this campus today is *rampant* anthropocentrism [centering our thinking on ourselves, rather than on God]...

Quite frankly, the Church today is filled with workmen who have every reason to be ashamed. They have not grappled with the meaning of the text and hence they have not grappled with God’s revealed will. They come to the Bible with their own prejudices and never adjust their life because they never see the truth.<sup>18</sup>

The reason the Apostles chose deacons to serve the needs of widows in the early church was so that they might give themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). This implies that even the apostles prepared messages which they preached.

I learned in seminary to manuscript my sermons and lessons. Over thirty years have passed and I still write out my sermons word for word. I could speak fluently and fairly effectively, I believe, without taking that time. But if I did so, I do not believe I would be as effective as when I take more time in preparation.

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://bible.org/article/crisis-word-or-message-pastors-and-would-be-pastors-2-timothy-215>. Last accessed October 5, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

### D. PREACHERS NEED TO SEEK TO PLEASE GOD, NOT MEN (GALATIANS 1:10)

A great danger that preachers face is losing sight on who it is they are to please. When I was on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ I remember hearing famed pastor Ron Dunn give a message entitled, "God Is My Audience."<sup>19</sup> He said that whenever he spoke, he envisioned God as listening to every word he said. He made it his aim to please God, not the audience listening to him. Dunn pointed out that there is a subtle danger of saying things that the audience wants to hear. Sometimes those things are not Biblically accurate. Other times they may not be Biblically inaccurate, but they are off the point and they fail to move the listener to believe and do what God says.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Gal 1:10,

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

The answer to Paul's first question is *men*.<sup>20</sup> Paul sought to *persuade* men to believe in Christ for everlasting life (Gal 1:6-9; 2:15-16). The answer to his second question is *God*. Paul sought to *please* God, not men. Fung notes, "'Pleasing men' and being a 'servant of Christ' are regarded as mutually exclusive (cf. Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22)."<sup>21</sup>

Many commentators note that Paul was evidently being criticized for trying to please *men* with his gospel message. For example, Longenecker says,

Evidently the Judaizers were claiming that Paul only presented half a gospel in his evangelistic mission in Galatia, purposely trimming his message so as to gain a more favorable response. They might, in fact, have applied to him such

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<sup>19</sup> In the chapel message cited above, Dan Wallace made the same point: "Our primary objective in life is to live for an audience of One."

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistles to the Galatians*, The New International Mission Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 48-49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

epithets as *ho areskos* (“the man pleaser”) and *ho kolax* (“the flatterer”)...<sup>22</sup>

Kent, like Fung, responds to this charge by saying, “If he had changed his message to win more human favor, then he would have been unfaithful to his apostleship.”<sup>23</sup>

### **E. PREACHERS MUST BE WILLING TO SUFFER FOR PREACHING GOD’S WORD (ROMANS 8:17B)**

In 2 Cor 11:24-33 the Apostle Paul catalogs some of the things he suffered for proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ. These included:

- Receiving 39 lashes (by scourging) five different times (v 24).<sup>24</sup>
- Being beaten with rods three different times (v 25).
- Being stoned [to death?] (v 25).
- Being shipwrecked three times (v 25).
- Constant peril from journeys, robbers, the Jews, the Gentiles, and even among false brethren (v 26).

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<sup>22</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 18. See also Fung, 48; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 55; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Freedom of God’s Sons: Studies in Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 39-40.

<sup>23</sup> Kent, 40. Of course some proponents of Lordship Salvation today bring that same charge of watering down the message against those of us who proclaim the free gift of everlasting life by faith alone, apart from works. They say that we change the saving message to win more human favor. See, for example, MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Chantry, *Today’s Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, and Boice, *Christ’s Call to Discipleship*.

Yet like Paul, we have received our gospel from the Lord Jesus (Gal 1:11-12). He gave us the *by grace through faith apart from works* message. He is the One who will judge us at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:9-10). We must give an account to Him (Heb 13:17). The key is being faithful to preach and teach the Word of God, not the ideas of men. We know from Galatians that men can actually *add works to the gospel of Christ*, thus perverting it (Gal 1:6-9; 5:4). Whether one is adding or taking away requirements depends on what God says, not what men say.

<sup>24</sup> For a good article on this see <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/suffering-is-a-gift-of-god--2-cor--11:24-25-/>, though it should be noted that in the last paragraph the author is not crystal clear as to how he understands the two parts of Rom 8:17 (heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ if we suffer with Him).

- Fatigue (v 27).
- Sleeplessness (v 27).
- Hunger and thirst (v 27).
- Cold and poorly clothed (v 27).
- Ongoing concern for all the churches (v 28).
- Escaping imprisonment by being let down in a basket over the wall of Damascus (v 33).

While western preachers today rarely experience such major suffering for Christ, there are many ways in which western preachers can suffer as a result of preaching God's Word. There is fatigue and even pain that comes from traveling to a place to speak, staying with people in their homes (instead of your own), eating their food, adjusting to their time and schedule, etc. Sometimes preachers are criticized after they speak. Sometimes we are even criticized *while* we speak.

One way in which preachers suffer is by people in the audience giving them the evil eye. I've had people literally wag their heads at me while I spoke, look at me with disapproval in their eyes, frown at me, growl at me, and so on. That hasn't been a common experience for me. But it has happened enough over the last four decades that I remember it well.

I once was corrected and rebuked by a pastor after I gave the Sunday morning message. Then in the evening the same pastor actually interrupted my message and corrected and rebuked me again. That was painful. Yet as I reviewed what I said, I was convinced that what I said was accurate. Even that pastor came to change his opinion somewhat about what I said over the next few days. (I was at his church for four days). But it was painful then, and even now in my memory.

In Rom 8:17b Paul says that we will be "joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The idea of being a joint heir with Christ via suffering is clearly not the same thing as being a child of God by faith alone. However, many commentators do not see this. Many think that all who are heirs of God will be joint heirs with Christ, either calling suffering *a condition* or *a confirmation* of everlasting life (e.g., F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, Revised Edition, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963, 1985], 159; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975], 407-408; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959,

If a preacher is unwilling to suffer for Christ in his preaching, then the Word of God will not run swiftly and be glorified. In the movie *The Preacher's Wife*, Julia Biggs (Whitney Houston), the preacher's wife, talked about how her Dad, a preacher, had managed to preach only the happy passages in the Bible. She pointed out that he never preached any of the negative verses in the Bible.

Prosperity gospel preachers receive a lot less criticism and suffer a lot less than do those who actually preach the Word of God. Some of these preachers are well known for driving only the best cars, flying around the country in their own private jets, having multiple mansions, eating the best of foods, staying in only the best hotels, receiving \$10,000 or more for a single sermon, and so forth.

But those who preach what God's Word actually says—what Paul calls “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27)—will find that suffering is part of the job (cf. Acts 20:19, 23, 25, 29-30). It was for the Lord Jesus. It was for His Apostles. And it will be for all that follow in His steps (cf. Matt 16:24-28).

## V. CONCLUSION

Is God's Word up and running at your church, in your home group, in your Sunday School class, in your ministry at the jails and local colleges? That is the goal of our ministries. Our aim should not be to have large numbers of people, great popularity, or lots of kudos. Our aim should be to please the Lord Jesus Christ by preaching and teaching His Word accurately. If we happen to be speaking to large groups, great. But our aim is not the praise and approval of men. We seek to please God and one day soon hear Him say, “Well done, good servant” (Luke 19:17).

Even our works of charity are an extension of the ministry of the Word (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). Properly motivated service grows out of ministries in which the Word of God is running swiftly and being glorified.

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1965], 298-99). For a defense of the view that being a joint heir with Christ is a special reward which only some believers will receive, see René A. López, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005), 172-75 and Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 224-25.



# THE NEW REALM AND RULES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: ROMANS 6:1–14

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## I. INTRODUCTION

No passage in the Bible is more central to the doctrine of spiritual life—or more liberating for the Christian who struggles with sin—than Romans 6. For the Apostle Paul, the Christian life is founded on one fundamental fact: not only did Christ die *for* the Christian (5:6–8), but the Christian died *with* Christ and was resurrected with Him to a new life (6:1–10). Through this “salvation history,” the believer was liberated from the realm and rule of sin and placed into the realm of God and righteousness. Sanctification takes place as the Christian believes this truth (v 11) and acts upon it (vv 12ff).

Romans 6 is the center of spiritual life, but not its circumference, for Paul makes no mention of the Holy Spirit until he brings the readers to realize their desperate need for help in fulfilling God’s requirements (7:24).

The chapter is divided into two sections: vv 1–14 and vv 15–23, with v 15 plainly recalling the “what then?” (*ti oun*) and the rhetorical question of v 1. The former section declares our deliverance from the old realm of sin; the latter explains our new life of service to God.

But there is another significant break at v 11, where imperatives replace the indicatives of vv 1–10. This middle section (vv 11–14) introduces two imperatives which control the chapter:

1. “Reckon yourselves to be dead” (v 11), and
2. “present yourselves to God” (vv 12–14).

Verses 11–14 are the fulcrum of chapter 6, with “reckon” in v 11 looking back to the preceding verses and “present” in vv 12–14 governing the subsequent ones. These appear to be the two fundamental imperatives of the spiritual life in Romans. In chapter 7 the author will write in vivid terms of the believer’s agonizing failure to present himself to God, and in chapter 8 he will introduce the Spirit, who enables obedience.

## II. THE NEW REALM AND RULES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (ROMANS 6:1–14)

In essence, Paul says to his reader, “You must not live the way you used to, because you are no longer the person you used to be. For you to live the way you once lived is inconceivable (vv 1–2), because the person you once were was joined to Christ at His death and was thereby freed from sin (vv 3–10). Believe this to be true about yourself (v 11) and ceaselessly give yourself to your new master, God, instead of your old master, sin (vv 12–13). You need not—indeed, you *must* not—live under the power of sin any longer (v 14).”

### A. THE QUESTION: SHOULD BELIEVERS CONTINUE IN SIN?

What shall we say then? (v 1).

The blacker the storm cloud of our sin, the brighter glows the rainbow of grace flung across it. Paul has just proclaimed that despite the multiplication of sin, God’s grace “abounded much more” (Rom 5:20). This glorious truth could be twisted into an invitation to continue in sin, on the logic that more sin causes more grace. This logic was used by legalists, who attacked grace from without (Rom 3:8), as well as by libertarians, who abused grace from within (Rom 6:1). It still is.



## B. THE REJOINER: NO, BECAUSE BELIEVERS DIED TO SIN

Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?  
 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live  
 any longer in it? (v 2).

Paul rejects this logic emphatically (v 2a) and then rebuts it with a rhetorical question which literally means “We who died to sin, how shall we live in it any longer?”

This affirmation that Christians have “died to sin” is the theme of 6:2–11. Paul personifies sin as the great power that rules over unbelievers. He employs the vivid image of dying (in every sentence in vv 2–11!) to communicate both the finality of the believer’s separation from sin and the connection this separation has with Christ’s death. As irrevocably as death transfers a person into another realm of existence, so irrevocably death with Christ transfers the believer out of the realm where sin is the ruling power (vv 6, 14, 17–22). Although this transfer takes place for each believer at the time of conversion (v 3), it is linked to Christ’s death on the Cross.

What answer does Paul mean to elicit by the rhetorical question, “How shall we...live any longer in it?” The interpretive decision has profound implications for grace and the Christian life. There are two possible answers to the question:

1. It is *impossible* for Christians to continue in sin. We *cannot* do it.
2. It is *unthinkable* for Christians to continue in sin. We *must* not do it.

The key terms are the verbs “we shall continue” and “we shall live” in vv 1–2. It is important to note that these verbs (*epimēnō*, *zaō*) are formally parallel and equivalent in meaning here.

The first option is widely supported.<sup>1</sup> In its favor is the mutual incompatibility of death and life in the physical realm: one cannot live—or even temporarily appear to live—in something one has died to. In its favor also is the fact that “continuing in

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<sup>1</sup>See C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1957); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

sin” and “living in sin” can readily be understood as “existing in the realm of sin,” from which the Christian has been removed. Advocates of this view generally concede that a burden of chapter 6 is the believer who lives at times as if sin still reigned, but they emphasize that this is “impossible for the Christian as a constant condition.”<sup>2</sup> Romans 6:1–2, then, is found to teach that Christians cannot make a habitual practice of sin, because it is actually impossible for them to do so.

But this interpretation faces at least three severe logical and theological difficulties:

First, it strips Paul’s emphatic denial (*mē genoito*) of its moral fervor. “Certainly not, for it’s theologically impossible!” is surely far less forceful than “Certainly not, for it’s morally intolerable!” Paul’s hortatory intensity indicates that continuing in sin is clearly something a Christian can still do.

Second, it turns the imaginary objector of v 1 into a disinterested theologian, asking not about daily persistence in old sins, but about existence in an old realm. (The only alternative is to imagine a contrast between continuing in sin [v 1] and living in sin [v 2], which the text does not support.) But surely Paul has in mind not the thoughtful theologian, but the immoral libertarian who imagines that he can continue to sin the way he used to.

Third, it introduces a fine theological distinction—committing sins vs. committing sins *habitually*—that is foreign to chapters 6–8. Indeed, 6:12–16 and 7:14–25 would appear to preclude any such subtleties in Paul.<sup>3</sup> The apostle is unambiguous about the continuing ability of the Christian to persist in sin. Indeed, it is his burden in this section of the book.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>3</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. J. A. Emerton (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 1:298–299, states, “Such an interpretation falls foul of the sober recognition of the continuing sinfulness of Christians to be found...in chapter 7. While it is reasonable to infer...that the death to sin which Christians are here said to have died is an event which has rendered their continuing in sin something essentially absurd, both 7:14–25 and also the imperatives in this present chapter alike forbid us to conclude that he thought that it had actually made it impossible for genuine believers to continue in sin seriously.”

We are left with the second option. Paul is declaring the suggestion of deliberately continuing in sin to be morally and logically inconceivable. It is absurd, abominable, intolerable! His vehement reply to the query, “Shall we continue in sin?” therefore has the following sense: “We shall not. We must not. The very idea is unthinkable, because we need not live that way any longer. We were delivered from that life, transferred from that realm, when we died with Christ.”

### III. THE ARGUMENT: JOINED TO CHRIST, BELIEVERS DIED AND WILL LIVE (ROMANS 6:3–10)

#### A. WITH CHRIST WE DIED TO SIN

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (vv 3–4).

In this great text of salvation history, Paul vigorously defends his theological declaration (v 2) that believers died to sin and therefore must not live in it any longer. He argues that death to sin is part and parcel of becoming a Christian and that it effects a transition into the new life in which the believer should walk.

How did believers die to sin? The Apostle assumes in vv 3–4 that his readers are aware that they were joined to Christ through (*dia*, v 4) baptism. Believers have been “baptized into [union with] Christ” (*ebaptisthēmen eis Christon*, v 3) and into union with His death (*baptismatos eis ton thanaton*, v 4). Baptism is not Paul’s concern here, and perhaps partly for that reason he does not explain whether it is water baptism or Spirit baptism that he has in mind. Which is it?

Many interpreters see water baptism wherever the term *baptizō* appears in Paul, including here. Admittedly, there is no reason to deny that the apostle’s thoughts embraced the image of Christian immersion. However, the primary reference here

cannot be to the physical rite, but rather to the spiritual reality which the rite vividly displays—the baptism of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup> There are both textual and theological reasons for this view.

