

A Brief Word of Exhortation

*Lessons from the
Epistle to the Hebrews*

Volume 1
1:1-2:18

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A Brief Word of Exhortation: Lessons from the Epistle to the Hebrews, Volume 1
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And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

--Heb. 13:22

Preface

The Church's mission is not to just get people saved. Its mission is to produce mature believers. Christ "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of 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 man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head—Christ—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. 4:11-16).

The Greek word for "perfect" (*teleios*) in verse 13 also means "mature." We are not supposed to remain children who are deceived by every doctrine that comes along, but we are supposed to grow up and

become mature, as Christ is mature. That is the Church's mission.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells his readers that they are immature. He says that they are babes who still need the milk of the word instead of solid food (Heb. 5:12-14). But his goal is to not leave them there. "Therefore," he says, "leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1). The Greek word for "perfection" is again *teleios*. He means, "Let us go on to maturity."

The Lessons in this book are based on the teachings I gave to my fellowship from January to June 2024 and are verse-by-verse expositions of the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapters one and two. Along the way, we will discuss such topics as:

- Why Jesus is called "The Word," "the only begotten," and "the firstborn."
- What the believers inherit.
- What praying in the name of Jesus really means.
- Why the Greek Old Testament differs from the Hebrew Old Testament.
- The significance of the Lord's Supper and how it was observed in the early Church.
- Predestination versus Free Will.
- Can we lose our salvation?
- Who are the seed of Abraham?
- What is propitiation?

A Glossary in the back of the book defines important words used in these Lessons.

My thanks go to the members of my fellowship for their invaluable input.

It is my hope that these Lessons will help you along the way as you mature in Christ.

Introduction

What We Know and Do Not Know About the Epistle to the Hebrews

The Nature of the Book

This book has been known as the Epistle to the Hebrews since the latter half of the second century. The word “epistle” means “letter,” but this Epistle is unlike the other New Testament letters. It ends with personal notes like a letter normally does, but it does not begin like a letter does. A New Testament letter normally starts with the name of the writer followed by the name or names of the person or persons being addressed. This “letter” has neither.

The book refers to itself in 13:22 as a word of exhortation. Paul was asked to give a word of exhortation in Acts 13:15 and he proceeded to give a sermon. So, this book is more like a sermon. An exhortation is a communication (such as a speech or a letter) which strongly urges someone to do something. The Greek word for “exhortation” also means “encouragement.”

The purpose of the book, therefore, is to encourage and strongly urge its readers to continue in the faith until the end. This purpose is perhaps best stated in 6:11-12.

What We Do Not Know about the Book

The Author

The personal notes at the end of the book tell us that whoever first received this book was very familiar with this author. However, the knowledge of who wrote this book was quickly lost. Origen, a Christian teacher and writer who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and in Caesarea during the first half of the third century AD, did not know who the author was and said that only “God knows the truth of the matter.”

This has not stopped people from speculating on who might be the author of this book. Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, and even Priscilla and Aquila have all been suggested as the author(s) of the book. The most widespread and persistent suggestion is that Paul wrote this book. However, this suggestion can be traced back to only the latter half of the second century and appears to have been started by the church in Alexandria, the very place in which Origen lived. This means, of course, that Origen was not convinced by the evidence presented by his own church.

But this is all speculation. If we go with what the Scriptures tell us, we would have to say that we do not know who the author is. God, who has inspired the Scriptures, has not seen fit to preserve the name of the

author, which means that it is not important for us to know who wrote it in order to understand it.

It is necessary to know who wrote the Gospels because they are presented as the testimony of eyewitnesses who had seen and heard the Lord Jesus himself. The authors were the witnesses themselves (Matthew and John) or they recorded the testimony of the witnesses (Mark and Luke). The validity and historicity of the Gospels would be suspect if they had been written by people who had heard the testimony third or fourth hand.

Paul's letters tell the churches what they should believe and do. The validity of what he had to say rested on his authority as an apostle. If the letters had come from someone with lesser authority, the churches could have rightly ignored them.

The writer of Hebrews also tells his readers what they should believe and do, but the validity of what he has to say does not rest on his own authority. Perhaps more so than any other New Testament book, this book quotes the Old Testament. The validity of what the writer has to say rests on the authority of the Scriptures. Therefore, the arguments that are presented in this book would remain valid no matter who had written it.

The Audience

The writer encourages his readers to remain in the faith and not revert back to following the old covenant. It is evident, therefore, that he is writing to Jews who had converted to Christianity. What we do not know is where these Jewish Christians lived.

It is often assumed that the readers lived in Jerusalem. However, when the writer quotes from the Old Testament, he always quotes from the Greek translation (known as the Septuagint), which was used by the Jews who lived outside of the Holy Land. Hence, it is thought that the readers were Hellenistic Jews who had converted to Christianity.

But the Hellenistic Jews lived throughout the Roman Empire. Suggestions as to where the readers of this book lived include Alexandria, Caesarea, Samaria, Colossae, Ephesus, and even Rome.

Again, this is all speculation. The fact is the Scriptures have not told us where they lived, which means that it is not necessary for us to know where they lived in order to understand the book. Perhaps God left this information out because, even though this book was originally sent to a particular group of Jewish believers, its message applied to all believers everywhere.

The Date

We cannot be certain as to when the book was written. Clement, who was a bishop in the church at Rome, wrote a letter to the Corinthian church in 95 AD and he quotes from the book, which means that the book had to have been written by then.

The Epistle makes it clear that the sacrificial system set up by the Law was still being practiced, which means that the book was written before 70 AD, when the Temple and the sacrificial system associated with it were destroyed. However, we cannot get more specific than that for the book's date.

What We Do Know about the Book

What we do know comes from the book itself.

The Audience

We do know that the readers had already endured intense persecution (10:32-34) and because of that, they were considering abandoning Christianity in favor of returning to Judaism.

The Message

The writer of the book encourages his readers to keep the faith. He does this in two ways.

First, he shows that the new covenant is superior to the old covenant. His favorite word is “better.” It occurs 13 times in 12 verses. The writer’s main argument, which takes up the bulk of the book, is that the new covenant is better than the old covenant. He dives right into the argument at the beginning of the book, where he declares that Jesus is better than the angels (1:4). He makes this point because the Jews believed that the Law was given to Moses through the mediation of angels. The writer refers to this in 2:1-4. Paul also refers to this in Gal. 3:19. The writer’s point is that the new covenant which was mediated by Jesus Christ is better than the old covenant which had been mediated by angels. Thus, he encourages his readers to stay in the faith because it is better than going back to the old covenant, despite the persecution.

Second, he warns them that if they do go back, they are not just abandoning Christianity but Christ himself and will be punished for doing so. The book to the Hebrews has more warnings about abandoning the faith than any other New Testament book. The writer does not say that it is possible for one to lose his salvation but he does say that it is possible for one to give it away.

Ironically, this is why the message in the Epistle to the Hebrews is still one that we need to hear today. We are not in danger of reverting to Judaism but we are always in danger of abandoning Christianity. The persecution of Christians is coming to our country, perhaps soon. We will be tempted to abandon the faith and deny Christ so that we can escape the persecution, but we cannot escape God's punishment "if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven" (12:25). The Epistle to the Hebrews is a word of encouragement. It is also a warning. Let us pay heed to both its encouragement and its warning.

Lesson 1

Why is Jesus Called “The Word”?

Heb. 1:1-4

I want to show you how the opening of the Epistle to the Hebrews shares concepts which we find in the Gospel of John. In the process, we will find out why John called Jesus, “The Word.”

The Epistle opens with a long sentence which takes up the first four verses. The theme of the Epistle is that the new covenant is better than the old covenant, that God is doing something new and better through the new covenant.

The writer hints at this difference in these verses by stating that God has now spoken to us in a new way. Before, in the old covenant, he spoke through the prophets. Now, in the new covenant, he speaks to us through his Son.

God, in this passage, must be the Father because the passage also talks about his Son. It starts by saying that God spoke in various times and in various ways. A more literal translation is that he spoke in many parts and in many ways. God spoke to the fathers (the

Jewish ancestors, the Israelites of the past) through the prophets in various ways but gave them only a part at a time. This means that no one prophet got it all. God did not reveal everything all at once. He spoke the truth a little at a time.