For one thing, the text represents this as a real death for the believer (v 2)—not merely a symbolic but a judicial and spiritual participation with Christ (*apethanomen sun Christō*) in His death (v 8). If so, how can water baptism be in view, since it does not produce a real death?

Further, the Col 2:11–12 parallel—“buried with Him in baptism”—precludes the possibility that it is water baptism because it uses the words “made without hands.” Though a secondary allusion to the symbolism of watery immersion remains likely,<sup>5</sup> the baptism which effectually places the believer into Christ is the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).<sup>6</sup> It is important to observe that water is not mentioned in the passage, nor is baptism mentioned again—curious if the rite is in view—but the role of the Spirit in Christian experience is central to this section (Rom 7:6; 8:9–11). The Spirit is not mentioned here perhaps because of Paul’s evident wish to bring Him triumphantly on stage for the first time in chapter 8.

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<sup>4</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 38a, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 311–12, argues that *baptizō* is a metaphor—drawn from the rite of baptism—for one’s incorporation into the Body of Christ, an incorporation in which the Spirit of God is primary: “The word itself...is a metaphor drawn from the rite..., since that in which or with which one is baptized may vary (water, Spirit: Matt 3:11 pars.; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor 12:13) and a metaphorical usage is well established in the Christian tradition (at least Mark 10:38 pars.) as well as in wider usage...”

<sup>5</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper, 1957), 123.

<sup>6</sup>Evangelical exegetes who find the rite of water baptism here but wish to avoid the obvious conclusion that Paul is teaching salvation by baptism generally attempt to take back with the theological hand what they have given with the exegetical. On the one hand, they have interpreted Paul to say that water baptism is the very means of unification with Christ. On the other hand, they are constrained to conclude that water baptism cannot be the means of eternal salvation. Though the end is orthodox, their means is often less than convincing. Moo, *Romans*, 383, for example, states, “What, we might ask, of the Christian who has not been baptized? Even though Paul never dealt with this question (and his first reaction would undoubtedly have been, ‘Why hasn’t he been baptized?’) we must assume from the fact that faith is emblazoned in every chapter of Romans, whereas baptism is mentioned in only two verses, that genuine faith, even if it has not been ‘sealed’ in baptism, is sufficient for salvation.”

When did the believer die with Christ? At Calvary *and* at conversion. Paul easily shifts from one to the other, now placing the believer's death with Christ at the cross (vv 4–6, 10), now in the believer's own experience (vv 2–3, 17). The Spirit's baptizing work merges these two disparate events to inaugurate the believer's salvation history.

Paul draws the conclusion (*oun*, v 4) that, if we joined Christ in His death, then “we were buried with Him”—set alongside Christ in His grave—through this baptism-unto-death (*dia tou baptisματος eis ton thanaton*, v 4). Burial is the definitive act which confirms death (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–4) and therefore declares the finality of our death with Christ to the old age of sin.

This verse begins a special cluster of the “with Christ” ideas, one of four in Paul (cf. Col 2:12–13; 3:1–4; Eph 2:4–6). The actual phrase “with Christ” (*sun Christō*) occurs only in Rom 6:8 in this epistle, but Paul attaches the preposition “with” to verbs (forming *sun*-compounds) in vv 4–6.<sup>7</sup>

God's intent is that (*hina*) we “should walk in newness of life” (*en kainotēti zoēs peripatēsōmen*, v 4). Paul subtly supplants the law with grace here by borrowing and altering the familiar OT command to “walk in the law/statutes/ordinances” (cf. Lev 18:3–5). The Christian life is a distinctively new way of living! The pattern of this new life is provided by the resurrection of Christ, in which (we are meant to assume) the believer participated. The power of this new era is the glory (*doxa*) of the Father wielded by the Spirit of God (cf. 7:6<sup>8</sup>). We need not live the way we used to, nor should we. In the six verses which follow, Paul constructs two parallel sections as confirming witnesses (*gar*, v 5) to this remarkable truth.

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<sup>7</sup> R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology*, *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 32 (Berlin: Topelmann, 1967), 129, summarizes, “Paul's use of dying and rising with Christ is complex, emphasizing in turn the past entry into new life, the present participation in life through death, and the future participation in the life of the resurrection.” For a thorough discussion, see Moo, *Romans*, 426–33.

<sup>8</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (London: SCM, 1952; reprint, London: Lowe & Brydone, 1958), 275.

## B. WITH CHRIST WE SHALL LIVE HIS RESURRECTION LIFE

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer serve sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God (vv 5–10).

Verses 5–7 and 8–10 are parallel in syntax and argument. Each begins with a conditional sentence (*ei...*) that argues from the fact of our death with Christ to the expectation of resurrection life with Him (vv 5, 8). Then follows an explanation of the significance of that death in the form of a participial clause using a verb meaning “to know” (*ginoskontes...eidotes*, vv 6, 9). A further explanation (*gar*, vv 7, 10) concludes the passage. In the English text, the parallelism is revealed by the leading words: *if...knowing...for*.

In both paragraphs (vv 5–7 and 8–10), Paul proceeds with his basic argument: since “we died with Christ,” surely “we shall also live with Him” (v 8). In vv 6–7, he buttresses this argument with the declaration that this death delivered us from the power of sin; in vv 9–10, he supports it with the affirmation that this death delivered us from the power of death. These truths are repeated in the same order in the second half of the chapter: deliverance from sin in vv 17–18 and deliverance from death in vv 21–23.

Verse 5 affirms what was implied in v 4, i.e., the believer’s privilege of participation in Christ’s resurrection based upon the truth that “we have been united with the likeness, or form, of His death”<sup>9</sup> (cf. Phil 3:10–11). But what are we to make of the future “we also shall be” (*esometha*) in v 5, and of “we shall live” (*suzēsomen*) in v 8? Is Paul thinking of eschatology or ethics?

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<sup>9</sup> Literal translation by author.

It is tempting to imagine that Paul speaks eschatologically of the believers' resurrection with Christ at His coming, since his apparent certainty here (*alla kai*, v 5) seems to exclude the moral failures which his imperatives imply elsewhere (e.g., vv 12–13, 19). But this would be a hasty conclusion.

At this point in the argument, the promise of a future resurrection life with Christ would be abrupt and extraneous. Paul has announced in vv 1–4 that it is morally inconceivable for the believer to remain in sin now. “For” (*gar*) indicates that v 5 is intended to corroborate this truth, and in doing so v 5 reiterates the sequence of v 4: now that we have undergone the death, we are expected to walk in the life. The passage goes on to assume that the believer has already begun this new life with Christ (vv 6, 11, 13).<sup>10</sup>

The references in vv 5 and 8, then, are not to our ultimate physical resurrection, but to our present moral life. Here, as elsewhere in this section of the Epistle (cf. vv 2, 14, 22; 5:17), Paul is not expressing a logical certitude, but a theological and pastoral confidence.<sup>11</sup> Since we have been conformed to his death,

<sup>10</sup> As Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:299–300, 306, rightly observes, Paul resists the attempts of many of his interpreters to restrict the death and resurrection of Christians either to the past or the future. For the apostle, there seem to be three different senses in which we die to sin and, correspondingly, three different senses in which we are raised up:

(1) *In the past, judicially*: we died to sin in God's sight when we were joined to Christ at His crucifixion (Rom. 6:2–11; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3), and we were raised with him in His resurrection (Rom. 6:11, 13; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 2:5–6; Col. 2:12; 3:1).

(2) *In the present, morally*: we are called and enabled to die to sin daily and hourly by “putting to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13; cf. Phil. 3:10; Col. 3:5), and to rise daily and hourly to newness of life as we “live according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1–13; cf. Rom. 6:4–5, 8; Phil. 3:10–11).

(3) *In the future, eschatologically*: we will die to sin finally and irreversibly when we die physically, and at Christ's coming, we will be raised up to resurrection life (1 Cor. 15:20ff; 2 Cor. 4:14).

It is characteristic of Paul to move freely between these senses in his discussions of the spiritual life. In Rom. 6:1–14, he speaks primarily of our death in the judicial sense, and of our resurrection in the moral sense, although the other senses are not absent.

<sup>11</sup> “A logical future,” which some scholars suggest, is unlikely because, while it explains very nicely the term “certainly” in v. 5, it is ruled out by the words “we believe” in the parallel in v. 8. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:306–08, does not label his interpretation of the future tense, which is adopted here, but Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 318 calls it a “current future.” See also F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early*

our logical and confident expectation is that we shall begin to experience a conformity to His resurrection life as well.<sup>12</sup>

Verse 6 gives a reason for such confidence: the person a believer once was, was crucified with Christ (cf. vv 4a, 5a) with the very intent that he might stop serving sin. The believer's "old man" is his old self (cf. RSV, NIV, NASB), the person he was before he trusted Christ. The phrases "old man" and "new man" are often misunderstood as referring to parts or "natures" of a person. Instead, they view the person as a whole according to the era to which he belongs—the old era of Adam or the new era of Christ (1 Cor 15:45; cf. Rom 5:15ff). While Paul uses the indicative here (cf. Col 3:9–11) to say that the transfer is an accomplished fact for the Christian, he uses imperatives in Eph 4:22–24 ("put off the old man...put on the new man") to indicate that the powers of that old age continue to influence the believer and must be continually resisted.<sup>13</sup>

The "body of sin" probably designates the physical body as controlled by sin, though it may denote the whole person as controlled by sin, or even the mass of sin viewed as a body having many members. In any case, the term "body" (*sōma*) is significant, because the power of sin resides in our physical body and in its members (7:23–24), and it is with this body that we sin or serve God (6:12–13; 12:1).

The great problem of Christian experience is to keep our physical members from being instruments for sin. The great provision of Christian experience, Paul says here, is that the death of the old man has dethroned (*katargeō*, "render powerless," v 6) sin as the controlling power in his body. The great purpose is "that we should no longer serve sin." The great principle Paul uses to clinch the argument is the general precept that "he who has died has been freed from sin."

Our death has set us free from every claim of sin upon our lives, just as a slave's death ends any master's claim on his services

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*Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. R. W. Funk (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961), § 349.

<sup>12</sup> The difference between Paul and John is worth noting here. Paul met the risen Christ and thinks of likeness to Him in terms of likeness to a risen person. John thinks in terms of likeness to His earthly walk (1 John 2:6). Because the earthly and risen Christ are one and the same (Heb. 13:8), the two likenesses are identical in actual experience.

<sup>13</sup> See Moo, *Romans*, 383.



(v 7). In a wordplay, the verb “has been freed” (*dedikaiōtai*, “has been justified”) reminds us that our liberation was effected by our justification, and that sin’s claim is legally ended.

Paul repeats his point in vv 8–10, beginning with the confident assertion that since “we died with Christ,” surely “we shall also live with Him.” Even though the verb is in the future tense, the context makes it clear that this refers to our present life (see v 5; cf. 2 Cor 14:3).<sup>14</sup> The phrase “we believe” signals that the words that follow are not to be regarded as true without exceptions (cf. Matt 20:10). It also serves to introduce the concept of faith into this new life and thereby foreshadows the first imperative of the Christian life, i.e., to believe that we are dead to sin and alive to God (v 11).

Having explained the Christian’s deliverance from sin in vv 6–7, Paul explores Christ’s deliverance from death and sin in vv 9–10. He stresses the point that Christ’s death was “once for all” and therefore does not need to be repeated. Because we have been joined to Christ’s once-for-all death, the implication is clear and comforting: we are eternally secure beyond the reach of sin and death. Nothing can return us to its control. In Christ we are alive to serve God.

#### IV. THE IMPERATIVES: RECKON, PRESENT (ROMANS 6:11–14)

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Exchanging the indicative for the imperative mood, Paul moves from instruction to exhortation. This middle section of Romans 6 introduces the two imperatives which encapsulate

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<sup>14</sup> P. E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 479.

the chapter: “reckon” (v 11) and “present” (vv 12–14). The former looks back to vv 1–10; the latter looks ahead to vv 15–23. These appear to be the two fundamental imperatives of the spiritual life in Romans.

The translation “likewise you also” of *houtōs kai humeis* (v 11) brings out the correspondence between Christ’s experience (v 10) and the attitude Christians are to adopt toward themselves (v 11). As the death which Christ died was a death to the authority of sin (v 10), so Christians must now consider themselves “dead to sin” (*nekrous...tē hamartia*). As His once-for-all death resulted in new life in God’s service (v 10), so Christians must consider themselves “alive to God” (*zōntas de tō Theō*). The writer is drawing a conclusion not only from v 10, but from the entire chapter thus far, and a better translation might be “so then you also.”<sup>15</sup>

“Reckon” (*logizesthe*) is both a present imperative, and a word of faith. It is a summons to believe (deliberately and continually) what God says about us in vv 2–10. We are to reckon that we are “dead indeed to sin, but alive to God.” You must believe, Paul says, that you are no longer the person you once were, controlled by sin. That person was joined to Christ and in Christ died to sin and rose to a new life.

This reality is true, whether it is believed or not, but believing it is essential to experiencing it. Down through the ages, sages have observed that belief impacts behavior. Here emerges a precept of biblical psychology, namely, that victory is preceded by an awareness of identity. This is the first imperative in the book of Romans, and the first order of the Christian life.

If v 11 indicates that living the new life demands faith, vv 12–14 instruct us that living this resurrection life also requires works. If we are truly dead to sin and alive to God, then (*oun*) we have a duty to live that way. We should “become what we are” by ceaselessly giving ourselves in service to our new master, God, instead of our old master, sin.

Paul appears to have laid out vv 12–14 in a chiastic *abcba* pattern which advances from the negative to the positive. The command in v 12 not to let “sin reign” is balanced by the promise

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<sup>15</sup> See also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd rev. ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 393, s.v., “*kai*.”

in v 14: “sin will not rule over you.” The imperative in v 13a, “do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin,” is matched in every aspect by that in v 13c, “[present] your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Set off like a diamond by this literary form is Paul’s central directive: “Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead.”

The first of Paul’s two negative commands is the sweeping “do not let sin reign” (Rom 6:12). The present tense prohibition (*basileuetō*) suggests the nuance “now that you realize that you have died to sin, do not go on letting sin reign” (cf. vv 1–2). At the same time, it is an assignment that no Christian ever perfectly accomplishes on earth.

The battle is fought, Paul says, “in your mortal body” (*en tō thnētō humōn sōmati*)—in the daily decisions the believer makes about how to use his or her body. The result (*eis to*) of letting sin reign is a servile obedience to the sinful passions, which have their seat in the body. The term “mortal” (*thnētos*) hints, even before Paul tells us so in chapters 7–8, that though the believer’s body has been delivered from the control of sin (6:6), it remains vulnerable to the deadly influences of the old age (7:24) and desperate for the infused life of the Spirit, who resurrects the dead (8:10–11).

Paul builds upon his first prohibition with a second one, more specific and practical: “do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin.” He has moved from the general “yourself” (v 11) to the specific “body” (v 12) to the more specific “members” (*melē*, v 13). The primary reference is to the parts of the body (e.g., eyes, tongue, hands, feet) by which we serve sin or God, but the parallelism with “yourselves” (*heautous*, vv 11, 13b) suggests that the term figuratively reaches out to include all of our natural capacities.<sup>16</sup>

The word “instruments” (*hopla*, v 13) could have its general sense of “tools” here and contribute to the figure of slavery in this chapter. Pauline usage (e.g., 13:12), however, is a military metaphor and points to the specific meaning of “weapons.” In the battle between sin and God, we wield bodily weapons that must not be presented to sin for the purpose of unrighteousness.

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<sup>16</sup> See Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1994), 401.

As it is throughout vv 6–14, sin is personified as the evil power of the old era, the dethroned ruler that would still be king.

The apostle gathers up the believer's practical duty in the verb "present" (*paristēmi*). It is a critical term for him in Romans (cf. vv 16, 19; 12:1). It is likely that Paul selected it because the Septuagint (LXX) uses it to denote putting oneself at the disposal of a ruler.<sup>17</sup> "Present," therefore, does not have the passive sense of "yield" or "surrender," but the active sense of "place at the disposal of" or "give in service to." Here the present imperative may have the nuance "now that you realize you have died to sin, do not go on placing your members at the disposal of sin."

On the contrary, Paul commands, "present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead." In literary terms, this command stands at the summit of vv 12–14, and of chapter 6 as well. It is the imperative of duty, and its words parallel those of the imperative of faith in v 11 ("reckon yourselves to be dead . . . to sin, but alive to God"; "present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead"). Practically speaking, the faith which self-consciously "reckons" and the life which forthrightly "presents" are concurrent, the faith being realized in the works of faith. Henceforth, the command to "present" will stand alone as the great Christian duty (6:15–23; 12:1). The call to reckon is not abandoned, but subsumed. It is by faith, after all, that the righteous man lives (1:17), ever placing himself at God's disposal.

The aorist (*parastēsate*, "present") is often misinterpreted as an instantaneous, "once-for-all" act in time,<sup>18</sup> but neither the aorist aspect<sup>19</sup> nor the context implies a "once-for-all" presentation. On the contrary, the context suggests either the ingressive sense of beginning to present oneself to God<sup>20</sup> or the gnomic sense of continuing to present oneself to God. Paul may be thinking particularly of the beginning of the Christian life, but it is certain that he is giving a directive, which is to be heeded throughout this life. It is possible that Paul means to stress the

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<sup>17</sup> E.g., 1 Kings 10:8. Cf. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 788, s.v. "*paristēmi*."

<sup>18</sup> See John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 228; E. H. Gifford, *Romans* (London: Murray, 1886), 130.

<sup>19</sup> As Frank Stagg, "The Abused Aorist," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 22–231, points out, the aorist is timeless.

<sup>20</sup> Blass and Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, § 337.

decisive urgency of this presentation by his switch to the timeless aspect of the verb.<sup>21</sup> But he is not thinking of a decision or a dedication which is never to be repeated. Rather, since we are alive from the dead, we must give ourselves daily and hourly to God's service. In everything, we must say "no" to sin and "yes" to God.

Verse 13c is the positive counterpart of v 13a. Present your members to God "as instruments of" (weapons for the purpose of) righteousness. Until now, the term "righteousness" (*dikaio-synē*) has been used exclusively in its judicial sense of justification or as an attribute of God. This righteousness could not be achieved but only received as a gift from the righteous God (4:5). But now that the sinner has attained a righteous standing before God, righteousness—in the moral sense of "behavior that pleases God"—is not only reachable but required.<sup>22</sup> From this point on, Paul appropriately (and frequently, cf. vv 16, 18–20) employs the term in this moral sense.

The statement "for sin shall not have dominion over you" is initially confusing. Is this a command or a promise? The suggestion that the future (*kurieusei*) has the sense of a command is initially attractive because it would be parallel to the meaning of v 12a, to which v 14a is verbally and structurally linked. But the two *gar* ("for") conjunctions here make this reading rather clumsy and unlikely. However, we must rule out at the same time any idea (contrary to v 12) that Paul is promising his readers that they will never again submit to the lordship of sin.

It is possible for those who read the verb as a simple promise to give it any one of three meanings. These correspond to the three senses in which we die to sin: judicial, moral, and eschatological (cf. v 5). However, few interpreters take it in the *eschatological* sense, for this is out of place in a chapter proclaiming the freedom from sin that believers enjoy in this present life.

Some interpreters, thinking of our new position in Christ, read this as a promise that the *judicial* dethroning of sin in

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<sup>21</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1902; reprint, Edinburgh: Clark, 1971), 161.

<sup>22</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 404, summarizes: "In chaps 1–5, *dikaio-synē* has a 'gift-character' to which man can contribute nothing (cf. 4:5); but in 6:16 *dikaio-synē* is the result of obedience."

our lives will never be reversed.<sup>23</sup> This view is cogent. It makes good sense of the future tense with sin as its subject, and gives a ground (*gar*) for the imperatives of vv 12–13 (that is, “refuse to serve sin, because sin will never be your Lord again”). It also summarizes 6:1–14 by reaching back to recall the message of vv 3–10: because Christians have died to sin, another Lord has taken possession of them—Christ. “Though sin will still have a hold upon them until they die (in the natural sense), they will henceforth, as subjects of Christ...be free to fight against sin’s usurping power.”<sup>24</sup>

The best interpretation of v 14, however, may be to take this promise in a present moral sense, although it is necessary to avoid reading a moral certainty into the future tense (“sin shall assuredly not rule over you”). Paul is not saying that believers will never again experience the domination of sin over their lives; the previous two verses make it clear that he is under no such illusion.

Instead, in this view the future verb expresses a moral expectancy (“for I am confident that sin will not dominate over you”).<sup>25</sup> This “current future”<sup>26</sup> or “confident future” is employed by Paul throughout this chapter (vv 2, 5, 8; cf. 5:17). To its advantage, this reading maintains the moral sense of vv 12–13, particularly its parallel in v 12a. Furthermore, a statement of confident expectancy makes the best sense of the causal clause which follows.

Paul’s confident assertion is buttressed (*gar*) by the assurance that “you are not under law but under grace.” Paul’s teaching on freedom from sin in chapter 6 was stimulated by the statement that sin is produced and intensified by the Mosaic Law (Rom 5:20–21). The Law is the power of sin (1 Cor 15:56)—it serves as sin’s lieutenant in the old realm. Paul says to believers,

If you were still under the Law, it would be futile for you to think that you could avoid the control of sin (v 14a). But in your transfer out of the old realm, you were liberated not only from the

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<sup>23</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 404, states, “Sin shall certainly not be your Lord—or ever!”

<sup>24</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 319.

<sup>25</sup> In this general category are views that qualify the verb in some way.

<sup>26</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 318.

power of sin but the power of the law. Therefore you can look forward expectantly to a life free from the control of sin.

## V. CONCLUSION

The paragraph that began with the question, “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase?” ends with the thundering declaration that we are under grace, which enables us to avoid sin. Indeed, Rom 6:1–14 instructs us not to live the way we once did, because we are not the persons we once were. We died with Christ to the old realm of sin, death, and the Law, and have been given the chance to live a new life with Christ in the power of His resurrection (vv 2–10). This life is lived by faith—by reckoning what God says about us to be true (v 11); this life is enjoyed by obedience—by presenting ourselves to our new master, God, instead of our old master, sin (vv 12–13). We need not—indeed, we must not—live under the power of sin any longer (v 14).

For the Christian struggling with sin, can there be better news than this? What an emancipation proclamation! What a deliverance! And now that we are free from sin and able to obey, what a charge! We cry in the words of the poet W. H. Auden:

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days,  
Teach the free man how to praise.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> W. H. Auden, “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” in *W. H. Auden: Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), 198.





# SACRIFICE NO LONGER REMAINS: HEBREWS 10:26-27<sup>1</sup>

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For if we sin willfully after we have received knowledge of the truth, *sacrifice for sins no longer remains*, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which is about to consume the adversaries (Hebrews 10:26-27).<sup>2</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 10:26b is routinely construed as threatening punishment for willful sin.<sup>3</sup> The theory seems to be that Christ withholds His sacrifice (as a penalty)<sup>4</sup> from those who “sin with a high-hand”, i.e., willfully sin. This

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<sup>1</sup> In 1996 I read a conference paper on Hebrews 10:26f; Dr. Earl Radmacher was the keynote speaker. Recognizing it as a rough draft, he urged preparing it for publication (it was published in two parts in 1998-99). That began a long and cordial friendship. This article further refines those initial articles: John Niemelä, “No More Sacrifice, Part 1 of 2,” *CTSJ* 4 (Oct 1998): 2-17; and John Niemelä, “No More Sacrifice, Part 2 of 2,” *CTSJ* 5 (Jan 1999): 22-45. It is offered in gratitude for Dr. Radmacher’s encouragement through the years.

<sup>2</sup> Author’s own translation. Italics highlight Heb 10:26b.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *Hebrews*, MNTC (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1983), 276, says, “The first result of apostasy is that the apostate no longer has a sacrifice that can atone for his sins. He is, therefore, beyond salvation.” Cf. Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 419.

<sup>4</sup> Does the author of Hebrews regard “sacrifice no longer remains” as a general statement: that (after the cross) God recognizes no expiatory sacrifices? Or does he mean that Christ’s sacrifice is (in some way) withdrawn from willful sinners as a penalty for such sin? This is the core issue of the article.

article rejects such an interpretation. Hebrews 10:26-27 occurs within a warning passage, so bad news is clearly present. This does not preclude these two verses from containing anything positive. This article takes a different approach: Hebrews 10:27 is the penalty for willful sin, but v 26b is good news in the midst of a warning. Believers, even willfully sinning ones, should thank God that “sacrifice no longer remains” (10:26b).

## II. PRELIMINARY ISSUES

Before starting our analysis, some background issues need clarification. Given the widespread confusion about Hebrews as a whole, we should first define who the readers are and clarify the message of the book before expositing the target passage. To that end, Heb 13:22 defines the book as a brief exhortation to brethren: “And I exhort you, brethren, endure the word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.”<sup>5</sup> Note three key terms that we must analyze: namely, the author’s definition of *brethren*, the implications of *word of exhortation*, and to determine the nuances of the word *briefly*.

### A. BRETHREN ARE BELIEVERS

Hebrews 2:11 says: “For both the Sanctifier [*ho hagiozoñ*, from *hagiozō*] and the sanctified-ones [*hoi hagiazomenoi*, from *hagiozō*] are all of one *Father*, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” The Father of both the Sanctifier (Jesus Christ) and sanctified-ones (i.e., saints) is God the Father. Thus, He unashamedly calls them His brethren. Hebrews 2:12f notes Ps 22:22; Isa 12:2; and Isa 8:18 to establish this.

Then Heb 3:1 addresses the readers as *holy* [*hagioi*] *brethren*, *partakers* [*metochoi*] of a heavenly calling. The readers were both brethren and partakers when he wrote. The author urges them to remain partakers—ones who *maintain the beginning of our assurance steadfast to the end* (Heb 3:14). Brethren is not a synonym for partaker. Faith alone in Jesus Christ alone renders people brethren, while final perseverance is required to remain a partaker. Although all partakers are brethren, not all brethren are partakers. The author of Hebrews urges

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<sup>5</sup> All translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

readers to remain partaking brethren, rather than becoming non-partaking brethren.

## B. THE WORD OF EXHORTATION IS AN EXHORTATIONAL SERMON

In Acts 13:15, synagogue rulers invited Paul to give a word of exhortation. Acts 13:16-41 was his exhortational sermon. The practical emphasis of Hebrews receives emphasis in the repeated exhortational words of Heb 13:22: “And I *exhort* [*parakaleō*] you, brethren, endure the word of *exhortation* [*paraklēsis*], for I have written to you briefly [*italics added*].” Those preachers claiming that the doctrinal sections address believers, but the warnings (practical sections) address unbelievers play fast-and-loose with Heb 13:22. The book as a whole exhorts *brethren*, i.e., eternally secure Jewish believers.<sup>6</sup>

## C. HEBREWS IS WRITTEN CONCISELY (HEB 13:22)

People often puzzle over the use of *briefly* [*dia bracheōn* in Heb 13:22]. Some surmise that it only refers to Hebrews 13, not the whole book. On the contrary, Heb 13:22 exhorts brethren to endure when hearing or reading it: “Endure [*anechomai*] the word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.” Why urge them to endure? One might exhort marathon runners to endure, but who would drop out of a fifty-yard dash? Clearly, an author who exhorts enduring the reading of his book knows it is long.

So, what does *briefly* mean? The author asserts that he is writing *concisely*. He does not go on for thirty chapters. Readers

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<sup>6</sup> Hebrews has 303 verses. The five doctrinal sections total 175 verses (58%); practical portions have 128 verses (42%). It is a book of doctrine and practice.

	Doctrinal	Verses	Practical	Verses
1.	1:1-14	14	2:1-4	4
2.	2:5-3:6	20	3:7-4:13	26
3.	4:14-5:11	14	5:12-6:20	23
4.	7:1-10:18	87	10:19-39	21
5a.	11:1-40	40	12:1-29	29
5b.	—	—	13:1-25	25
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>175</b>		<b>128</b>

should endure his lengthy exhortation, because he does not waste words.

#### D. SUMMARY OF HEBREWS 13:22

The purpose of the book of Hebrews is to exhort the brethren to remain partakers. Believers are to *maintain the beginning of our assurance steadfast to the end* (Heb 3:14). Even those failing in their Christian walk are eternally secure, but they lose great reward for the coming age.

### III. A TENSION BEGGING FOR RESOLUTION

By 1993, I had analyzed Zane Hodges's approach to Hebrews,<sup>7</sup> and shortly before my doctoral comprehensives, something startled me. While rereading the warning passages in Greek, I noticed a striking similarity between v 10:26 and v 10:18b. How could the parallel between the two be anything but intentional?

(v 18) Now where pardon of these [sins and unlawful acts] *exists*, offering for sin no longer remains.

(v 26) For if we sin willfully after we have received knowledge of the truth, sacrifice for sins no longer remains.

Previously, reading Heb 10:26 in light of Num 15:31, it seemed to me that the verse somehow limited v 18. Philip Edgecumbe Hughes expresses a similar view:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>I had spent time studying Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT ed., John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 777-813. Also, the final class session of my Th.M. program at Dallas Seminary was also the last classroom lecture of Zane Hodges there (for New Testament 225, *The Epistle of Hebrews*, spring 1986). Also, my family attended Victor Street Bible Chapel (Zane Hodges was part of the same assembly).

<sup>8</sup>Though my view of the flow of 10:26 had some affinities with Hughes, we saw the passage differently. He favors the Never-Saved view: that only unbelievers can commit the willful sin of 10:26 (= apostasy). By contrast, my old view finds expression in T. Kem Oberholtzer, "The Danger of Willful Sin in Hebrews 10:26-39," *BibSac* 145 (Oct 1988), 413: "Willful sin committed... (after receiving the full-knowledge of the truth) results in no sacrifice for

For such a person [who has abandoned profession of Christ] *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*. This was true of the deliberate sinner under the old covenant, whose iniquity rested, without expiation, upon his own head (Num. 15:31). It is even more obviously true of the apostate under the new covenant... [Verse 26b] is not at all a repetition of the affirmation of verse 18 above, that “there is no longer any offering for sin”...<sup>9</sup>

Although Hughes denies that v 26 repeats v 18, any other possibility seems preposterous. Rather than bolstering the arguments I had prepared for my comprehensives, my old view no longer persuaded me. I worked for two days reaching a new understanding of Heb 10:26, so (if asked about it in comps) I would actually again have an answer. God was gracious, though. The question in my comprehensives about the warning passages in Hebrews concerned chapter 6, not 10:26.