He spoke “by the prophets,” literally, *in* the prophets. The prophets did not just hear God and repeat what they heard; God was in them, speaking his words through them.

But now, in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. “These last days” could mean the end times, which would indicate that the end times started 2000 years ago. The Greek is literally, “at the last of these days,” possibly meaning the last days of the old covenant. The Son, Jesus, appeared during the last days of the old covenant to introduce the new covenant.

“By His Son” is literally, “in a son.” The emphasis here is not on Christ’s divinity (the writer will get to that) but his position. Not a prophet, but a son. Not many sons, but *a* son. This Son has the final and complete revelation.

The writer says three things about this Son:

1. God spoke to us in him;
2. God made the worlds through him;
3. The Son is the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person.

We find all three of these concepts in the Gospel of John.

1. God spoke to us in him.

God spoke *in* him: God was in Christ speaking through him. Jesus says the same thing in John 14:10, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.” Jesus is saying that the Father is in him and the words he speaks are not his words, but the Father’s. Jesus also repeatedly says elsewhere that he spoke only what the Father commanded him to speak (John 14:23-24; 12:48-50).

2. God made the worlds through him.

The Gospel of John says the same thing: “All things were made through Him [Jesus], and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3).

3. The Son is the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person

“Brightness,” more literally, is “shining forth.” The Son is not just bright; he is shining forth, sending out, the glory of the Father. In Christ, we can see the glory of the Father. Jesus mentions this in his prayer in John 17: “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). Jesus acknowledges that he had the Father’s glory.

The writer of the Epistle also says that the Son is the express image of the Father. The phrase, “express image,” in the Greek is *character*. This word referred to a mark or impression burned or stamped on something

else, such as a coin. The image left on the coin would be an exact replica of the image on the stamp. *Character* was also used of the impression left in melted wax. If a king did not want anyone to read an important document without his permission, the document would be rolled up and then hot wax would be poured on it to seal it. The king would then press his ring into the hot wax. The impression left in the wax would be an exact replica of the design on the ring. What the writer of the Epistle is saying is that God took his image, his personality, his character, and impressed it upon Jesus so that Jesus is the exact image of the Father. Seeing Jesus, therefore, was the same as seeing the Father.

Jesus said the same thing about himself: “Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”?’” (John 14:8-9).

So, the Son spoke the words of God, he created the worlds, and he is the express image of God the Father so that when you see him you see the Father. Those are also the functions of the being or force known as the Word, which is why John calls Jesus “The Word” in John 1:1.

The Greek word for “word” is *logos*, but *logos* does not mean simply “a word.” It means a collection of things. It refers first to a collection of thoughts or ideas. Hence, it also means the ability to think and to reason. Since thoughts and ideas are expressed in words, it also means a collection of words. It can mean a saying, a speech, a doctrine, or a narrative. For example, Luke

writes in Acts 1:1, “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” The former account, of course, is the Gospel of Luke, but the word “account” in the Greek is *logos*. Luke refers to his entire Gospel as a *logos*.

By the time John wrote his Gospel, the Jews and even some of the Greek philosophers had developed the concept that the Logos was a being or a force that acted as the intermediary between God and the universe. This concept developed over a long period of time.

In 600 BC, a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus said that the Logos was the universal truth which held the universe together. He did not see the Logos as a person but he did see it as a truth which everyone should know.

In the Old Testament, the word of the Lord is sometimes seen as a force that God sends out and therefore has an existence of its own. For example, Ps. 107:20 says, “He sent His word and healed them,” as if the word itself did the healing. In Isaiah 55:10-11, the word accomplishes what the Lord sent it out to do. It departs from the Lord, accomplishes its task, and then returns to him, as if it could exist independent of him.

The Jews developed this idea that the word of the Lord existed apart from him even further after they returned from the Babylonian exile when they wrote the Targum, which is a collection of paraphrases of the Old Testament. These paraphrases would be read in the synagogues, so the people became familiar with these paraphrases as well as the Old Testament. This collection of paraphrases, the Targum, was written in

Aramaic. The Aramaic word for “word” is *memra*. Where the Old Testament would use God’s name, the Targum would sometimes use Memra. For example, Deut. 9:3 says that the Lord is a consuming fire, but the Targum says that the Memra is a consuming fire. The Targum also says in several places that the Memra created the world. It has been argued, therefore, that Memra is simply another name for the Lord.

But there are places in the Targum where the Lord and the Memra are two separate entities. Thus, in Ex. 25:22, the Lord says to Moses that he will meet with him at the mercy seat, but in the Targum, God says, “I will order my Memra to be there.” In the Targum, the Memra also appears quite often to deliver a message from God. Thus, one of the functions of the Memra was to speak the words of God. The Memra, therefore, was not God himself nor divine but was a messenger, like one of the angels.

Interestingly, where the Old Testament says that Abram believed the Lord (Gen. 15:6), the Targum says that Abram believed the Memra. It also says that the Memra will justify Israel.

A Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, in the time of Christ and was named Philo combined these Jewish ideas about the Memra with Greek philosophy. He taught that God was separate from the universe and was therefore hidden and unknowable. He also said that the universe has always existed and is inherently evil, which is why God keeps himself separate from it. But the universe has a sense of order to it because of God’s Reason (the Logos). The Logos conceived how the universe should run and imposed

that idea upon the universe. The Logos also holds the universe together and makes sure that it operates correctly. The Logos is also the mediator between God and men and can atone for sins and be man's advocate before God. He actually describes the Logos as the *paraclete*, a word which the Gospel of John uses to describe both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It means "one who is called alongside to help" and is translated as "comforter" or "advocate." The Logos is also God's envoy to man, meaning that the Logos reveals the unknowable God to men. Philo also refers to the Logos as the firstborn of God.

By stating that Jesus is the Logos, John was saying that Jesus is all of this and more. He did not have to explain what he meant to his readers because he knew that these ideas were already well known to them.

Because he is the Logos, Jesus spoke the words of the Father. And because he is the Logos, he created the worlds. But, unlike the Memra, he is not a being who is less than divine. He, too, is God, just as much as the Father is. And because he is God, because he has been with the Father from eternity and therefore knows the Father intimately, because he has the character of the Father impressed on him, because he is in the Father and the Father is in him, he can accurately represent the Father and accurately reveal to us the Father, who is otherwise hidden from us: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared him" (John 1:18). Notice that Jesus "declared him," that is, he did not just show us who the Father is; he also used words to tell us who the Father is.

Jesus spoke the words of the Father, the Father created the world through him, and Jesus revealed the Father to us and showed us his glory. Those are the functions of the Logos, which is why John calls Jesus the Word, the Logos.

The writer of Hebrews is saying that because God has changed how he speaks to us, not through more prophets, but through the Son who created the worlds and is the express image of the Father, the old way of doing things, the old covenant, has been done away and a new way of doing things, a new covenant, has been implemented. He ends verse 4 by saying that Jesus is better than the angels. He will spend the rest of chapter 1 proving that statement and then, in chapter 2, he will tell us why that is important.

Lesson 2

What the Believers Inherit

Heb. 1:2

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that God has appointed the Son “heir of all things” (1:2). The Greek word for “heir” is *kleronomos*, which means “one who receives by the casting of a lot,” which is interesting because God did not cast a lot to see who would get his inheritance but appointed Jesus to receive it.

In practice, inheritance was not passed on by casting a lot. In the Hebrew culture, the father’s possessions were passed on to his surviving sons. The inheritance would not be passed on to the daughters unless there were no surviving sons. The firstborn son would receive twice what the other sons received. His portion was known as “the double portion” (Deut. 21:15-17). If a father had three sons, his possessions would be divided into four parts. Two parts would be given to the firstborn and one part would be given to each of the remaining sons. Of course, if the firstborn was also the only son, he would get it all.

When Elisha asked Elijah to give him “a double portion” of his spirit (2 Kings 2:9), he was not asking that he be given twice the amount of the spirit that Elijah had. He was asking to inherit Elijah’s spirit. He was asking that he would be the firstborn, so that if others received part of Elijah’s spirit, he would get double that.

In the Greek culture of the first century, the father’s possessions would be divided equally among the surviving sons. Daughters would receive an inheritance only if there were no surviving sons and they were unmarried. Again, if the firstborn was also the only son, he would get it all.

In both cultures, it was possible to give the inheritance to the sons before the father died, as we learn from the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus, therefore, does not have to wait for God the Father to die to receive his inheritance, because, of course, the Father will never die. And since Jesus is God’s only Son, he receives all that God possesses.

I say that Jesus is God’s only Son because he is the only Son who has the divine nature, so he is the only Son by nature. The rest of us do not have that divine nature and become God’s sons only through adoption.

Even so, because of God’s love and mercy toward us, he has decided that we, too, get to inherit all that he has. Paul tells us that since we are the children of God, through adoption, we too are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17). The word for “joint heirs” is *sygkleronomos*, which means “an heir together” or “an heir with.” It is used in Eph. 3:6 to say that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews. It is

also used in 1 Pet. 3:7, where Peter reminds the husbands that their wives are also heirs of the grace of life with them. So, unlike the Hebrew and Greek cultures, believing women also receive God's inheritance because they, too, are the children of God.

What, then, does Jesus inherit? And what do we inherit with him?

1. All things (Heb. 1:2), that is, everything that has been created and therefore everything that God possesses. We, too, will receive all things. God the Father declares in Rev. 21:7, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."
2. The kingdom of God. "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5). Jesus said to the disciples, "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one on Me" (Luke 22:29). The kingdom did not originally belong to him. It belonged to the Father, who gave it to Jesus. And Jesus in turn will give us that same kingdom.
3. The promises of Abraham. Abraham was, of course, promised the land which we now call the Promised Land. It occupies a certain section of the earth. But several passages in the Old Testament suggest that Abraham was actually promised more than that. In Gen. 22, God

commanded Abraham to go to a certain mountain and sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham goes to the mountain but the Angel of the Lord stops him from actually killing his son. Then the Angel of the Lord makes a promise to him in vv. 15-18. The promise is that ALL of the nations will be blessed in his seed.

David says in Ps. 37:22, “For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off.” Back in verse 11, David says, “But the meek shall inherit the earth,” and Jesus, of course, repeats this in Matt. 5:5. In Is. 54:3, God, speaking to the nation of Israel, says that Israel’s descendants will inherit the nations. The promised inheritance, therefore, includes the entire earth, not just the Promised Land.

The Hebrew word for “descendants” in Is. 54:3 also means “seed” and is singular. This is also the same word used in Gen. 22:15-17 and there it is also singular. This fact is important to Paul in Gal. 3:15-29. The promise was made to Abraham’s Seed, who is Jesus Christ, the one who inherits the promise of Abraham. And because by faith we have become one with Christ, we, too, are Abraham’s seed and inherit Abraham’s promise.

Paul makes the same point in other passages: Rom. 4:13-16; Eph. 3:6. From the beginning of time, God intended for the promises of Abraham to pass on, not to his physical descendants, but only to Christ and to Abraham’s

spiritual descendants, whether they were Jew or Gentile. I will talk more about this in Lesson 15.

4. God himself. In Num. 18:20, the Lord says to Aaron, who was the first High Priest, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.” Moses states that this was true of the entire tribe of Levi: “The priests, the Levites—all the tribe of Levi—shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and His portion. Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the LORD is their inheritance, as He said to them” (Deut. 18:1-2). Since we are now the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), this applies to us. The Lord is our inheritance. Even better, Jeremiah twice calls the Lord, “The Portion of Jacob” (Jer. 10:16; 51:19). Though the Israelites were given land as their inheritance, in reality the Lord himself was their true inheritance, which means that the Lord is also our true inheritance.

The writer of Hebrews declares, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). If we diligently seek *Him*, then when we find Him, He becomes our reward.

5. Interestingly, the Old Testament also reverses this. Not only is God Israel's inheritance, but Israel is also God's inheritance. Moses said to Israel, "But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day" (Deut. 4:20). He also said, "For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance" (Deut. 32:9). Since we believers are now His people, we are his inheritance. And since we inherit what he possesses and he possesses us, our inheritance includes *each other*.

Usually, only items of value are inherited. And if we know in advance that we will inherit a mansion or an expensive car, we will take real good care of it. What if we started looking at each other as valuable? And what if we started taking care of each other because we are valuable?

Jesus, therefore, is the Son who has been appointed heir of all things, all that God possesses. And because we are joint heirs with Christ, we, too, will inherit all things. Those things include the kingdom of God, the promises of Abraham, God himself, and each other. Let us take good care of one another because each of us is truly valuable.

Lesson 3

The Power of the Son

Heb. 1:3

In this Lesson, we will look at what the writer of this Epistle has to say about the Son in the rest of verse 3. We already looked at what the writer means when he says that the Son is “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” The next thing he says about the Son is that he is “upholding all things by the word of His power.”

“All things,” of course, is the entire universe. “Upholding” in the Greek is *phero* and it means “to bring.” Since you usually have to carry something to bring it to someone else, the word also means “to carry, to bear.” And since the object you are carrying is moving, the word also means “to move something.” It is used to describe the rushing of the wind. It is also used to describe the movement of a ship as the wind pushes it. Jesus, therefore, is not just upholding the universe, making sure it stays in place. He is carrying it to ensure that it arrives at its proper destination. That destination has been determined by God’s plan, and we know from the Scriptures that at the end of time, there will be a

new heaven and a new earth, in short, a new universe. In the meantime, Jesus is carrying this universe and making sure it does not fall apart before it gets to the end.

The same idea is expressed by Paul in Col. 1:17, where he states, “And He [Jesus] is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” The Greek word for “consist,” *synistemi*, means “to put together.” The Greek word for “in” can also mean “by.” Paul is saying that not only were all things put together by Christ but all things also hold together in Christ.

The writer of Hebrews says that the Son carries the universe and keeps it together “by the *word* of His power.” The Greek word for “word” here is not *logos*, as we might expect, but *rhema*. I know that some Bible teachers want to say that there is a significant difference between these two words. *Logos*, they say, refers to the general word of God, the Scriptures, whereas *rhema* refers to a specific word which God might speak to you. There is some technical difference between the two words. *Logos*, for example, does not usually mean a single word, whereas *rhema* can mean that. However, *logos*, both in the singular and plural, and *rhema*, in the plural, both mean “words,” “speech,” or “a saying.” Hence, in practice, the words were often used interchangeably. For example, when Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek around 200 BC, they used both words to translate *dabar*, which is the Hebrew word for “word,” even when the text referred to the same speech or saying. Ex. 24:3 says, “So Moses came and told the people all the words (*rhema*) of the LORD and all the judgments. And

all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words (*logos*) which the LORD has said we will do.’” The New Testament also uses the words interchangeably at times. For example, Heb. 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” Eph. 6:17 says, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Both verses describe the word of God as a sword, but *logos* is used in the first verse and *rhema* is used in the second. There is, therefore, no significant difference between the two words.

The writer of Hebrews says that the Son carries the universe “by the word of His *power*.” The Greek word for “power” is *dynamis*, from which we get our word, “dynamite.” The writer is saying that the Son’s word is so powerful, it holds the entire universe together. The writer’s point is that the Son is better than the angels and any other created thing or person because he is the one who has the power to hold all created things together.

The writer then states that the Son “had by Himself purged our sins.” In saying this, he makes an important point about what the Son accomplished for us on the cross. The Greek word for “purged,” *katharismos*, is actually a noun, so a better translation is “having made the purification of our sins.” But the verb form of the word appears in several places and it means “to purify, to clean or cleanse.” It is used of the cleansing of lepers (Luke 5:12-13). When the leper was cleansed of the leprosy, it left him. That means, he no longer had it. When Jesus died on the cross, he cleansed us of our sins. That means we are supposed to no longer have

sin in our lives. Jesus did not just pay the penalty for our sins so that we can go to heaven, nor did he just gain forgiveness for us so that we can go on sinning, believing that God loves us so much that he will always forgive us if we just ask him to do so. Jesus accomplished more than that on the cross. He eliminated sin, which means that we should live like sin has been eliminated from our lives. As Paul wrote to Titus in 2:14, Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” As Paul also says in 2 Cor. 7:1, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” We Christians have been commanded to turn from sin and to live a different lifestyle, a lifestyle of holiness. Those who continue in sin have missed the point of what Jesus did on the cross. As Peter says in 2 Pet. 1:5-9, “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” Jesus is the only who has the power, the ability, to cleanse us from our sins. Therefore, let us live as if we have been cleansed from sin.