#### IV. NUMBERS 15:31 IS NOT THE TEMPLATE FOR HEBREWS 10:26

Two lines of reasoning lead to the conclusion that Heb 10:26 should not be understood in light of the Old Covenant principle laid down in Num 15:31. Namely: (1) the OT sacrificial system made no provision for high-handed sin, but the New Covenant, by contrast, will resolve *all* sin, including high-handed sin. (2) Hebrews contrasts the ineffectual Old Covenant sacrifices with Christ's single effectual sacrifice.

These two points require rejecting Num 15:31 as the template for Heb 10:26. Let us consider these arguments in sequence.

##### A. THE NEW COVENANT WILL RESOLVE HIGH-HANDED SIN

The features of Heb 10:17f outweigh the apparent semblance between Num 15:31 and Heb 10:26. The principle set forth in Num 15:31 finds expression in 1 Chron 10:13f:

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sins... The loss is not salvation but the loss of the means by which we can have daily cleansing of sin...”

<sup>9</sup> Hughes, *Hebrews*, 419, speaks of “the abandonment of the Christian profession,” so the brackets reflect his wording.

And Saul died for his transgression which he transgressed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium. But he did not consult the LORD; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

Consider his three sins of a high hand.

In 1 Sam 10:7-8, Samuel had told the king of a yet future sign: For seven days Saul was to wait in Gilgal, so Samuel could make a burnt offering. However, on day seven, when Samuel had not yet appeared, Saul made the burnt offering himself. Then, at the last moment, Samuel came, and announced that Saul's disobedience led God to give the kingdom to another.

However, 1 Sam 15:1-3 gave Saul a second chance to obey. If he put all the Amalekites to death, God would establish his kingdom. Instead, Saul spared King Agag and the best livestock. Samuel said God desired obedience over sacrifice, equated rebellion to witchcraft, and rejected Saul as king (1 Sam 15:22f).

Finally, Saul sought the medium at En Dor in 1 Samuel 28. She even reminds the incognito king that Saul had cut off mediums from the land (v 9).

First Chronicles 10:13, the passage explaining Saul's death, is also interesting. It reads: "And Saul died for his transgressions [Hebrew: *mā'al*; LXX: *anomia*], in which he transgressed [Hebrew: *mā'al*; LXX: *anomeō*] against God." *Nomia* refers to a *lawful action*. The initial *a* in the Greek *a-nomia* (and *a-nomeō*) means *not*, indicating an unlawful action. Unlawful acts include high-handed sin (of Num 15:31), for which the Law lacked a sacrificial provision.

Now, consider Heb 10:16ff (which cites Jer 31:33f):

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days," says the LORD: "I will give My laws upon their hearts, and upon their minds I will write them, and their sins and unlawful acts [*anomia*] I will certainly not remember anymore." Now where pardon of these [sins and unlawful acts] *exists*, offering for sin no longer *remains*.

Jeremiah 31 promises the New Covenant. Though it is *presently ratified* (Heb 7:22), it will only be *enacted* "after those

days” in the Millennium.<sup>10</sup> God will make His new covenant with Judah and Israel (Jer 31:31), not the Church.

Implementing the New Covenant with Millennial Israel in the kingdom without dealing with its sin—including its repeated willful rebellion that led to discipline (Lev 26:14-39)—would be unthinkable.<sup>11</sup> Despite how Israel persistently rebelled against God with a high hand, He holds out the olive branch of restoration (cf. Lev 26:40-45). He will enact the New Covenant with a restored ever-rebelling nation, not with a never-rebelling one. The OT expected a future resolution for willful sin, despite not making sacrificial provision for sins with a high hand.

Hebrews 10:16-18 speaks of a pardon that even extends to high-handed sin. That is the context for Heb 10:26, despite attempts to make Num 15:31 its template.

(v 18): Now where pardon of these [sins and unlawful acts (*anomia*)] *exists*, offering for sin no longer remains.

(v 26): For if we sin willfully after we have received knowledge of the truth, sacrifice for sins no longer remains.

## **B. CHRIST’S SACRIFICE OBVIATED OLD COVENANT SACRIFICES: HOW COULD THEY BE THE TEMPLATE FOR HEBREWS 10:26?**

Hebrews 10:16-18 culminates an eighty-seven verse argument (7:1–10:18) for the superiority of both Jesus Christ’s priesthood and His priestly ministry over that of the Levites. The intentional verbal resemblances between 10:26b and 10:18b remind readers of the argument that culminates eight verses earlier (in 10:18).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen R. Lewis, “The New Covenant: Enacted or Ratified?” *CTSJ* 8 (Oct 2002): 55-65, demonstrates from Heb 7:22 that the New Covenant is already ratified, though enactment awaits the Millennium.

<sup>11</sup> “To finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity” are among Dan 9:24’s six prerequisites to the Millennium. Of necessity, high handed sin must be resolved.

<sup>12</sup> In this context *offering* (10:18) and *sacrifice* (10:26) are equivalents. Note the frequent interchange between sacrifice (*thusia*: Heb. 10:1, 5, 8, 11f, 26) and offering (*prosphora*: Heb. 10:5, 8, 10, 14, 18). Significantly, Hebrews 10:5 and 8 use both words in translating Psalm 40. Furthermore, the author

Highlights from 7:1–10:18 reinforce the idea that 10:26b should be viewed through 10:18b as its template. Hebrews 8:1f asserts that the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood is his “main point” of 7:1-28. Furthermore, 8:6 declares that He is Mediator of a better covenant that is based on better promises than the old Mosaic Covenant. Also, 8:13 concludes: “The New Covenant declares the first [covenant] obsolete. Now what is declared obsolete and obsolescent is on the verge of vanishing.”

That is only part of the pertinent picture. The sacrificial offerings of bulls and goats under the Mosaic Covenant (even in its prime) could never take away sins (Heb 10:1, 4, 11). If those sacrifices failed to remove ordinary sin, they most certainly could not cancel high-handed sin. The obviated Old Covenant Sacrifices cannot be the template for viewing Heb 10:26b.

## V. HEBREWS 10:16-18 AS THE TEMPLATE FOR 10:26

What difference does viewing 10:26 through the lens of 10:16-18 make? Despite protestations by Reformed writers, it makes Heb 10:26b parallel to 10:18b.<sup>13</sup>

(v 18b) offering for sin no longer remains  
[The cross removed Levitical offering for sin].

(v 26b) sacrifice for sins no longer remains  
[The cross removed Levitical sacrifices for sin].

Today, God no longer recognizes Levitical expiatory sacrifices<sup>14</sup> and offerings, as the bracketed renderings of Heb 10:26 from a post-cross vantage illustrate:

For whether or not we [twenty-first century  
Christians] sin willfully after we have received

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does not seek to differentiate sin (singular) from sins (plural) because the passage relates sacrificial offering to both the singular and the plural.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the citation of Hughes, *Hebrews*, 419, concerning Heb 10:26 on the first page of this article.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 13:15f treats the non-expiatory sacrifice of praise as still legitimate. Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 178-84, links the peace offering with Heb 13:15.



knowledge of the truth, [Levitical] sacrifice for sins no longer remains.

Whether or not a twenty-first century Christian sins willfully,<sup>15</sup> Levitical sacrifice for sins have long-since ended. Now, let us apply that with the post-cross understanding that the author of Hebrews seeks to convey in Heb 10:26

For whether or not we [Christians living in AD 67]<sup>16</sup> sin willfully after we have received knowledge of the truth, [Levitical] sacrifice for sins no longer remains [authorized by God].<sup>17</sup>

The author affirms exactly the same point in both Heb 10:26b and in 10:18b: *The cross terminated all expiatory sacrifices and offerings*. Hebrews 10:11f states this emphatically:

And every priest stands ministering daily and repeatedly offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He Himself had offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down continually at the right hand of God.

Levitical priests could never sit—indeed, their Temple furniture lacked chairs—because they always stood to offer another sacrifice. By contrast, Jesus sat down and remains seated continually<sup>18</sup> after making one sacrifice—which in fact took away sins.

Thus, with Heb 10:16-18 as the template for 10:26, the author reminds his readers that Levitical sacrifices are obsolete and

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<sup>15</sup> Editor's Note: The willful sin of Heb 10:26 was a specific sin—an affront to the blood of Christ (Heb 10:29). See p. 93 for a discussion of what that sin was for first century readers (in the main text), and what it means for us today (in footnote 35).

<sup>16</sup> My date for Hebrews is AD 67.

<sup>17</sup> Priests still offered expiatory sacrifices for a few years after Hebrews was written, but God rejected all such sacrifices after the cross.

<sup>18</sup> The phrase *eis to diēnekes* is often mistranslated here in two ways. First, many render it as *forever*, despite clearly meaning *continually* in Heb 10:1. Then, they realize that sitting until His enemies became His footstool is not sitting down forever. Second, as an improvised solution, they improperly repunctuate, suggesting that *forever* would modifier *offered*. Thus, translations often speak of Christ offering one sacrifice forever. Instead, Hebrews argues that He sits continually until His enemies become His footstool, rather than continually standing (as the Levitical priests of Heb 10:11), always needing to offer another sacrifice. He contrasts Christ sitting continually with the Levites continually standing.

ineffective. This contrasts with sanctified people, who benefit from Christ's never-to-be-repeated sacrifice that paid for sin—even willful sin.

## VI. A RED-HERRING ARTICLE AND HEBREWS 10:26

Most translations (except the KJV and NIV) add the indefinite article *a* in 10:26b. The NKJV has “there no longer remains *a* sacrifice for sins [italics added].” The KJV says, “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” The NIV reads, “no sacrifice for sins is left.” My translation, “sacrifice for sins no longer remains,”<sup>19</sup> follows their lead.

What is the issue with adding the word *a*? Readers might wrongly infer that a sacrifice remains for non-willful sinners. They might reason from “*a* sacrifice no longer remains” that: “*A sacrifice* no longer remains for those who sin willfully, so might *a sacrifice* remain for those who do not sin willfully? What sacrifice might remain for them? Perhaps Christ's sacrifice remains for those not sinning willfully.

However, a text reading, “sacrifice no longer remains,” may help readers see that: “No sin sacrifices (offered by Levites or anyone else) apply to either willful or non-willful sinners.”

The word *a* might cause a reader to think that the topic is Christ's sacrifice, not sacrifices in general. The little word *a* can be a troublesome red herring in 10:26b.

## VII. IF SIN IS PAID FOR, WHY NOT SIN WILLFULLY?

Some readers might wonder, “If the meaning is, ‘Whether or not we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, sacrifice for sins no longer remains,’ how does it discourage sinning willfully?” That is a good question.

The answer is that the *if*-clause of 10:26a links to both v 26b and to v 27. The word *if* does not itself imply *if-and-only-if*. In

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<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 10:26 reads the same in the *MajT*<sup>2</sup>, *UBS*<sup>4</sup>, *NA*<sup>28</sup>, and in the TR. The order in Greek is *ouketi (no longer) peri hamartōn (for sins) apoleipetai (remains) thusia (sacrifice)*. *Thusia* is last for emphasis. In English this is well conveyed by *sacrifice for sins no longer remains*.

binary conditional statements (e.g., if heads, it is not tails), *if* can mean *if-and-only-if*. Non-binary conditional statements cannot.<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 10:26b is not binary, but 10:27 is.

For *whether or not* we sin willfully after we have received knowledge of the truth, [Levitical] sacrifice for sins no longer remains [authorized by God] (10:26).

But *if-and-only-if* we sin willfully after we have received knowledge of the truth, a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation [remains] which is about to devour the adversaries (10:26a and 27).

Verse 26 asserts that the sacrificial system no longer remains, whether or not believers sin willfully. What does remain, though? Verse 27 says that a fearful dread of God's impending

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<sup>20</sup> Highlighting this logical point, someone might object: "What about the *if* in Heb 10:26? A sacrifice for sins no longer remains, if we sin willfully. Might it imply that a sacrifice for sin remains, for non-willful sinners?" The word *if* lacks such an implication. A teacher might ask students to evaluate: "If an adult is married, he/she no longer drinks milk from a baby bottle." But adults (married or single) do not drink milk from baby bottles! *If* does not imply the reverse [that unmarried adults drink from baby bottles]. Adults (married or single) have all been weaned. In non-binary conditionals, *if* is logically equivalent to whether or not, as in "Whether or not an adult is married, he/she does not drink milk from baby bottles."

The word *if* does not demand reversibility. Digressing briefly might help. What determines reversibility for conditional statements? Only binary conditionals reverse. Examples may help.

### Binary

If a child is male, it is <u>not</u> female. (true)	→ If a child is <u>not</u> male, it is female. (true)
If he is dead, he is <u>not</u> alive. (true)	→ If he is <u>not</u> dead, he is alive. (true)
If the coin is heads, it is <u>not</u> tails. (true)	→ If the coin is <u>not</u> heads, it is tails. (true)

### Non-Binary

If a car is white, it is <u>not</u> black. (true)	→ If a care is <u>not</u> white, it is black. (false) [It could be red.]
If a coin is a penny, it is <u>not</u> a dime. (true)	→ If a coin is <u>not</u> a penny, it is a dime. (false) [It could be a nickel.]
If he is age six, he is <u>not</u> age nine. (true)	→ If he is <u>not</u> age six, he is age nine. (false) [He could be ten.]

The word *if* says nothing about reversibility. Binary conditionals reverse; non-binary ones do not.

severe discipline [specifically, the AD 70 siege of Jerusalem]<sup>21</sup> remained over the heads of willful sinners. Though designed for destroying God's [non-Christian] adversaries, believers who align themselves with enemies of God will suffer severe consequences.

Hebrews warns against inferring from the sacrificial system's obsolescence that God would wink at rebellion. He never has and never will.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, Christendom is uneasy with grace. Many deny that anyone can know absolutely that Jesus has irrevocably guaranteed him/her everlasting life. Thus, preachers twist passages like Heb 10:26 into threats concerning eternal destiny. In a vain effort to coerce obedience, Heb 10:26 is often misconstrued as a NT parallel to Num 15:31.

But it is amazing that anyone would water-down Heb 10:16-18 by treating 10:26 as anything other than parallel to v 18. In point of fact, Hebrews challenges partaking holy brethren (3:1) to maintain their confession, so they would remain rewardable (3:14). In Heb 10:26f he urges them negatively not to sin willfully and thereby to come under severe discipline. He never threatens them with loss of eternal life, but does show

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<sup>21</sup> Many imagine the lake of fire as the much worse punishment than v 28's death by stoning. However, exercising either of two options leads to a different conclusion.

Option 1: Though ones in v 29 are worthy of a worse punishment, do they actually receive a worse punishment? No, for example, one might say that Adolf Hitler was worthy of dying six million times for those he murdered in concentration camps. As it turns out, he only died once (in 1945), despite being deemed worthy of dying over and over. Worthiness of a greater punishment says nothing about whether their physical deaths exemplified such heightened suffering.

Option 2: Death by stoning would be a horrible way to die, but it was quick. Dying of starvation, sickness, etc. during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, would be a worse way to die. Josephus gives gruesome details of death by siege.