Finally, the writer of this Epistle declares that the Son “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

In the kingdoms of those days, the person who was second in charge would sit at the right hand of the king. The Son, therefore, is second in charge over the entire universe, second only to the Father, and everything and everyone else falls under his authority. Paul points out in Eph. 1:20-23 that the Father demonstrated his own power “which he worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And he put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

After he was resurrected, Jesus told the disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). By “all authority,” Jesus, of course, did not mean that he had authority over the Father. Paul notes in 1 Cor. 15:24-28, that after the believers are resurrected, “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For ‘He has put all things under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.” The purpose for giving authority to the Son is to ultimately bring all things, including us, into subjection to the Father.

The Son, therefore, upholds the universe by the word of his power, he has cleansed us from our sins, and he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. It would do us well to obey his authority by living lives that are actually cleansed from sin, trusting that he will carry us to our proper destination, to the new heaven and the new earth, where we will live with the Son and our Father forever.

Lesson 4

The More Excellent Name

Heb. 1:4

We will discuss Heb. 1:4 in this Lesson and find out what the word “name” means in both the Old and New Testaments and even find out what it means to pray in the name of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews describes the Son as “having become so much better than the angels.” Here we encounter the first use of the word, “better,” which is one of the writer’s favorite words. It is used 13 times in Hebrews. “Better” (*kreitton*), means “more worthy, more excellent.”

The writer uses the phrase, “having become,” which raises a question. Hasn’t Jesus always been better than the angels? Heb. 2:6-8 quotes from Ps 8:4-6 which declares that the son of man was made a little lower than the angels, then God put all things under his feet, that is, under his authority. The writer equates the son of man in the psalm with Jesus. In the Jewish thought of the time, the angels ruled over the earth (under God’s authority, of course). By taking on flesh and entering the world which is administered by the

angels, Jesus, like us, took a lower position of authority under the angels. But after his resurrection, all authority was given to him, so now he has become better than the angels.

The writer says that Jesus has become so much better than the angels because he obtained a more excellent name than they. “More excellent” (*diaphoros*) means “excellent, surpassing.” Jesus has a name that surpasses the angels. The writer will spend the rest of chapter 1 proving his point.

But why does Jesus’ name surpass the angels? What is so excellent, so special about his name? The answer lies in what “name” means in both the Old and New Testaments.

In English, “name” can mean label (My name is Clayton), reputation (the family name), or authority (Stop, in the name of the law). “Name” means all of those in both the Hebrew and Greek.

The Hebrew and the Greek words both mean “label” in Gen. 11:29 and Luke 1:63. They both mean “reputation” in Prov. 22:1 and Rev. 3:1. And they both mean “authority” in Esth. 8:10 and Acts 16:18.

But in both the Hebrew and Greek, “name” takes on one more meaning: character. This is what they mean in Ps. 111:9 and Matt. 6:9. God’s label is not holy and awesome; his character is. The writer of the Epistle is not referring to Jesus’ label, but to his authority and character. Jesus has a more excellent authority and character than the angels.

Knowing that name means these things helps us to understand other passages.

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given me” (John 17:6). Jesus did not come to tell us that God’s label is Yahweh. He came to manifest God’s character, to show us who God really is.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

“And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23). Believing in the name of Jesus is not to believe that his label is Jesus. To believe in the name of Jesus is to believe in who he really is, to believe in the real Jesus, the Jesus proclaimed by the Bible, not the Jesus proclaimed by the cults.

Peter to the Jewish leaders: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). No one else has been given the authority to save men.

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17). Doing all in the name of Jesus does not mean we say, “In the name of Jesus,” every time we do something. It means to do everything in the authority and character of Jesus, as if we were Jesus himself.

Doing all in the name of Jesus includes praying in the name of Jesus: “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23).

Praying in the name of Jesus does not mean we add the statement, “We pray all this in the name of Jesus,” or something similar, to the end of our prayers. There is no prayer in the Bible that ends this way. I did a Google search on the prayers of the early Church, and the first written prayer that ends with the statement, “In the name of Jesus,” is a prayer in Latin from the middle of the fifth century (450 AD), four hundred years after Jesus told the disciples to pray in his name. This means that by the middle of the fifth century, people had forgotten what praying in the name of Jesus really means.

Praying in the name of Jesus means to pray as if we have the character and authority of Jesus, as if we were Jesus himself. And if we pray as if we were Jesus himself, we will ask for the things that Jesus would ask for, so of course the Father will grant us our request.

In Luke 11:1-4, one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus responds by giving them a model prayer, which we now call “The Lord’s Prayer” or “The Our Father.” Notice that the prayer does not end with the statement, “We pray all of this in Jesus’ name,” or something similar. Jesus did not teach us to end our prayers with that statement. That is a tradition developed by men. Praying in the name

of Jesus means praying in the authority and character of Jesus, as if we were Jesus himself.

Notice also that the prayer starts with, "Our Father." Jesus said that we will ask him nothing. Instead, we should ask the Father in his name. There is no example of prayer being directed to Jesus anywhere in the New Testament. In the book of Acts, the only time people spoke to Jesus after he ascended to heaven is when he appeared to them. We do not have to take our requests to Jesus. We can take them directly to the Father.

Jesus, therefore, has a more excellent name than the angels because he has a more excellent character and authority than the angels.

Lesson 5
Better than the Angels
Heb. 1:4-14

In the rest of chapter 1, the writer of Hebrews goes on to prove his point that the Son, Jesus, is better than the angels.

The writer of Hebrews has in mind here the Jewish tradition that the old covenant was mediated by the angels, that is, the old covenant was given by God to the angels who then gave it to Moses. Paul refers to this tradition in Gal. 3:19. We must remember that the Jewish audience to whom this Epistle was addressed was considering abandoning Christianity and returning to Judaism, of abandoning the new covenant and returning to the old covenant. The writer of Hebrews will eventually encourage his Jewish audience to remain in the new covenant because the new covenant is better than the old covenant. One way that the new is better than the old is that the new was mediated by Jesus whereas the old was mediated by the angels, and Jesus is better than the angels.

The writer proves his point by citing the Scriptures. I said before that we do not know who the writer of He-

brews was because, apparently, we do not need to know who he was. The writer does not base the authority of his Epistle, the truth of this Epistle, on his own authority. He does not say, for example, “I am an apostle, so you should believe what I am telling you.” Nor does he take the stand of a prophet. He does not say that God revealed these truths to him, so his readers should believe it. Instead, he cites the Old Testament, the authority of which his Jewish audience already accepts. The authoritative Old Testament proves that the Son, Jesus, is better than the angels.

But some of the things he says in here raise three important questions. Since we Christians believe there is only one true God, how can God call the Son “God” in verse 8?

Second, if the Son is God and, therefore, has existed from eternity, why does God the Father say in verse 5, “Today, I have begotten you”? If the Son has been begotten, does that not imply that he had a beginning like the rest of us do?

Third, if the Son is God and, therefore, has existed from eternity, why is he called the firstborn in verse 6?

We will answer the first question in this Lesson.

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that there is only one true God. For example, in Isaiah 43:10-11, God says to Israel through the prophet Isaiah,

“You are My witnesses,” says the LORD,
“And My servant whom I have chosen,
That you may know and believe Me,
And understand that I am He.
Before Me there was no God formed,

Nor shall there be after Me.
I, even I, am the LORD,
And besides Me there is no savior.”

The Scriptures also make it abundantly clear that the Father is the one true God. For example, in 1 Cor. 8:4-6, Paul states, “Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”

Yet, the Scriptures also declare that the Holy Spirit is God. For example, Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” And, as we saw here in Heb. 1:8, God the Father calls the Son “God.” The preeminent verse that declares the deity of Jesus Christ is John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

How do we reconcile these Scriptures? How do we reconcile the Scriptures that declare that there is only one God with the Scriptures that declare that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each God?

The Church has always reconciled these Scriptures with the doctrine of the Trinity. The word “trinity” is a combination of the words, “tri” and “unity.” Hence, it means “three in one.” It is true that nowhere in the Scriptures do we find a passage that explains the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine, like many of the

doctrines of the Church, is based on everything the Scriptures have to say about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is also true that we do not find the word “Trinity” in the Scriptures. That is just our word for the doctrine.

The doctrine of the Trinity states that there is only one true God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are equal in nature, power, and eternity. Each person is fully God, yet they are united in such a way that there is only one God.

This doctrine is admittedly a difficult one to understand, but we can understand it better if we recognize the difference between *nature* and *person*. “Nature” means kind or sort. For example, God created all of the animals, each “according to its kind” (Gen. 1:25). Specifically, nature means “the particular combination of qualities belonging to a person, animal, thing, or class by birth, origin, or constitution; native or inherent character.” For example, human nature is the set of characteristics that are common to humans. Human nature is what makes us human. Horse nature is what makes horses, horses. Dog nature is what makes dogs, dogs. The divine nature is what makes God, God.

“Person” refers to the individual who is distinct from everyone else. All of us have the human nature in common, but each of us is a distinctive person.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each have the divine nature. This is why each of them is called God. This is also why they are united as one God, because they share this divine nature.

However, each one is a distinctive person. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. The Scriptures teach that each one is distinct from the other and have distinct roles. For example, we are taught to pray to the Father, not the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son, not the Father or the Holy Spirit, died on the cross. There are passages in the Scriptures in which all three persons appear. For example, when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:16-17), Jesus, the Son, was in the river, the Holy Spirit descended upon him, and the Father spoke from heaven. Jesus also spoke of the three persons as distinct from each other. For example, at the Last Supper, Jesus said to the disciples, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). Here the Son asks the Father to send the Spirit. Together they are one God, yet they are three distinct persons.

God the Father, therefore, calls the Son “God” because the Son also has the divine nature. This is one reason why the Son is better than the angels, for they have the angelic nature but not the divine nature.

Lesson 6

The Only Begotten, Firstborn Son

Heb. 1:4-14

In the last Lesson, I said that the passage in Heb. 1:4-14 raises three important questions. First, since we Christians believe there is only one true God, how can God call the Son “God” in verse 8? Second, if the Son is God and, therefore, has existed from eternity, why does God the Father say in verse 5, “Today, I have begotten you”? If the Son has been begotten, does that not imply that he had a beginning like the rest of us do? Third, if the Son is God and, therefore, has existed from eternity, why is he called the firstborn in verse 6?

We answered the first question in the last Lesson. We saw that God can call the Son “God” even though there is only one God because the two of them share the same divine nature and because they, along with the Holy Spirit, are united in such a way that there is only one God. That is the doctrine of the Trinity.

We will now answer the other two questions. The second question is if the Son is God and, therefore, has existed from eternity, why does God the Father say in

verse 5, “Today, I have begotten you”? If the Son has been begotten, does that not imply that he had a beginning like the rest of us do?

The Greek word for “begotten” is *gennao*, which literally means “to beget.” It is used in the literal sense in the genealogy in Matt. 1:2-17, which says, for example, “Abraham begot Isaac.”

In human terms, a boy is not a son until he is begotten and a man is not a father until he begets a child. There was a time when the son did not exist and there was a time when the man was not a father. “Begetting,” therefore, implies a beginning.

The cults, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, apply this idea to God the Father and Jesus, the Son. There was a time, they say, when the Father was not a father and there was a time when the Son did not exist until the Father begot him, which means that Jesus had a beginning, which means that he cannot be God. They believe that Jesus was the first thing God made, which is why he is called the Son of God.

They also point out that in John’s Gospel, Jesus is often called “the only begotten Son.” For example, he is called that in John 3:16. They argue that if Jesus is begotten, doesn’t that imply that there was a time when he did not exist, that he had a beginning?

This is not a new idea. It was widely taught in the late 200s and early 300s AD. To counter this teaching, the leaders of the early Church issued a statement of faith known as the Nicene Creed. This Creed was issued in 325 AD and, because the teaching persisted, was revised in 381 AD. In that Creed, the leaders said, “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of

heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

Substance is the same as nature. When the leaders say that Jesus has the same substance as the Father, they mean that he has the same divine nature as the Father.

Notice also that they said that Jesus was begotten but not made, which means that Jesus did not have a beginning. How do we reconcile these two truths? How can Jesus be begotten but not made?

In the Greek, “only begotten” is *monogenes*, which means “only child.” It could be used of an only son or only daughter. What John is saying in his Gospel is that Jesus is the only Son of God.

This raises an interesting question because John also says in John 1:12 that all of us believers are the sons (children) of God. How do we explain that seeming contradiction?

The answer is in Rom. 8:14-15. We are children of God by adoption. We are not the natural children of God. We were born sinners and enemies of God. We were born outside of God’s family, but in Christ we are adopted into God’s family.

But Christ is the only begotten Son. What the leaders of the early Church were trying to say is, just as humans beget humans and horses beget horses and dogs beget dogs, so too, God begets God. This is why we are not the begotten sons of God. We are not gods.

By being the only begotten Son, Jesus is the only son who has the same divine nature as the Father, which means he is eternal like the Father. This is why the Father says in Heb. 1:5, “Today, I have begotten you.” He is saying that the Son has the same divine nature as himself.

So what does the Father mean when he says, “*Today*, I have begotten you”? The early Church leaders addressed this as well. They said that since God is outside of time, it is always today for him. Hence, “today” is not a particular day but an eternal today. Jesus, therefore, is eternally begotten

The third question is if the Son is God and, therefore, has existed from eternity, why is he called the firstborn in verse 6?

The Greek word for “firstborn” is *prototokos*, which literally means “firstborn.” It is used literally in Matt. 1:25 where Jesus is called Mary’s firstborn.

“Firstborn” was never used of an only child. It was used of the first of multiple children. An only child was called *monogenes*, an only begotten. Since Jesus was Mary’s firstborn, she must have had other children after him.

But Jesus is called both “the only begotten,” which means an only child, and “the firstborn,” which means the first of multiple children. This seems to be a contradiction. However, how a word is actually used often differs from its literal meaning. The firstborn son had preeminence over the other children. When the father died, the firstborn would run the house. He was given the authority over all of the other children. So, in usage, “firstborn” came to mean “the preeminent one.”

In Exod. 4:22, God declares that Israel is his firstborn. When this verse was translated into the Greek, the translators used *prototokos*. Obviously, not everyone in Israel was a firstborn, nor was Israel the first nation. God means that Israel is preeminent over all of the other nations, the most important one to him.

The Jewish rabbis called God the “Firstborn of the World.” They do not mean that God had a beginning. They are saying that God is preeminent over everything.

“Firstborn” has both meanings in Col. 1:18, which says that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. Jesus is the first to be resurrected to eternal life. Other people in the Bible were resurrected, but they died again. Jesus is the first to be resurrected and never die again. Paul says in this verse that God did this so that Jesus could have the preeminence over all. So “firstborn” has both meanings here.

Paul also says that Jesus is the firstborn over all of creation in Col. 1:15. He does not mean that Jesus was the first one created, as the cults like to say, but that Jesus has the preeminence over all of creation.

By calling Jesus the firstborn, the writer of Hebrews is saying that Jesus is preeminent over everything, which means he is preeminent over the angels and therefore better than them, which also means that we had better listen to him. And by saying that Jesus was begotten, he is saying that Jesus is the only one who also has the divine nature of the Father, that he is God himself, which is another reason why he is better than the angels and another reason why we should listen to him. Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish Chris-

tians who were thinking about leaving Christianity and returning to Judaism. The writer of Hebrews is saying to them that they should stay with Jesus because he is better than the Judaism from which they had come.

Lesson 7

The Reliability of the Bible

Heb. 1:6

Heb. 1:6, speaking of the Son, says, “Let all the angels of God worship him.” This is a quote from Deut. 32:43, but if you read Deut. 32:43 in our modern English translations you will not find this statement:

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people;
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
And render vengeance to His adversaries;
He will provide atonement for His land and His people.”