Note, though, 10:28 describes physical death. The fact that the people in v 29 are worthy of a greater punishment does not point to a punishment other than physical death. In particular, Heb 10:29 describes the willful sinners as having been sanctified. Based on Heb 2:11, sanctified ones are brethren of Christ—believers. The greater punishment for willfully-sinching believers cannot be the lake of fire.

that willful sin has consequences. Partaking brethren will be rewarded in the unshakable kingdom, while non-partaking brethren face severe discipline now and loss of future reward. But they remain brethren, born of the Father, and possessing everlasting life. Hebrews 10:26 draws upon vv 16-18 and the ratified New Covenant, showing that Jesus Christ so completely pardoned sin, that rebellious Israel will eventually find that He dealt with their unlawful acts. In the Millennium, Jesus will enact the New Covenant with Judah and Israel, and free them from the taint of sin—even high-handed sin. Sacrifice for sins no longer remains, because the cross paid the penalty of sin—even willful sin—once-and-for-all.



# THE MESSAGE THAT GIVES LIFE AND THE DOCTRINE OF PROPITIATION

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A quick look at our world reveals man's sinful/fallen/dead<sup>1</sup> condition. It is a condition against which mankind, in his own resources, is completely helpless. In spite of all man's expectations for a "new" or "improved" society, or his dreams of bringing about utopia, civilization has remained shattered by the ravages of sin. Paul spoke of a barrier<sup>2</sup> of separation existing between God and man. As long as this barrier exists, fellowship between God and man is impossible.

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<sup>1</sup> When Adam and Eve ate of fruit from the forbidden tree in the Garden, God did not declare them "sinners" (although they were and we are); God declared them "dead." The result is that every human being is estranged from God—"alienated from the life of God" (Eph 4:18). Therefore, since that time, what man has needed is not only to have their sins forgiven, but more importantly, they have needed life—everlasting life. In fact, the reason anyone is cast into the lake of Fire is not because of unforgiven sin, but because their name is not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Unbelief is the *cause* for the unsaved not having Everlasting Life. Not having Everlasting Life is the *reason* they are condemned to the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15).

<sup>2</sup> See Eph 2:14-16. A "middle wall of separation" (NKJV), or literally the "dividing wall" mentioned in v 14, referred historically to the dividing wall in the temple in Jerusalem. This wall separated the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple and excluded the Gentiles from the inner sanctuaries. Spiritually this wall was a picture of the separation that stands between God and man which prohibits man's access into God's presence. The Jews could go beyond the dividing wall, but this was only because they had access through their God-given sacrificial system which pointed to the person and work of Christ, the Messiah, the One who would make peace and remove this barrier.

The composition of this barrier is: God's holiness,<sup>3</sup> man's sin,<sup>4</sup> sin's penalty,<sup>5</sup> spiritual death,<sup>6</sup> and unrighteousness.<sup>7</sup> How, then, does a dead/sinful man enter into a life relationship with God? The solution is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks of God's gracious plan to provide a solution to man's problem. This article explores the once-and-for-all work that God accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross, providing *redemption*,<sup>8</sup> *reconciliation*,<sup>9</sup> and *propitiation*<sup>10</sup> for every person in the entire world.<sup>11</sup>

## II. TWO KEY TERMS: RECONCILIATION AND PROPITIATION

### A. WHAT RECONCILIATION ACCOMPLISHES

Reconciliation is the work of Christ which brings man from the place of hostility to peace with God.<sup>12</sup> There are other words used in Scripture for God's gracious work in Christ, such

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<sup>3</sup> See Gen 18:25; Deut 32:4; Isa 57:15; 6:3; Habk 1:13; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 John 1:5 and many other passages that point to God's perfect holiness and stress that God cannot and will not act contrary to His holy character. He is without injustice and completely righteous in all that He is and does, He can't have fellowship with sinful man in anything less than His perfect holiness. The holiness of God has two aspects: perfect righteousness and perfect justice. God is absolute in both. It is impossible for God to have fellowship with anything less than His perfect righteousness. Since God is also perfect justice, which acts in accord with His perfect righteousness, He cannot be partial or unfair to any creature and He must deal with the creature in perfect justice. This means all that is unrighteous or sinful must be judged and separated from Him (See and compare Pss 119:137-138; 145:17 with Hab 1:13; Rom 1:18; 2:5-6, 11; 14:11-12; 1 Pet 4:5).

<sup>4</sup> See Rom 3:23; Isa 59:1-2; this includes imputed sin: Rom 5:12-18; inherited sin: Gen 5:3; Pss 51:5; 58:3; Eph 2:1-3; and personal sin: Rom 3:18, 23.

<sup>5</sup> See Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:19, 22; Col 2:14.

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Cor 15:22; Rom 5:12, 6:23; death is the overwhelming consequence of sin (compare to Gen 2:17; 1 Cor 15:21, 56; Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13).

<sup>7</sup> See Isa 64:6; Rom 4:1-4; 10:1-4; Heb 6:1; 9:14.

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Tim 2:6.

<sup>9</sup> See 2 Cor 5:19.

<sup>10</sup> A quick definition of this word would be "*the appeasement or satisfaction of God's holiness.*" See 1 John 2:2.

<sup>11</sup> See John 3:16; Heb 2:9.

<sup>12</sup> See Rom 5:1.



as redemption, justification, regeneration, and propitiation. However, reconciliation seems to be the over-all term which encompasses what God has done to completely remove the sin barrier. It is reconciliation that sets God free to save the believing sinner by faith in Christ so there is peace with God, and a change in relationship from hostility to harmony.

The *source* of reconciliation is God and not man.<sup>13</sup> The *agent* of reconciliation is the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The *instrument* and *cause* of reconciliation is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross [and His resurrection].<sup>14</sup> The *object* of reconciliation is man not God.<sup>15</sup> *It is the death of Jesus Christ that changes man's position of enmity to harmony with God.*<sup>16</sup>

## B. WHAT PROPITIATION ACCOMPLISHES

Propitiation is that part of the work of reconciliation which deals with the barrier of God's holiness, the obstacle erected or caused by man's sin. Thus, God's holiness is key in removing

<sup>13</sup> See 2 Cor 5:18 and the key Greek words for reconciliation and their definition: (1) *Katallassō*, the verb, and *katallagē*, the noun form. This word comes from *kata* which means "down," and *allasō* which means "to change" or "exchange." Thus, *katallassō* means "to change from enmity or disharmony to friendship and harmony," or "to reconcile" (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-19). (2) *Apokatallassō*. This is a triple compound word (adds the preposition *apo*, "from,") It does not occur in earlier Greek and seems to be used by Paul to express the idea of the *completeness* of reconciliation (Eph 2:6; Colossians 1:20-21). We can properly translate it "to reconcile completely." Each of these Greek words primarily referred to a one-way kind of reconciliation, one accomplished by one person. This is important because the Greeks had a word, *diallassō*, that referred to a two-way or mutual reconciliation—one dependent upon the work of both parties. *Diallassō* "denotes a mutual concession after mutual hostility, an idea absent from *katall-*." Though *katallassō* could be used of a reconciliation between people (1 Cor 7:11), the exclusive choice of the *katalassō* family of words for the reconciliation of the sinner stresses that salvation is totally the work of God that man may either accept by faith or reject, but either way, salvation is a work not partly of man and partly of God as it might occur between people, but totally, 100%, a work accomplished by God through His Son, the Lord Jesus (2 Cor 5:17-19; Rom 5:11). (3) The concept of reconciliation is, of course, not limited to the word "reconcile." When the Bible speaks of "peace with God" (Rom 5:1), of Christ as "our peace" (Eph 2:14), and of His work of "establishing peace" (Eph 2:15-17), this is reconciliation, the work of God in Christ to remove the enmity and alienation that separate God and man (Rom 5:1-11).

<sup>14</sup> See 2 Cor 5:21.

<sup>15</sup> See 2 Cor 5:18-20; Rom 5:10, See also Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1999), 337.

<sup>16</sup> See Rom 5:10; Eph 2:10; Col 1:20.

the alienation or enmity against Him.<sup>17</sup> Propitiation is the truth that the person and death of Jesus Christ appeased or turned away God's wrath, satisfied His holiness, and so met God's righteous demands that the sinner can be reconciled into God's holy presence. God's righteousness is satisfied by the person of Christ and His life.<sup>18</sup> God's justice, which requires judgment for sin, is likewise satisfied by the death of Christ as the substitutionary payment for sin.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> God is called *holy* more than anything else in Scripture. In fact, "holy" is one of His names. In Isa 57:15 we read, "*For this is what the high and exalted one says, the one who rules forever, whose name is holy...*" (cf. Exod 15:11; Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; Pss 30:4; 47:8; 48:1; 89:35; Isa 5:16; 1 Pet 1:15-16; Rev 15:4).

<sup>18</sup> See Heb 2:17; 1 Pet 1:18; 1 John 2:1-2. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law. He was without sin and lived in perfect righteousness and harmony with the will of God. At His baptism, the Father said, "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Here God the Father verified the sinlessness of Jesus and showed that He was qualified by His person and life to begin His ministry. By the miraculous events surrounding the cross, the darkness, the shaking of the earth, the rending of the veil, and the resurrection of Christ, the Father further showed that Christ was not only qualified to be our sin bearer, but that He had successfully satisfied the holiness of God and had dealt with man's sin.

<sup>19</sup> See Rom 3:25-26; Heb 9:5; 1 John 2:2; 4:10. Christ's death redeemed and expiated man from sin and its penalty by His judicial substitutionary death—the innocent for the guilty. As our substitute He bore our penalty. This satisfied the requirements of God's justice. The Greek words for propitiation, *hilasmos* occurs two times, once in 1 John 2:2 and once in 1 John 4:10. It means "an appeasement, a satisfaction, or a propitiation." *Hilastērion* is a Greek noun that occurs twice also, once in Rom 3:25 and once in Heb 9:5. The ending of this word, *tērion*, often indicates a place of something, i.e., the place of propitiation or satisfaction. *Hilastērion* is the key Greek word used in Heb 9:5 of the mercy seat which covered the ark. The mercy seat was the lid to the ark of the covenant which stood in the Holy of Holies into which the High Priest of the OT could go but once a year and then not without the blood of an animal that had been shed at the altar of sacrifice. This all foreshadowed and spoke of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

### III. PROPITIATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND GREEK APOCRYPHA

Because wrath and propitiation are correlative terms, and therefore influence one another, wrath in the OT is both personal and sovereignly expressed.<sup>20</sup> It may be averted through various means,<sup>21</sup> and (incidentally) it may be less “fundamental” to God than mercy since: (1) it is called His strange work; (2) He turns from it because He delights in mercy (Mic 7:18); (3) He is described as slow to anger in ten passages; and (4) the removal of wrath is ascribed to God Himself (Ps 78:38; Isa 48:9).

C. H. Dodd argued for the exclusive sense of “expiate” in this word group.<sup>22</sup> But Morris criticizes Dodd’s method for producing too general a meaning for the group, and overlooking the fluidity of words within their field of meaning.<sup>23</sup> Morris states the difference this way, “Propitiation is a *personal* word; one propitiates a person. Expiation is an *impersonal* word; one expiates a sin or a crime.”<sup>24</sup>

Let us examine the other relevant terms.

1. *Hilaskomai*: though translating words meaning generally to *forgive*, the contexts frequently further specify *the removal of wrath* (Exod 32:14; Lam 3:42; Dan 9:19).

2. *Hilamos*: wherever it means *forgiveness*, the circumstances usually indicate the turning away of the divine wrath (Dan 9:8; Ps 129:4; 2 Macc 3:33). *Hilastērion* means either *place or means of atonement*. The meaning of atonement (*kipper*) is therefore determinative, so *hilastērion* is reserved for discussion under *exilaskomai*, the Greek translation of *kipper*. *Hileōs* confirms the previous tendencies, meaning *forgiveness through the removal of wrath*.

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<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 129-36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>22</sup> C.H. Dodd, Romans, *Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (London: Hodder & Stoughton; Reprint edition, 1947), 20-26.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 136-38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

3. *Exilaskomai* is given more detailed study because of its close kinship to *hilaskomai* and the bearing of *kipper*, the word it translates in 90% of the uses of *exilaskomai*. In the non-cultic use of *kipper* “the impressive thing about the passages in which *kipper* is used of atonement...is the close kinship in meaning between it and the noun *kopher*...which we saw is almost always used (perhaps without exception) to denote payment for the redemption of forfeited life.”<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Exod 30:12-16; 32:30; Num 25:3-13; 31:50; 35:33; Deut 21:1-9; 2 Sam 21:1-14; Prov 16:6; Isa 27:9; Ezek 16:63.

In the use of *kipper*, it is not easy to find out how exactly the sacrifices were thought to make atonement, as the verb *kipper* acquired a technical meaning which completely overshadowed any other. In most places it means to accomplish reconciliation between God and man without anything to indicate how that reconciliation is obtained. However, indications are not lacking that the above mentioned relationship between *kopher* and *kipper* gives us the key to the understanding of the cultic references (Num 16:41-50; 15:25; Deut 16:16; Judges 6:18,19; Isa 18:7, etc.). Thus it would seem that the verb *kipper* carries with it the implication of a turning away of the divine wrath by an appropriate offering. Where *exilaskomai* translated roots other than *kipper*, the meaning of propitiate was further confirmed.

## IV. THE OLD TESTAMENT SOLUTION: THE MERCY SEAT

### A. THE PURPOSE OF THE MERCY SEAT (EXOD 25:1-22)

The Lord instructed Moses to build the Mercy Seat in Exod 25:1-22. In Exod 25:22, He said, *there I will meet with you*. Thus, the place where God manifested His mercy was also the place of contact between God and man. It was at the Mercy Seat that God was pleased to meet with His people, represented by the high priest. There God's righteousness and justice were satisfied, or propitiated. Leviticus 16 reveals what happened at the Mercy Seat.

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<sup>25</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953, 1978), 497. See also BDAG, 350.

## B. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (LEVITICUS 16)

Note that there were two kinds of impurity atoned for on the Day of Atonement: “So he shall make atonement for the Holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness” (Lev 16:16).

The first “uncleanness” was that which contaminated every Israelite by virtue of living in a fallen and corrupted world. Thus, God spoke of the “uncleanness of the children of Israel.” In addition He referred to “their transgressions, for all their sins.” This was the impurity resulting from disobedience to the commandments of God—personal sin. Sin is not only an individual reality; it has a corporate dimension. Therefore, there needs to be a communal ritual to deal with sin’s potential communal destructiveness (the goat was sent into the wilderness/outside the camp/city for the sins of all the people). The Day of Atonement cleansed both kinds of uncleanness.

Leviticus 16:1-5 speaks of the Holy of Holies, where the Mercy Seat was located. Verses 29-34 especially show the purpose of this Mercy Seat—the purpose fulfilled only one day each year. In vv 30 and 32-34, note the clause *shall make atonement*. “Atonement” is the verb *kaphar*, meaning to cover over, to pacify, or to make propitiation.<sup>26</sup>

Underlying all these offerings is the conception that the persons doing the offering are covered by that which is regarded as sufficient and satisfactory by Yahweh. (The purpose of the covering is stated in Lev 16:30 to *make atonement for, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord*.)<sup>27</sup>

Thus, from the OT we learn that sinful man had to deal with God, who was angry at his sinful acts. Yet, God Himself provided a way for contact. When the high priest put the blood of a sacrifice on the Mercy Seat, that blood satisfied God—it propitiated, or appeased the divine judgment. This, then, permitted God to cleanse the people (Lev 16:30) and to sustain a relationship with them for another year (16:34).