Our modern translations are based on the Hebrew text, but this quote comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew:

“Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice

to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.”

The Greek translation is known as the Septuagint. It was translated around 200 BC. The Jews believed that 72 Jewish scholars made this translation. When it was introduced to the Romans, who spoke Latin, it was given a very long Latin title that essentially said, “This is the Greek translation as done by the seventy and two.” The Latin word for seventy is *septuagint*. It became customary to refer to this translation as the Septuagint, rather than by its long title. It was very popular with the Jews, especially those outside of the Holy Land who could no longer speak or read Hebrew. For this reason, the New Testament writers quoted from it quite often.

Why does the Greek differ from the Hebrew? If the Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant word of God, would not the Greek agree with the Hebrew? Would not all of the copies of the Scriptures be the same?

There are two reasons why the Greek differs from the Hebrew. First, the Septuagint did not always translate literally. Some passages were literal whereas other passages were more like a paraphrase. Second, the authors of the Bible wrote on parchment or papyrus, both of which decay. Computers and printing presses did not exist back then, so as the original writings decayed, copies had to be made by hand. The problem with making copies by hand is that mistakes can be made.

When we say that the Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant word of God, we mean that the originals

were inspired and inerrant; the copies have errors. Because of the errors, some, like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, say that we cannot trust that we have what the authors originally wrote. The Mormons say that God is gradually revealing to their prophets what the Bible originally said, so they are in the process of "fixing" it. Still others, including the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses and scholars like Bart Ehrman, say that the Bible was deliberately changed to match what we believe. Let me tell you why they are wrong.

Every ancient book has undergone this process. We do not have the original manuscripts of Plato's books. We only have handwritten copies of them. We do not have the original *Iliad* by Homer. We only have handwritten copies of it. But in each case, scholars are extremely interested in knowing what the original said.

To find out what the original said, scholars gather all of the copies of any given work. They then look for two factors when they examine the copies.

The first factor is age. The older a copy is, the less errors it is likely to have. Let us say that a scribe made a copy of the original and made a mistake. A second scribe then made a copy of the copy, reproducing that mistake, and making one of his own. A third scribe then made a copy of the second copy, reproducing the two mistakes, and making one of his own. The first copy, being the older copy, has fewer mistakes than the other two. So the older a copy is, the less errors it is likely to have.

The second factor is the number of copies: the more copies we have, the easier it is to determine what the original said. If we have eight copies of a book, and four

say one thing and the other four say something else, it is difficult to know which ones are correct. But if we have 5000 copies of a book, and 100 say one thing and the other 4900 say something else, we have a very good idea as to which ones are correct.

Let us look at some ancient works and see how many copies we have and how old they are. Plato's *Tetralogies* was written somewhere between 427 BC and 347 BC. The oldest copy was made around 900 AD, creating a gap of at least 1250 years. We possess only 7 copies. Homer's *Iliad* was written about 800 BC. The oldest copy was made about 400 BC, creating a gap of 400 years. We possess 643 copies. There are many other examples that could be cited.

Now compare that information with the New Testament. It was written by 80-90 AD. The oldest, almost complete, New Testament was made around 325-350 AD, creating a gap of only 270 years. We have only 3 copies of the complete or almost complete New Testament. But we also have copies of the books or portions of the books. The oldest known copy is a portion which contains John 18:31-33 and 37. It was copied around 130 AD, which is a gap of only 50 years. Altogether, we have 5000 copies in Greek and another 20,000 copies in other languages. We can also look at the quotations of the New Testament in the writings of the early Church leaders. It has been said that the entire New Testament can be reconstructed just from the quotes of the early Church leaders.

All of the other ancient literary works have far fewer copies. The *Iliad*, with 643 copies, comes in second. For the majority of ancient works, we have only five to

twelve copies of each one. And yet, scholars are reasonably certain that they have been able to accurately reconstruct most of the original text for these ancient works.

The small gap between the original writings and the oldest copies as well as the sheer number of copies makes the New Testament the easiest text to reconstruct and assures us that the copies which we read in our homes are in fact reliable copies of the original text. Some textual critics have even said that the New Testament copies are more reliable than any ten ancient literary works combined.

This information also tells us that changes to the New Testament could not have been deliberately made. How do you retrieve and replace 5000 copies that were scattered all over the Roman Empire without somebody getting suspicious?

We do not have many copies of the Old Testament because the Jews burned the ones with errors. Until recently, the oldest copy we had was made around 1000 AD, which is a gap of 1400 years between it and Malachi. However, in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves above the Dead Sea. They were written around 300-100 BC, which is a gap of only 100-300 years after Malachi and 1300 years earlier than our previously oldest copy. The Dead Sea Scrolls include a copy of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. The Dead Sea Scrolls are very similar to the other copy, which means that the Old Testament has been reliably copied for more than a thousand years.

The copies of both the Old Testament and the New Testament do contain errors, but that fact does not

disprove the reliability of the Bible. What we call errors, scholars call variants. Bart Ehrman claims that the New Testament has 400,000 variants. The implication is that the New Testament has so many errors that we cannot trust it. However, what he does not say is how scholars count the variants, nor does he say how insignificant most of those variants are.

Sometimes a Greek word is spelled one way in some copies and spelled a different way in other copies. It is similar to the difference in how Americans spell “theater” and the British spell “theatre.” If 3000 copies spell a Greek word one way and 2000 copies spell it a different way, scholars count that as 2000 variants. And that is just for one word in one verse. These variants are insignificant because the different spelling does not change the meaning of the word or the meaning of the verse.

Only 12.5% of New Testament verses have variants. If we were to write the New Testament in only 100 pages and put all of these verses together, they would take up only 8 pages. Some of the variants do change the meaning of the text. However, only 1.66% of verses have variants that change the meaning of the text. If we put all of these verses together in our 100-page New Testament, they would take up only 1 and 2/3 pages. That means we have 98.33% of the original text. And none of these variants change the doctrines historically taught by the Christian Church.

The same is true for the Old Testament. Very few variants alter the meaning of the text and none change the doctrines taught by the Church.

But why did God allow the errors in the first place? Why did he not make sure that no errors were made? Why did God not preserve the originals? One probable reason is our propensity for idolatry. As it is, some people have a relationship with their Bible, not with the author of the Bible. We must remember that the purpose of the Bible is to help us develop a close relationship with God, not replace him.

Lesson 8

The Tanak Proves that Jesus is Better than the Angels

Heb. 1:5-14

The main point that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews wants to make is that the new covenant, which was mediated by Jesus, is better than the old covenant, which was mediated by the angels. One way he proves this is by showing that Jesus is better than the angels.

The writer is not relying on his own authority. He is relying on something his audience already accepts as authoritative: the Old Testament. Since the unbelieving Jews do not acknowledge that there is a new covenant instituted by Jesus and therefore do not accept the 27 books of the New Testament, they do not refer to the Old Testament as “The Old Testament.” They call it “The Tanak.”

They also do not arrange the 39 books in the same order in which we arrange them. This is how we arrange the 39 books:

Historical Books (17 books)

1. The Law (5 books): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
2. The Former Prophets (12 books): Joshua through Esther

Poetry (5 books): Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes

The Prophets (17 books)

1. The Major Prophets (5 books): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
2. The Minor Prophets (12 books): Hosea through Malachi

This is how the Jews arrange the 39 books:

Torah (The Law) (5 books): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Nephilim (The Prophets) (21 books)

1. The Former Prophets (6 books): Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings
2. The Latter Prophets (15 books): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve

Kethubim (The Writings) (13 books): Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles

The first letters of these three divisions (TNK) do not spell a word, so they added an “a” between each one (TaNaK) to make the word, Tanak.

Jesus refers to these divisions in Luke 24:44-45. Since the first book in the third division is Psalms, this division is sometimes called Psalms.

The writer of Hebrews will pull at least one quote from each division, his point being that you can find the proof that Jesus is better than the angels throughout the Scriptures, in every division. All of the quotes are from the Septuagint.