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Summary: To make atonement for sin was to propitiate God, satisfying His justice and permitting His love and mercy to flow unhindered. Atonement happened on the Mercy Seat.

## V. JESUS CHRIST, SACRIFICE AND ATONEMENT

According to Hebrews, Jesus Christ is the ultimate atoning sacrifice, the one who fulfilled all others. His sacrifice was superior because it did not need to be repeated and it was the substance of which the others were the shadow. He was/is the fullest revelation from God to Man.

There are many different terms which the Scriptures use to describe the work done by Christ on the cross. One such term is “propitiation”, and it is a word whose definition is not easily understood by the majority of Christians. Coming from translations of the Greek words *hilaskomai*, *hilasterion*, and *hilasmos*, the word only appears eight times in the Greek NT. Most authors use the term only once, except John (who uses it twice,) and the author of Hebrews (who uses it three times). Let us look at the various uses, categorized by the author who wrote the term, and attempt to come up with a better understanding of the term.

### A. PROPITIATION (*hilasmos*)

We only find this noun in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10. John describes Jesus Christ as *our Advocate with the Father* (1 John 2:1) and as *the propitiation for our sins* (1 John 2:2). The fact that we need an Advocate—a defense attorney before heaven’s tribunal—intimates that we have a problem: a sin problem (1 John 1:8, 10). Since God is light and in Him there is no darkness (1 John 1:5), our standing before heaven is humanly impossible. Nevertheless, we may have confidence, or full assurance, because our defense attorney is also our propitiation; that is, He satisfies the justice of God the Father, having satisfied it fully by His shed blood on the cross.

The first epistle of John is written to mature believers looking to maintain and grow deeper in fellowship with God. John explains that his purpose for writing “these things” is that the readers not sin. Yet, even if they do sin, he says that Christ is our Advocate before the Father. He is the *hilasmos* for our sins

and, furthermore, for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Later, when speaking of our being ‘in’ God through love, John says that God’s love was made apparent to us by sending His Son into the world that we might live through Him. He then asserts that the best example of love is that God loved us and sent His Son to be the *hilasmon* for our sins (1 John 4:10). This describes Christ as the one who makes the ‘propitiation’ on our behalf. Christ was the provider of ‘propitiation’ not only for our sins, but for the sins of whole world as well.

### **B. MAKE PROPITIATION, OR BE MERCIFUL (*hilaskomai*)**

*Hilaskomai* only occurs in Luke 18:13 and Heb 2:17. These verses show that God Himself initiated the required sacrifice to satisfy His just claims against sinful (dead) man—a marvelous display of grace in action.

Luke uses the term when relating a parable of Jesus to some who were filled with self-righteousness. In contrast to a Pharisee who loudly thanks God for making him so good, Jesus describes a tax-collector who can only beat his breast and say, “God, be merciful [*hilastheti*] to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Unlike the Pharisee, this man does not point out any good thing he has done. He acknowledges that he has nothing by which to commend himself to God. He asks God to make Himself merciful. This man seems to be asking for mercy from the Lord despite his sins. Or he could be asking that God find satisfaction in him despite his sinfulness.

### **C. PROPITIATION, MERCY SEAT (*hilastērion*)**

*Hilastērion*, which occurs only in Rom 3:25 and Heb 9:5 denotes the place where propitiation took place.

In OT times, once a year the high priest offered sacrifices on the Mercy Seat for the sins of the whole nation. Each time it was a recognition and reminder of obligation: the people owed God the appropriate penalty or sacrifice for their sins.

The children of Israel were renewing an indebtedness, and each year on the day of atonement they offered the blood in order that the note might be deferred, for it was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could finally take away sin (Heb 10:4).

Paul teaches that God set forth Christ Himself *to be a propitiation*.<sup>28</sup> Scripture uses the term in contexts where we find God's justice demands a payment for a sin, denoting that God is righteous, not able to dismiss man's sin without adequate cause.

As discussed previously, concerning Leviticus 16, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of a goat once a year—on Yom Kippur! He sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat, where the Lord appeared in a cloud (Lev 16:2) and where, apparently, the two cherubim represented His righteousness and justice. When the blood fell on the Mercy Seat, it made atonement for all the congregation of Israel (16:17); that is, the shed blood of the goat satisfied God's righteous and just requirements. To satisfy God is to propitiate God, leaving Him free to forgive His people and to fellowship with them.

Then in Rom 3:25, Paul builds on the OT concept of a sacrifice that satisfies God's righteous demands. Specifically, the term propitiation denotes a "propitiatory sacrifice,"<sup>29</sup> or, a satisfactory sacrifice. Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross was the means God chose to satisfy<sup>30</sup> fully His righteous demands. The cross, in effect, was the ultimate mercy seat and Christ's shed blood (death) was the sacrifice that satisfied God. While a sacrificed animal in Israel's dispensation temporarily satisfied God's requirement for a payment for sin, Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice has forever satisfied the Father.

Note carefully that *by His blood* connects with *to be a propitiation* (not with *through faith*).<sup>31</sup> Paul does not say here that we are to put our faith *in* Christ's blood, but we are to place our faith/believe/trust *in* Jesus Christ *because of* His death and

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<sup>28</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII*, Vol. 1, Intl Critical Commentary Series (London: T&T Clark Ltd., 1975), 214. F. F. Bruce, *Romans: The Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007) takes the term to denote the "place where sins are blotted out," i.e., the mercy seat, 104-105. In addition, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958) give "place of propitiation" as an option, 376.

<sup>29</sup> Cranfield 1:216-17.

<sup>30</sup> BDAG, 476, says that *hilastērion* "in Greek-Roman literature that which serves as an instrument for regaining the good will of a deity, concretely, a 'means of propitiation or expiation, gift to procure expiation.'"

<sup>31</sup> Cranfield 1:210.



resurrection (though we believe that Christ shed His blood [His death and Resurrection] on our behalf). Rather, we are to believe *in* Jesus Christ because He became a propitiation by shedding His blood.<sup>32</sup> The blood of Christ speaks of the event when Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, satisfying God the Father (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:26; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18).

God purposed that His Son would be *the* satisfactory sacrifice. That work is “one and done.” It stands forever finished, propitiating God the Father.

Now note that *God passed over the sins that were previously committed* (Rom 3:25b). This phrase alludes to the deferment of the penalty for sin. When Christ died on the cross, He gathered together all the “deferred notes” in the prior dispensations and made a once-and-for-all payment for past sins, thus fully satisfying, or propitiating, God the Father’s just claims. The Lord Jesus Christ by offering up His blood made a final and complete settlement for all of those past “notes.” Consequently, there was payment of sins that are past, as well as of those that were present and future.

Hence it is not without cause that Paul magnificently celebrates the triumph that Christ obtained upon the cross, as if the cross, the symbol of ignominy, had been converted into a triumphal chariot. For he says, that ‘he blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross: that having spoiled principalities and powers he made a

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<sup>32</sup> Regarding Christ's blood, see Acts 20:28; Rom 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20; Heb 9:11ff; 10:19, 29; 13:12, 20; 1 Pet 1:2, 19; 1 John 1:7; 5:6; Rev 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11; 13:12). Also see Lev 17:11; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 10:16; Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977) 1:174-75; Turner, George Allen; Mantey, Julius R., *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 390, who when commenting on John 19:34—where Jesus’ side is pierced by a spear—they say: “This is the language of metaphor, obviously the reference is not to Jesus’ physical blood, but rather to the ‘Life’ which is presented by blood in both the Old and New Testaments” (Lev 17:14). See also Donald G. Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans As a Point of Departure* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959) 3:126-130 and Brook F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: Notes and Essays on the Greek Text* (London, 1892), 34-37.

show of them openly, triumphing over them in it'  
(Col 2:14, 15).<sup>33</sup>

Since God is fully satisfied with the death of Jesus Christ, we should not ask people to try to do something to satisfy God. As Charles Ryrie explains, "This would mean trying to appease someone who is already appeased, which is totally unnecessary...our message to men today should not suggest in any way that they can please God by doing something, but only that they be satisfied with the sacrifice of Christ which completely satisfied the wrath of God."<sup>34</sup> The writer of Hebrews says, in 9:13-14, that Christ offered *to God* a propitiation, or satisfying sacrifice. In 9:22 he adds that the specific thing Christ offered to the Father was *His own blood*. And Rom 3:25 adds that though the place of propitiation in OT times was the Mercy Seat, in the NT the place of propitiation is Jesus Christ's body nailed to a cross.

Romans 3:21-26 is a very important description of the gospel, written by Paul, and appropriately it also uses this term. After explaining how all have sinned and fall short of God's glory and are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, Paul says that Jesus is the *hilastarion* God put forward in His (Christ's) blood in indication of His righteousness on account of having passed over previously committed sins (Rom 3:25). This word is absolutely key to the passage. The fact that Christ was presented as this *hilastarion* is intended both to describe the validity of Christ's redemptive act that allowed sinners to be declared righteous and to explain how God can be righteous after having passed over previous sins. This propitiation, therefore, does not seem only to indicate a random act of mercy, but of something that allows a wrongdoer to receive mercy without the justice of the mercy-giver to be questioned. Thus, the phrase seems to take on more of a judicial aspect—something that can hold up under the inspection of questioners.

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<sup>33</sup> John Calvin, *Romans*, Calvin's Commentaries, tr. by John King, at sacred-texts.com. Last accessed Oct 5, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Ryrie, *Survey of Bible Doctrine*, 337.

## VI. HEBREWS

The unnamed author of Hebrews, in writing a book to Jews about the overwhelming greatness of Jesus over the whole of the Old Covenant, uses words in the *hilas* family three times in the thirteen-chapter book. First, when talking of Jesus' becoming like men, the author says "he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to *hilaskesthai* the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17). Later, as the author describes Jesus' ministry as high priest as being much better than the Levitical high priest's ministry as the New Covenant is better than the Old, he quotes Jeremiah's description of a new covenant, where God says, "For I will be *hileōs* toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Heb 8:12). Finally, in describing the Temple, the Holy of Holies, which contained the golden Altar of Incense, the Ark of the Covenant, and above the Ark "the cherubim of glory overshadowing the *hilasterion*" (Heb 9:5). Jesus has been described as doing this *hilaskesthai* on behalf of our sins, allowing God to be *hileōs* and forget their sins, and the place where Jesus is said to have entered into on our behalf contains the mercy-seat, here called *hilasterion*, which can only be approached with blood.

The author, having asserted that the new covenant has replaced the old (Heb 8:1-7), then explains that the Holy Place, with all its rituals, represents the old covenant as a barrier which must be removed before we can have access to the more precious Holy of Holies (Heb 9:1-10). By Jesus' purifying blood, we can enter into the Holy Place. The concept of "propitiation" is in on that which Jesus' death has not only allowed God to have mercy, but has effectually made us, by His blood, clean enough to enter into the holiest of places, granting us direct access to God!

### A. HEBREWS 10:18, 26

In Heb 10:16-18 the writer quotes Jer 31:33-34 (38:33-34 LXX) for two reasons. Structurally, the quotation closes an *inclusio* marking Heb 8:3-10:18, a section on the superiority of Christ's high-priestly offering. As for his theological purposes at this point, the writer argues for the decisiveness of Christ's

sacrifice (once for all), seizing especially on Jer 31:34, which proclaims of those who belong to the New Covenant (in His blood) that God will no longer remember their sins as His sacrifice was superior to the many sacrifices of the Old—therefore there is no longer a need for any further sacrifice(s) ever. The writer of Hebrews is trying to get them to stop looking at the OT “practice” of sacrifices (covered sins) and look at Jesus Christ—Himself, the final/ultimate sacrifice (removed sin) once for all.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:26-29).

## **B. HEBREWS 10:26-31**

Hebrews 10:26-31 is a warning, the fourth warning in the book. Verse 26 starts the warning, but it does so by reminding the readers of the once for all death of the Lord Jesus on the cross for our sins. The expression “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” was first stated in v 18. And there it is a very positive thing. Because of the cross there is no longer any offering for sins needed or possible.

Is the reminder that there is no longer an offering for sins a bad thing in v 26? No. Not if we remember that the reason this is so is because of the shed blood of Christ. However, what “if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth”? What happens then?

As vv 27-31 lay out, there is “a certain fearful expectation of [temporal] judgment,” “worse punishment” than the immediate

death penalty handed out under the Law of Moses (vv 28-29), vengeance and temporal judgment from God (v 30), and the fearful experience of “fall[ing] into the hands of the living God” (v 31). The shed blood of Christ will not avert temporal judgment for the believer “who has trampled the Son of God underfoot” and has “counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing” and has “insulted the Spirit of grace” (v 29).

What might a temporal punishment worse than death be? Zane Hodges suggested in his class on Hebrews at DTS that this might refer to ongoing torment, physical, mental, and spiritual. Immediate death for the believer is far less painful than ongoing affliction from God’s hand.

What is this willful sin that these Jewish believers were contemplating? If we understand this in light of the immediately preceding context, this sin might be that they were contemplating forsaking the assembling of themselves together as believers (vv 23-25). If we understand this in light of vv 26-31 themselves, the willful sin might be that they were considering going back into the Jewish practice of animal sacrifices in order to gain the forgiveness of sins (as though the blood of Christ was ineffective). That would fit with the idea of counting the blood of the covenant a common thing and of trampling the Son of God underfoot (v 29).<sup>35</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

It is hard to get around the clear and normal meaning of terms/words in their context. But in the case of controversial passages, how we understand universal terms depends very much on how those who taught us understood them. As Tom Wells wrote regarding 1 John 2:2, in defense of Limited or Particular Atonement, “he means to assert that there is no other Propitiation. Anyone who will be saved—however many

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<sup>35</sup> The willful sin for modern believers would thus be comparable. It would be either a willful walking away from fellowship in a local church or it would be actions that are an affront to Christ’s blood, like getting drunk at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:30) or renouncing the cross of Christ as a myth. This clearly does not refer to any and all willful sin because very few sins result in a terrifying temporal judgment worse than immediate death.

or few—will be saved by that Propitiation and no other.” Wells continues:

In the case of controversial passages, how we understand universal terms depends very much on how those who taught us understood them. Had you been taught that “God so loved the world” means that God loved both Jews and Gentiles, that is how you would understand it.