Verse 5 quotes Ps. 2:7 (The Kethubim). It also quotes 2 Sam. 7:14 (The Nephilim). In context, both passages refer to the Son as a king. Ps 2 says that the Lord has set the Son as king in Zion and that all of the kings of the earth would be wise to submit to him. In 2 Sam. 7:14, God is speaking to David about Solomon, who will be the next king of Israel. The writer of Hebrews says that this statement about Solomon also applies to Jesus. Thus, the writer is reminding his audience that Jesus has been appointed the king over the whole earth.

Verse 6 quotes Deut. 32:43 (The Torah). If all of the angels are worshipping the Son, then he is not one of the angels. Only God can be rightly worshipped (Ex. 34:14), so if the Father commands the angels to worship the Son, then the Son must also be God.

Verse 7 quotes Ps. 104:4. “Ministers” is another word for “servant.” The angels are servants.

Verses 8-9 quote Ps. 45:6-7. The entire psalm praises “the King,” but it never names the King. The writer of Hebrews says that this King is the Son. The

psalm calls the King, “God,” so again the Son must also be God.

Verses 10-12 quote Ps. 102:25-27. Here the writer calls the Son, Lord, meaning again that he is God. Though the earth and the heavens will perish, the Son, like God, will remain, meaning that he will live forever. The Son, like God, will not change but will remain the same (Heb. 13:8).

In verses 7-12 the writer contrasts the angels, who are servants, with the Son, who is the King of all of creation. In verses 13-14, he reverses the order of that contrast, saying again that the Son is King, while the angels are servants.

Verse 13 quotes Ps. 110:1. The second in command over a kingdom sat at the right hand of the King. So the Son has been appointed King over all of creation, but still answers to the Father. Ps. 110 has long been recognized by the Jews as referring to the Messiah (the Christ). Jesus used this Psalm to ask the Pharisees a question which they could not answer (Matt. 22:41-46). The Jews recognized that the coming Messiah would be the son (a descendant) of David. In normal circumstances, the son (or descendant) is not Lord over the father. Yet in Psalm 110, David calls the coming Messiah his Lord. Jesus was trying to get the Pharisees to think about who the Messiah really is by asking, “How can the Messiah be both the Son of David and the Lord of David?” The answer, of course, is that since Jesus is a man, he is physically the Son of David but because he is also God, he is the Lord of David.

In contrast to the Son being the King, the angels, as verse 14 states, are just servants who serve the believers.

Therefore, the Son, Jesus, is better than the angels because they are just servants while the Son is both God and King. This is why he has a more excellent name than the angels (Heb. 1:4). And the Tanak proves that this is true.

Digression

The Lord's Supper: Its Significance and Observance

1 Cor. 11:17-34

We are digressing from the Epistle to the Hebrews to answer the questions: Why is the Lord's Supper significant? And how was it observed in the early Church? You will see in succeeding Lessons how the answers to those questions tie in to important concepts in the Epistle.

Let us start with how Luke relates the first time the Lord celebrated this supper:

When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for

you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:14-20).

Passover was usually celebrated in the home with the family, or, if one family could not afford to buy the Passover lamb, two families. By celebrating the Passover with the apostles, Jesus was signifying that they were his family.

Luke mentions only two cups of wine, but as it was celebrated in Jesus’ time, the Passover celebration involved four cups of red wine mixed with water. When the fourth cup was ready to be passed around at the end of the meal, the participants would sing Psalms 115 through 118. This is probably the hymn mentioned in Matt. 26:30 and Mark 14:26. The host would then recite two traditional prayers over the cup and pass it around. What Jesus did with the third cup is what makes the Lord’s Supper significant.

The traditional Passover celebration began when the host (in this case, Jesus) took the first cup, gave thanks by saying a traditional prayer over it, and passed it around. This is the first cup that Luke mentions. The wine was then poured into the second cup. In the traditional celebration, the son (or the youngest person present) would ask why the Passover was celebrated and the father (or the host) would explain why by reciting Israel’s history from the time of Terah, Abraham’s father, through to the miraculous deliverance from Egypt and the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. If Jesus and the apostles followed this tradition, then

John, being the youngest, asked the question and Jesus gave the explanation. Then they sang Psalms 113 and 114, ate the traditional bitter herbs, and then passed around the second cup. Jesus broke a cake of unleavened bread, and gave thanks for it. The writings of the rabbis from that time specifically say that the giving of thanks always followed the breaking of the bread. That is how we know that this bread is not the bread mentioned in Luke's passage. That will come later.

Bitter herbs were placed between the pieces of the broken bread, which were then dipped in the sop and handed out to everyone. At this point, Jesus gave a piece of the bread to Judas and said, "What you do, do quickly." Judas took the bread and left (John 13:21-30). Jesus and the apostles then ate the Passover meal.

As they were ending the meal, Jesus deviated from the tradition. He took another cake of unleavened bread, which is not done at the end of the traditional Passover meal, gave thanks and then broke it, reversing the traditional order. Jesus did this to signify that he was starting a new tradition. He then told the apostles what that new tradition would be by taking the third cup, which is the second cup mentioned in Luke's passage. The Jews referred to this cup as "the cup of blessing" (as does Paul in 1 Cor. 10:16) because the host would bless the cup by saying a traditional prayer over it in which he gave thanks for it. Matthew tells us that Jesus gave thanks for this cup (Matt. 26:27), but when he passed it around, he said something new: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you." Because the apostles grew up in the Jewish culture of

the first century AD, they immediately recognized the significance of Jesus' words. However, we do not, so for us to understand the significance of Jesus' words, we need to go back to the Old Testament and get some background information.

In Gen. 17:1-8, God appears to Abram and makes a covenant with him. As part of this covenant, God changes his name from Abram to Abraham. In the ancient Near East, when a man acquired a slave, he would often change the name of the slave. Or if a king conquered some people and brought them into his service, he would change their names. Changing the name signified to the slave or the conquered people that they now belonged to the man or the king. This is why Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of Daniel and his friends. By changing Abram's name to Abraham, God was saying that Abraham now belonged to God. But notice that God also said that he would "be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7). That is, in this covenant, God, Abraham, and Abraham's descendants would mutually possess each other. This mutual possession is precisely what we see in a marriage: the man and the woman possess each other. This covenant, therefore, was a marriage covenant in which Abraham and his descendants would have a deep, intimate relationship with God himself. Furthermore, because "name" also means "character," God was saying that because of this marriage relationship, Abraham's character would be changed for the better.

Years later, God made a covenant with Israel through Moses, and in that covenant, God says, "I will

walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Lev. 26:12). God and Israel would mutually possess each other, as in a marriage. God intended for Israel to have a deep, intimate relationship with him, as a man and a woman do in a marriage relationship.

The prophet Hosea saw the Mosaic covenant as a marriage relationship between God and Israel, but he also saw that Israel had broken that covenant. When Hosea’s wife gave birth to their second child, a daughter, God said, “Call her name Lo-Ruhamah [No Mercy], for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel” (Hos. 1:6). When Hosea’s wife gave birth to their third child, a son, God said, “Call his name Lo-Ammi [Not My People], for you are not My people, and I will not be your God” (Hos. 1:9).

But Hosea also saw that this marriage relationship would be restored by God:

“And it shall be, in that day,”
Says the LORD,
“That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’
And no longer call Me ‘My Master’...
I will betroth you to Me forever;
Yes, I will betroth you to Me
In righteousness and justice,
In lovingkindness and mercy;
I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,
And you shall know the LORD...
Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth,
And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained
mercy;
Then I will say to those who were not My people,

‘You are My people!’

And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’” (Hos. 2:16, 19-20, 23).

Peter refers to this prophecy when he says that we believers “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Jeremiah also saw the Mosaic covenant as a marriage relationship which Israel had broken and he, too, saw that this relationship would be restored by God but through a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes this prophecy from Jeremiah and states that the new covenant is the one that Jesus established and is the one in which we now participate (Heb. 8:6-13).

Thus, the new covenant which Jesus spoke about when he passed the third cup around is a marriage covenant in which the believers enter into a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus and God himself. But the way he said this only emphasized his point even more.