What does that prove? *Prove* may be too strong a word, but *it strongly suggests that we must get our doctrine of the Atonement from the words that describe it in Scripture and not from the universal terms that describe those who benefit from it* (emphasis added).<sup>36</sup>

When all the uses of this family of words are brought together, the idea of propitiation should begin to become much clearer. It does have the idea of mercy or satisfaction, but it also carries wider connotations. As Paul says, the fact that Christ was our propitiation not only allows for our justification, it allows God to be declared righteous in having passed over former sins, for His righteous justice is able to be satisfied. As the author of Hebrews points out, the propitiation was made at the mercy-seat. His blood having been offered once, we are now able to go beyond the boundaries imposed by the Old Covenant, and go boldly into the Holy Place. The work of propitiation has gone beyond merely declaring us righteous, to actually cleansing us, and making us holy enough to go to the intimate place of communion with God. John’s revelation is perhaps the most direct. He asserts that God loved the world so much that His Son was sent to be the propitiation for its sins. Taken at face value, we must accept that this act of propitiation must have been done for the sins of the whole world, such that God is satisfied with the propitious

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<sup>36</sup>Tom Wells, “For Whom Did Christ Die?” *Reformation and Revival* Volume 5:1 (1996): 63. Some members of the early church found in the word *world* a reference to the new humanity that God is forming in Christ. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c. AD 150–180) speaks of our Lord as the one who suffered for the whole world of those being saved. Christ has a world of His own, in this understanding that He is bringing to Himself. Origen, who died about AD 254, after citing the words, “God was in Christ reconciling the world” (2 Cor 5:19), says, “Of the world of the church this is written.” He also cites John 1:29 as illustrating the same truth. *The sin of the world* is for him the sin of the church.

blood of Christ paid for all sins ever committed by mankind.<sup>37</sup> Thus, while other aspects of Christ's work on the cross must be applied to a greater extent to believers than to unbelievers (since unbelievers are still destined for everlasting condemnation), the payment for their sins must have been satisfactorily made by Christ, such that there is currently no sin-debt keeping unbelievers from also being able to boldly accept Christ's offer of everlasting life through belief. After the cross, the believer can rejoice because he personally receives, once-and-for-all, the benefits of propitiation by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

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<sup>37</sup> As long as we attempt to find some form of Calvinism compatible with Free Grace we are locked into the consensus theology of the Reformation and the use of their logic. This has led many to look for "repentance" in the Gospel of John and have found creative ways to see it there (although it is not there). No matter how far up the ladder we go in redefining Calvinism, we are on a ladder that is leaning against the wrong building. Lewis Sperry Chafer did write, "the atonement is sufficient for all, but efficient for those who believe." ["For Whom Did Christ Die?" In *Examining Enduring Issues in Theology*, ed. Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 96]. This was a change by Chafer as he considered himself a Calvinist and was not happy with the "L" Limited Atonement so he created an adaptation of the Reformed concept of "the Atonement of Jesus Christ is sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect."

The message that was believed which gave a person life (everlasting) is consistent throughout the OT and NT (except the name of the "Promised Seed" is now known to us as Jesus the Christ, the Son of God). I am not sure "Savior" is the promise of the OT and NT—but the One who gives everlasting life. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden, God did not declare them "sinners" (although they were and we are); God declared them "DEAD." What man has needed since that time is to not only have their sins forgiven, but more importantly, they have needed "LIFE—Everlasting Life."





# AFFLUENCE WITHOUT INFLUENCE: THE LAODICEAN CHURCH IN REVELATION 3:14-22

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## I. INTRODUCTION

**M**ost people are aware that certain lukewarm fluids (such as water) can be emetic, resulting in vomiting. However, as far as our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned, a lukewarm faith can be just as nauseating.

Indeed, that is precisely the kind of faith He found in the church at Laodicea. His spiritual diagnosis and prognosis are recorded for us in Rev 3:14-22.

This passage contains the seventh and final letter recorded in Revelation 2–3, all of which were written to local churches that actually did exist near the end of the first century AD. Combined, these letters contain, in essence, the very last (recorded) words of Christ to His Church. It is through these letters that we are able to gain a clear understanding of what our Lord really thinks of His Bride, the Church.

Taken together as one unit, these seven letters present for us a composite picture of the Church. I believe that it was our Lord's intent that we see in each of these seven churches certain characteristics (both good and bad) that have existed, and will continue to exist, in various congregations in the world throughout the entire church age, which will culminate with the rapture of the Church. Therefore, it is very important that the message to each church back then be applied by every church today.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute, 1966, Eighth printing, 1972), 51. Dr. Walvoord

What we will soon discover in our study of this seventh and final letter, is that this Laodicean church (like so many churches today in the western world in particular) enjoyed lots of affluence, but little influence. It was self-sufficient, but spiritually deficient. It was financially prosperous, but missionally, it was nauseous. Essentially, the members of the church at Laodicea were lukewarm with respect to their faith. They were neither hot nor cold. Therefore, I believe that our Lord's message to us today is that we must not allow ourselves to become lukewarm in our faith. Because a lukewarm church—even though it might be financially, numerically, materially and outwardly prosperous—can also be spiritually nauseous.<sup>2</sup>

## II. EXPOSITION

### A. EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH (VV 14-17)

This seventh letter begins in the 14th verse much like the previous six, "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write..."

The city of Laodicea was located some 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia (home of the recipients of the previous letter), and almost 100 miles due east of the first church in this circuit of seven, the church at Ephesus. It was the last stop of that ancient postal route that included all seven of the cities mentioned in these seven letters in Revelation 2–3. Laodicea was founded by a man named Antiochus II, who was the great-grandfather of Antiochus Epiphanes—a key figure in the Book of Daniel—with lots of prophetic overtones concerning the end-times and the rise of a wicked world leader referred to in Bible prophecy

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explains, "The messages directed to these seven churches should therefore be considered as sent to the rest of the province and other churches as well. The messages to the seven churches therefore embody admonition suitable for churches in many types of spiritual need."

<sup>2</sup>Robert N. Wilkin, Editor, *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Vol 2 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1269. In his commentary on *Revelation*, Robert Vacendak describes Laodicea as "a large and prosperous city," and as "a renowned banking center." He further explains, "Unfortunately, these believers allowed their wealth to ruin their effectiveness for Christ...Because of their outward wealth they had no clue as to their inward poverty."

as the Antichrist. Antiochus II named the city after his wife, Laodice. It was located on a plateau in the Lycus River valley, close to two other NT cities, Colossae and Hierapolis. In fact, Laodicea is specifically mentioned in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians five times (2:1; 4:13, 15, 16 [x2]).<sup>3</sup> Some commentators have surmised that both churches, the one at Colossae and the one at Laodicea, were founded, not by the Apostle Paul (who never visited these particular cities), but by a fiery evangelist and church planter named Epaphras, who was a business man who had come to faith in Christ through the ministry of the Apostle Paul.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in his closing words in his letter to the Colossian church, the Apostle Paul writes, "Now when this epistle is read among you (Colossians), see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans..." (Col 4:16).

There are three important things that every student of the Word needs to know about the ancient city of Laodicea. The first one is that it was an extremely wealthy city. It was situated at the junction of three great highways that were major trade routes during the first century. Thus it became the wealthiest city in the province of Phrygia during the heyday of the Roman Empire. In fact, it was so wealthy, that when the city was virtually destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60, its affluent, self-sufficient citizens spurned Rome's offer to help subsidize their reconstruction efforts. Instead, they decided to "foot the bill" themselves entirely through their widely-known and highly-respected banking establishments. Out of their own pockets they were able to rebuild the resplendent temples and theatres that once graced their city streets.<sup>5</sup>

Laodicea was also famous for its textile industry, and, especially for its production of a soft, glossy, violet-black woolen cloth that was considered very fashionable, and was always in great demand.<sup>6</sup> But perhaps Laodicea's greatest claim to fame was its medical school at the Temple of Asclepius. Her doctors were so respected that some of their names were actually imprinted on

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<sup>3</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), 249.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1987, 1996), 81.

<sup>5</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 64.

<sup>6</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990), 131.

local coins. It was because of a special eye/ear salve that they had created, called “Phrygia-powder,” that they had become so well-known.<sup>7</sup>

Actually, it seems that the city’s only weakness was its lack of an adequate water supply. Theirs was brought in from nearby Colossae, via a six-mile-long underground aqueduct.<sup>8</sup>

This letter begins, like those that preceded it, with our Lord’s evaluation of the church. But unlike all the others, there is no word of commendation here—only condemnation. In fact, it’s interesting to note that whereas Christ had nothing bad to say about the preceding church—the church at Philadelphia—He had absolutely nothing good to say about the church at Laodicea.

And, lest anyone question His authority, or doubt His accuracy, He begins His report by reminding them (and us) in v 14, that “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.”

“These are the words of the Amen...” What a fascinating name of our Lord: “Amen.” Our English word “amen” is simply a transliteration of the original Hebrew term, and means “certainly, truly, verily.” Today we might even say, “so be it!” or “preach it, brother!”<sup>9</sup> It is an unusual title. Throughout Revelation “amen” is used liturgically either at the introduction or the close of a prayer or praise (1:6, 7; 7:12; 19:4). But nowhere else is it used as a title for Jesus.<sup>10</sup> As Walvoord comments, “The frequent use of “Amen”, meaning “so be it,” was a feature of Christ’s teachings during His ministry on earth. As a title for Christ it indicates His sovereignty and the certainty of the fulfillment of His promises.”<sup>11</sup> It speaks of the infallibility of Christ. Jesus is saying, in essence, “Look, folks, this is the way it is, from the mouth of the One Who tells it like it is . . . What I have to say cannot be changed...”

The title also speaks of the veracity of Christ, as though to say: “Furthermore, what I am about to say does not need to be corrected, because I am not only the Amen, but I am also

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<sup>7</sup> Ladd, *Revelation*, 64.

<sup>8</sup> Elwell, Walter A., Editor, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 2 (Baker Book House Company, 1988), 1307-1310.

<sup>9</sup> Elwell, Walter A., Editor, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 1 (Baker Book House Company, 1988), 69.

<sup>10</sup> Mulholland, *Revelation*, 132.

<sup>11</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 87.

the faithful and true witness . . .” He tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, because He is the God of truth (John 14:6, 18:37). William Mounce explains that, “It presents the trustworthiness of Christ in sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of the Laodicean church.”<sup>12</sup> When Jesus speaks there is never any distortion, dilution, exaggeration, or deviation from the truth. He tells the whole truth without addition or omission.

So what He is about to say cannot be changed and it does not need to be corrected. Furthermore, it must not be challenged. For He is also the ruler of God’s creation, the beginning, the Supreme First Cause. He is the Sole and Supreme Originator and the Sovereign Ruler. Do you remember what Paul said about Christ in his letter to the Colossians (which, by the way, according to Col 4:16, was also to be read by the Laodiceans)? He wrote: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created...He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...so that in everything He might have the supremacy” Col 1:15-18a). The Laodiceans had lost their true purpose. They had come to find value and fulfillment in wordly concerns and successes. But as G. B. Caird writes, Christ was:

the Amen to God’s purpose for man and therefore to his purpose for the universe, of which man was to be the crown...It is this Christ who addresses the Laodiceans, summoning them to find their true strength and wealth in the recreating love of God.<sup>13</sup>

Knowing who is speaking, we ought to pay strict attention to what He is saying in vv 15-16, “I know (intimately, infinitely and absolutely) your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

There are essentially three parts to our Lord’s “State of the Church” address. First of all, the church at Laodicea had become complacent. She was indifferent. She had lost her fervency in her worship for Christ, and her sense of urgency in her witness

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<sup>12</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 124.

<sup>13</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 57.

for Christ. Now, mind you, her people were respectable—but nominal. Today they would probably be like those we sometimes refer to as “C & E” Christians (Christmas & Easter). And even on those days some of them would undoubtedly sit (just like some believers today) in the “pew” with a bored, disinterested, glazed-over expression on their faces, totally oblivious to the fact that they were in the presence of the great “I Am.” They were very nice people, but they were not very committed people. They were superficial, spiritually lethargic, and apathetic. Their Christianity really only went skin deep. Christ described them as “lukewarm”—neither hot nor cold. What does that mean?

I am quite sure the members of the Laodicean congregation knew exactly what He meant. You see, many of them had visited the bath houses built around the medicinal hot springs at the north end of nearby Hierapolis.<sup>14</sup> My wife and I have a fairly good idea of what it must have been like, having lived for eight years in a southern California town called “Desert Hot Springs.” In fact, our church facility was built on a street called “Bubbling Wells Road,” where the water with apparent healing qualities came out of the ground anywhere from 140-180 degrees just like the hot springs of Hierapolis. Yet by the time that same water reached Laodicea via the underground aqueduct, it was not hot enough for the public baths. It had become lukewarm.

Similarly, many of them also, undoubtedly, had visited nearby Colossae and found their thirst quenched by the clear, cold water of the Lycus River. Oh, it was so refreshing. Yet by the time that same water reached Laodicea via the underground aqueduct, it, too, had become lukewarm.

In essence, what Jesus was saying to the Laodicean believers is that there was nothing either soothing or refreshing about their spiritual condition.<sup>15</sup> They were neither a life-giving drink of cold water, nor a healing mineral bath.<sup>16</sup> They were neither hot nor cold. They were lukewarm. Therefore, Jesus had to tell them, “You know, in your complacency, you really make me sick:

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<sup>14</sup> Earl F. Palmer, *The Communicator's Commentary, 1, 2, 3 John, Revelation* (Word Books, 1982) 152.

<sup>15</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 134. See also Aune, 257.

<sup>16</sup> Paige Patterson, *Revelation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 140.

Because of your indifference you are distasteful and unpalatable; because of your half-heartedness you are nauseating and sickening; and because you are tasteless, you are virtually useless. I think I am going to vomit!”

However, if that was not bad enough, there was still more Jesus had to say. Not only were the Laodicean believers complacent, but, according to v 17, they were also arrogant. “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing...’” Apparently their financial prosperity resulted in a feeling of self-sufficiency (as is often the case). Because they were wealthy they believed they had everything, and didn’t need anything or anyone—not even Him. Their wealth may have even been tied to an all too lax association with idolatry. As G. K. Beale speculated,

The problem with the Laodicean Christians probably arose from willingness to identify in some way with the trade guilds and their patron deities. Perhaps this identification merely consisted in identifying with the guilds and not testifying to faith in Christ as a polemic against the guild’s loyalty to their patron deities, who were considered responsible for the economic prosperity of each trade. Loyalty to these deities usually included professions of loyalty to the imperial cult.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, as I mentioned before, even though they enjoyed lots of affluence, they had little spiritual influence on the world in which they lived. The church at Laodicea was prosperous and polished—but powerless.

Thirdly, and finally: although the Laodicean Christians considered themselves self-sufficient, Christ condemns them in v 17 as spiritually deficient. Just listen to what the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Ruler of God’s creation has to say about them in the second part of that verse, “(you) do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” There is a strong sense of irony in this passage.<sup>18</sup> Commenting on this verse, Mulholland explained: “To the Laodicean church, surrounded with immense wealth, their medical school, and

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<sup>17</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 302.

<sup>18</sup> John K. Yeatts, *Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 78.

their luxurious black woolen garments, the imagery of being poor, blind, and naked would be radically confrontive.”<sup>19</sup>

## **B. RECOMMENDATION FOR THE CHURCH (v 18)**

Our Lord’s three-part evaluation in vv 14-17 is followed by a corresponding three-part recommendation in v 18. He begins, first, by saying, “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in fire, so that you can become rich...” The Laodiceans may have been rich materially, but they were poor spiritually. You see, Christ is simply pointing out that, primarily due to the influence of their society, and the affluence which they enjoyed, they had come to adopt warped (and/or twisted) values. So, they were much more concerned with how much money they could get, than they were with how much money they could give. They cared more about things fiscal, than they did with things eternal. By AD 95 their slogan might have been “Financially free in the next century!” Yes, most of them had become financially independent. But their warped values as a church had driven them to the very brink of spiritual bankruptcy. True, they had everything money could buy—but money cannot buy everything. And what they needed, only Christ had. To admit that meant that they needed to abandon those independent, arrogant and self-sufficient attitudes that lead to those warped values in the first place.

Secondly, Christ recommends in the middle of v 18 that they buy “white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.” I am sure those Laodiceans thought they were rather fashionable attired in their soft, glossy, black woolen clothes that had made their city so prosperous, and for which Laodicea had become famous. But I believe that Christ wanted to point out to them that not only were their values warped, but their virtue was false. They were like the emperor parading around in his new clothes—which really weren’t clothes at all. In a sense their good works amounted to no more than filthy rags. They were dressed in all kinds of noble deeds and worthy causes, were investing all of their time, talent, and treasure, as well as their energy, ability, and money, in projects that contributed absolutely nothing to the furtherance of the message and mission of Christ in their world. What a colossal waste! Yet, they had convinced themselves that

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<sup>19</sup> Mulholland, *Revelation*, 133.



what they were doing was worthwhile and good, when, in essence, instead of furthering the Christian movement, they were only fashioning a human monument, made of wood, hay, and stubble—destined eventually for destruction by fire.

Thirdly and finally, Christ counsels these Laodiceans in v 18 to “buy salve, to put on your eyes, so you can see.” How ironic: the physicians at the medical school of Asclepius were world-renown for their miracle-cure eye-salve that could restore one’s physical sight. Yet, the church at Laodicea had gone blind spiritually. Not only did Christ want to point out her warped values and her false virtue; He also needed to make her aware of her distorted vision. She did not see Him for who He really was: the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. She certainly could not see herself as she really was: wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. And I suspect she could not clearly see the world around her as it really was: spiritually dead in sin and desperately in need of a Savior.

### C. INVITATION TO THE CHURCH (VV 19-22)

Now, it is to this church of warped values, false virtue, and distorted vision—this affluent, arrogant, complacent, deficient, impotent, independent, indifferent, and self-sufficient church—that Christ extends one of the most fervent and urgent invitations ever given. Notice how He prefaces it in v 19: “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten...” John uses *phileō* instead of *agapaō* for “love.” John Walvoord explains that while *agapaō* refers to the self-sacrificing love of God, *phileō*, or “brotherly love,” is an affection with less depth. He speculates that the word was deliberately chosen “to express a personal affection that was more in line with the discipline that is also part of God’s love.”<sup>20</sup>

Centuries earlier, a man by the name of Eliphaz admonished his suffering friend, Job, with these words, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (Job 5:17). That theme was reiterated by the Psalmist in Ps 94:12, “Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord.” Similarly, a very wise father advised his son in Prov 3:11-12, “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in.” And those same words were

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<sup>20</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 92.

to be quoted by the writer of Hebrews in Heb 12:5-6. So, what is my point?

Obviously, from what we already know, the Laodicean church richly deserved to be rebuked and chastened. But please do not overlook the fact that the criticism and correction that is about to come their way is motivated by compassion. Make no mistake about it: Christ loves His Church—even this one, warts and all. But Jesus' love "is a sharp, astringent, purifying kind of love."<sup>21</sup> And one day, the Bible says in Eph 5:26, He intends to "present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." With that end in mind, Christ pleads in v 19, "Therefore be zealous, and repent." Rekindle your passion, people. Repent of your pride. Once again burn with zeal; turn from sin.

"Here I am," He says in v 20. "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

It seems to me that when considered in its context this verse should be not be viewed as an invitation to the unsaved for salvation (although I know it is often used that way), but an invitation to the saved for restoration of fellowship with God. Indeed, the picture here is not one of Christ standing outside an unbeliever's heart (as portrayed in Holman Hunt's famous painting now hanging in a London museum). He is addressing believers in this text. The meal is characteristically a symbol of fellowship. The members of this congregation were indeed "out of fellowship" with the Lord. The word for "dine" here is *deipnēsō*, the same word for the institution of the Lord's Supper (Luke 17:8; 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).<sup>22</sup> The invitation to eat with Christ not only alludes to the Lord's Supper, and to the future Messianic banquet, but may also subtly hint at the Laodicean's idolatry. David Aune refers to the Greco-Roman religious practice of receiving an invitation to attend a dinner with a god, whose banquet hall would have a terra-cotta statuette or some other depiction of the god in question.<sup>23</sup> Were the Laodiceans frequenting the dinners of their pagan trade guilds? The door He refers to is not opened by faith, but by zeal and repentance (v 19). There are no other

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<sup>21</sup> Mulholland, *Revelation*, 135.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>23</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 251-52.

Biblical illustrations like this one for justification salvation. (In John 10:7 Jesus is not standing outside a door; He is the door!)<sup>24</sup>

Instead, here we have a picture of Christ standing outside His Church, in this case, first-century Laodicea. But Jesus has been left out and locked out. It is really not that difficult to understand: Because they were so affluent, they became rather independent. They did not need anything anymore. In fact, they did not even need Him anymore. So they simply left Him out. And in so doing, their values became warped, their virtue false, and their views distorted.

By the way, it is interesting to note that to the previous church at Philadelphia Christ gave an open door.<sup>25</sup> It was a door of opportunity. A door of ministry. A door of witness and service. But, from the church at Laodicea Christ desired an open door. A door of opportunity for Him. A door of ministry for Him. A door that would lead to fellowship and true worship. He just wanted to get His foot in the door. Because once He was allowed in He would straighten out their warped values; He would show them the path of true virtue; and He would clear up their distorted vision. He desperately wants in the church that has left Him out. He is the King of Glory. The Lord Almighty. And He wants in! In the poetic words of the Psalmist, “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in” (Ps 24:7).

Note what happens when He does: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev 3:21). Incredible, but not impossible. Joint participation with Messiah in His Kingdom rule! As David Aune notes, “While the promise that Christians will reign with Christ occurs occasionally in the NT (2 Tim 2:12), it occurs with striking frequency in Revelation (1:6; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5) and is a conception partially modeled after Dan 7:18, 27.”<sup>26</sup> These are the words of the Amen, the faithful

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<sup>24</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, Editor, *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Vol 1 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 419. In his commentary on John, Wilkin explains regarding this third “I am” statement of Jesus, “In one sense the door represents Jesus . . . To become a member of God’s flock one must go through Jesus. There is no other way (cf. 14:6).”

<sup>25</sup> See Rev 3:7-13, but especially v 8, “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it...” (Rev 3:8a, NKJV).

<sup>26</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 261.

and true witness, the ruler of God's creation! The Laodicean believers had the relationship...but they desperately needed to restore their fellowship!

### III. APPLICATION

#### A. REKINDLING OUR PASSION

It seems to me that the church at Laodicea represents very fairly and pretty accurately any church that finds itself in the midst of an affluent society. Therefore, as difficult as it may be to admit, in some ways—perhaps more than any other of the seven churches—it represents the American church as well.

By the world's standards, there is no doubt about the fact that we are affluent. And by Christ's standards, we may also be arrogant and spiritually deficient. Though we may consider ourselves prosperous, He might consider us nauseous. For, perhaps it is true that we, too, have adopted warped values. There are those in the Body of Christ who seem to value things that are in reality worthless, while at the same time they tend to trash things that are priceless. Perhaps it is true that we place too much emphasis on the temporal, rather than the eternal; on matters fiscal, rather than on matters spiritual; on the here and now, instead of then and there. Perhaps we have become so earthly-minded that we are no longer of much (if any), heavenly good!

If so, then we need to open the door of our church to Christ, and allow Him to come in, and give Him the opportunity to rekindle our passion. To fan the flame of our devotion. To stoke the fire of our enthusiasm! For I know of no better way to straighten out warped values than for us to fall, once again, hopelessly and whole-heartedly in love with Jesus. For us to be able to say in the words of a very old hymn, that He is "Jesus, priceless treasure, source of purest pleasure."<sup>27</sup>

We need desperately to have our passion rekindled, not only for the Savior of men, but for the souls of men. Because I fear

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<sup>27</sup> The original German text is "*Jesu, meine Freude*" by Johann Franck. Catherine Winkworth translated the text into English and published it in her *Chorale Book for England*. Johann Crüger composed the melody, and Johann S. Bach supplied the harmonization.

that all too often we, like the Laodiceans, have become complacent and indifferent; apathetic and lethargic. Meanwhile, people all around us are dying without hearing the good message of God's grace and without everlasting life that can be had by believing in Jesus Christ. We need to open the door of this church to Christ, and allow Him to come in, and give Him the opportunity to rekindle our passion for the salvation of all who have not yet believed in Jesus for everlasting life. I submit to you, that when we have our passion rekindled, our values will become straightened, and it will indeed result in our living in the words of an old gospel song—with "eternity's values in view."

## **B. REDEFINING OUR MISSION**

Secondly, we may also need to open the door of the American church to Christ, and allow Him to come in, in order to give Him the opportunity not only to rekindle our passion, but also to help us redefine our mission. And what is that mission? Well, it is the evangelization of those who have never believed, and the edification of those who have believed. These are the good deeds of true virtue. We have not been called to socialize, or even to politicize—but to evangelize. We must never allow ourselves to be drawn away from our central task.

Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). That was His mission: the will and work of God. Toward the end of His early ministry, Jesus then said in His High Priestly prayer to the Father in John 17:18, "As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world." Then, to His disciples He said in John 20:21, "As the Father hath sent me, I am sending you." He finished His part (John 20:30), but we have not finished ours. We still have much work to do—in our own Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria—and to the very end of the earth. There still are so many people who have yet to hear the gospel of God's grace. The time is short, and the need is great. We cannot afford to squander our time, to waste our talents, and to throw away our treasures on anything that does not contribute to the advancement of the work and witness of Christ in this world.

### C. RESTORING OUR VISION

The answer to warped values is to allow Christ to rekindle our passion. The answer to false virtue is to ask Him to help us redefine our mission. And the answer to distorted views is to open the door of this church to Christ, and allow Him to come in, and give Him the opportunity to restore our vision.

First of all, we need to see Him as He really is. For He is the King of Glory, the Lord Almighty. He is the Amen, the God of Truth, the Faithful and True Witness, and the Ruler of God's creation. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and End, the Author and Perfecter of Faith. He is the Holy One who holds the key of David. He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Oh, He is all that—and, yet, He is infinitely more. We need to see Him as He really is!

Tragically, there are those today who hate Jesus, who despise Him with every breath they breathe, who are determined to try to force our culture to see Him as He is not. They caricaturize Him. They ridicule and mock Him. They depict Him in movies as “crazy” and “not well in the head.” He is portrayed as a man suffering from “brain fever”—a man confused, and haunted by nightmares and hallucinations; a man unable to answer questions about his own identity, and who is shocked by his magical powers. They make Him out to be just a man who struggles with His own sin, and is driven by lust for a prostitute named Mary Magdalene. What utter blasphemy! And for those of us who are passionately in love with Jesus that is more than enough to make us nauseous. May God give us the courage in the midst of this utter perversion, to be like Phineas of old, “zealous for the honor of (our) God” (Num 25:13).

We must be careful, lest in our complacency and self-sufficiency, in our arrogance and indifference, that we do not defame the precious Name of our God. And may He keep us all from ever accepting and adopting any of the truly distorted and very perverted views of this world. We need to have our vision restored so that we see Him as He truly is. Indeed, one day this world is going to see Him as He truly is. On that day “every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10–11).

Secondly, we need to allow Him to restore our vision so that we see ourselves as we really are (i.e., wretched, blind, miserable, poor, and naked). Once we catch a glimpse of Him as He really is, our vision will almost follow naturally. Do you remember what happened to Isaiah after he saw the Lord, in all of His holiness, righteousness, purity and majesty? Isaiah then got a pretty clear picture of what he truly was. “Woe to me,” he cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips...” (Isa 6:5). When we see Christ as He truly is, we see ourselves as we really are: nothing more than sinners, saved by grace.

Finally, we need to allow Him to restore our vision so that we also see this world as it really is: spiritually dead and desperately in need of a Savior, the Lord Jesus. Oh, may God restore our vision, so that we can honestly say in the words of this missionary hymn,

The vision of a dying world is vast before our  
eyes;

We feel the heartbeat of its need, we hear its  
feeble cries.

Lord Jesus Christ, revive Thy church in this,  
her crucial hour!

Lord Jesus Christ, awake Thy church with  
Spirit-given power.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the invitation is extended by Christ to believers in His church all over the world. He says, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20).

Every once in a while God raises up a godly man whose personal, familial, and ministerial life demonstrates so clearly, effectively, and powerfully the application of the truth of a text like this one. I have been honored beyond my wildest hopes and dreams to have such a man as my mentor, advisor, neighbor, and brother in Christ, Dr. Earl D. Radmacher. I first met him when he preached at the church where I served as a Youth Pastor in the late 1970’s. However, it wasn’t until some fifteen years later, in the early 1990’s, that our lives intersected again during a Bible conference he held at a church in the California

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Ortlund, “The Vision of a Dying World” (1966).

desert where I served as the Senior Pastor. Since then I do not think I have ever met anyone with a deeper, fuller passion with respect to his relationship with Jesus, a more defined sense of mission with respect to the stewardship of his life, and a clearer, brighter vision with respect to his future reward, reign, and everlasting fellowship with the triune God. Jesus Christ has always been at the center of Dr. Radmacher's life—at the very core of his being. Dr. Radmacher has never marginalized the Lord, pushing Him to the outer edges of his life. Jesus is not just a footnote in the story of this godly servant of Christ. Because of his passion, mission and vision, what a role model he has been for the many people he has trained for the ministry of the Word. Furthermore, God has used him to rehabilitate the spiritually unhealthy and to invigorate the spiritually thirsty. There is no question about it: he would never be described as "lukewarm!"

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Jesus wants in. He wants His children to turn from sin, and to burn with zeal. He desires that we open the door and give Him the opportunity to come in and deal with our warped values, our false virtue, and our distorted views. He wants us to rekindle our passion, to help us redefine our mission, and to restore our vision.

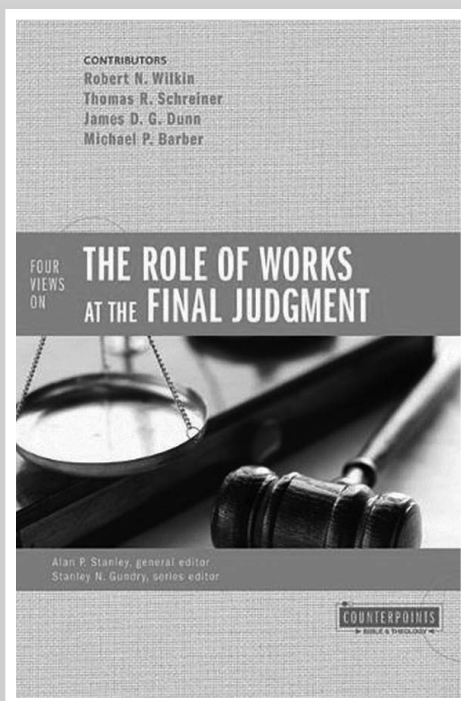
Jesus, (He) is standing,  
Outside the fast-closed door,  
In lowly patience waiting  
To pass the threshold o'er.  
Shame on us, Christian brothers,  
His Name and sign who bear,  
O shame, thrice shame upon us,  
To keep Him standing there.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This beautiful poem was written by the Anglican minister, William W. How, in 1867.



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