In the Jewish culture of that time, marriages were arranged by the fathers of the future bride and groom. When it was time for the bride and groom to get engaged, the groom and his father would go to the house of the bride and her father, where the fathers would make the final negotiations, including setting the price of the dowry that the groom would pay to the bride’s

father. Then the groom's father would pour a cup of wine and hand it to his son. The groom would turn to the bride and say, "This cup is a new covenant in my blood, which I offer to you." It was his way of saying, "I love you so much that I am willing to die for you. Will you marry me?" The bride accepted his proposal by drinking from the cup.

The apostles, therefore, knew immediately that when Jesus presented the third cup, he was proposing marriage to them as representatives of the Church. They accepted that proposal by drinking from the cup. This is why the Church is pictured as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7-8).

The same is true for each of us. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper and drink from the cup, we are accepting Jesus' marriage proposal. We are saying, "Yes, I want to enter into that deep, intimate relationship with you."

That is the significance of the Lord's Supper. How was it observed by the early Church? To answer that, we need to turn to 1 Cor. 11:17-34.

Many churches, when they celebrate the Lord's Supper, will read only verses 23-26 and maybe talk about verses 27-29, but to understand what Paul is saying about the Lord's Supper, we need to read these verses in their context.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul usually starts a new subject with the word "Now." It is his way of saying, "I am done talking about this subject. Now I am ready to talk about a new subject." He uses the word in 11:17 to indicate that he is done talking about the covering for a woman's head. He uses it again in 12:1 to indicate that he

is now ready to talk about the spiritual gifts. This means that Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper begins at verse 17 and ends at verse 34.

The Corinthian church celebrated the Lord's Supper by having dinner together. They held a potluck. At some point during the dinner, they would break the bread and pass around the wine (which was mixed with water, just like the wine in the Passover celebration). Did every church celebrate the Lord's Supper this way? I cannot confirm that. However, many of the early Church leaders referred to these dinners as "love feasts" and implied that they were held frequently. From the writings of the Church leaders after 150 AD, we see that at least some of the churches had already begun to celebrate the Lord's Supper as part of their formal services on Sunday by passing around the bread and the wine (but no dinner).

Paul does not commend the Corinthians for the way they were celebrating the Lord's Supper because "each one takes his supper ahead of others and one is hungry," meaning, apparently, that some people would take more than their fair share of the food and leave others with nothing to eat. Wine was also available and some were drinking too much of it. In other words, some of the people were thinking only of themselves and not taking into consideration the needs of their Christian brothers and sisters. This is why Paul asks, "Do you despise the church of God?" The Lord's Supper is not about us; it is about everyone else.

Paul then recites what happened at the Lord's Supper to remind the Corinthians that they were to celebrate it in remembrance of Jesus. Again, the Lord's

Supper is not about us; it is about Jesus. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remind us of what Jesus did for us by going to the cross. "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27). In fact, each of us is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord because it was our sin that sent him to the cross. But the one who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner is, in essence, trying to nail Jesus to the cross a second time. That is why he is especially guilty of the body and blood of Jesus.

Paul also says, "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (v. 29). What does Paul mean by "discerning the Lord's body"?

The Catholics teach that during the Lord's Supper the bread and the wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. The person who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, therefore, brings judgment upon himself because he thinks that the bread is still just a piece of bread. He does not discern that the bread has now become the actual body of Christ.

But this is not what Paul meant, nor is it what Jesus meant. Jesus did not mean that the bread is his actual body any more than he meant that he was an actual loaf of bread when he said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). The bread is merely symbolic of his body, not his actual body.

The Protestants understand verse 29 to mean that a person eats and drinks in an unworthy manner if he or she has unrepentant sin or if he or she has something against another Christian. This person should re-

pent of his or her sin or should fix the relationship with the other Christian before partaking of the Lord's Supper. I know that this understanding goes all the back to the second century AD, but Paul never says this is what he meant by eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

What he does say is that he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner is "not discerning the Lord's body." By that, Paul means that he is not recognizing the Church, which is the Lord's body. Back in 1 Cor. 10:16-17, Paul says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." The one bread is not the body of Christ. We are, for all of us share that one bread. He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, therefore, is placing himself above all the other Christians at the dinner and taking food ahead of the others because he does not recognize that he and the others are all members of the same body, the body of Christ.

The early Church leaders called these dinners "love feasts" because the Christians came together to love one another. He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner is not loving Jesus or the other Christians. He is thinking only of himself.

This is why Paul says that many of the Corinthians were weak and sick and asleep (dead). The Lord was chastening them so that they would not be condemned with the rest of the world.

Paul ends this discussion on the Lord's Supper by saying, "Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment." The Lord's Supper is about loving others by placing them ahead of me. If I am so hungry that I cannot wait for others to get their food first, I should eat at home. Otherwise, I may bring judgment upon myself.

Therefore, the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper is to bring Christians together to share a meal because they are a family whose members love one another. The purpose is also to remind us that we have entered into a marriage relationship with Jesus and God himself in which we should love Jesus and God the way a bride should love her groom. And its purpose is to remind us of what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross for our sins. In short, the purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remind us that we should love Jesus and God and each other the way that Jesus loves us.

Lesson 9
Salvation is a Process
Heb. 1:14

In Heb. 1:14, the writer of the Epistle declares that the angels minister to “those who will inherit salvation.” This seems to imply that salvation is something that we will obtain sometime in the future. But aren’t we already saved?

The subject in this Lesson is an example of why, when we study a topic in the Bible, we need to read everything the Bible has to say about it. If we read only certain passages and ignore the others, we will end up with a distorted doctrine.

Some Scriptures speak of salvation as a *past* event, that is, as something that happened to us when we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He

saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:4-5).

“For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24).

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim. 1:8-9).

But other Scriptures, including Heb. 1:14, speak of salvation as a *future* event, something that will be obtained in the future.

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:9-10).

“Who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5).

“Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy

inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb. 9:27-28).

Still other Scriptures speak of salvation as an *ongoing* event, that is, they speak of us as being saved.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 2:15).

Salvation, therefore, is a process which began when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and will be completed when Christ comes back again.

To understand why salvation is a process, we need to ask a question: from what are we saved? If the purpose of salvation is to simply save us from hell and get us to heaven, why are we still here?

The answer is that God has given each of us something to do. Paul tells us in Ephesians that our good works do not save us, but God still expects us to do good works: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of

God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10).

God has prepared good works for each and every one of us. Those works will vary from person to person, but God expects each of us to accomplish what he has given us to do. God, therefore, expects obedience.

This tells us from what we have been saved. We have been saved from disobedience, that is, we have been saved from sin. Jesus said to the Jews, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34-36). Jesus wants to make us free from sin. As John the apostle states in his epistle, “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). This is why John the Baptist introduced Jesus as, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The writer of Hebrews says, “He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9).

The punishment for sin is eternal death in the lake of fire. Salvation, therefore, does not simply save us from hell and the lake of fire; it saves us from what is sending us there, from sin.

Why is the punishment for sin eternal death? To understand why, we need to know the Biblical definition for death. James 2:26 says, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” At death, the spirit does not cease to exist; it separates

itself from the body. This is why the body dies. The body will come back to life when the spirit unites with the body again at the resurrection.

Hence, biblically speaking, death occurs whenever there is a separation. Life occurs whenever there is a union.

This is true in all facets of life. A marriage comes alive when a man and a woman unite. A marriage dies whenever there is a divorce, a separation. A church comes alive when the believers gather together and love one another. A church dies whenever there is division, a separation.

The Scriptures tell us that we obtain eternal life by uniting ourselves with God and Jesus Christ, by having a relationship with God and Jesus Christ, by becoming one with God and Jesus Christ. In his prayer to his Father, Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ means having a relationship with them. As we saw in the Digression, this relationship is a deep, intimate relationship, a marriage relationship with Christ.

Having a relationship with God gives us eternal life because God *is* eternal life. He does not just have eternal life which he can give us. He is eternal life. As Moses told the Israelites, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey

His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life” (Deut. 30:19-20).

Having a marriage relationship with Jesus also gives us eternal life because Jesus is also eternal life. “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11). Eternal life, therefore, is not a gift which God and Jesus can give us separate from them. I can give you a gift separate from me because I am not the gift. But God and Jesus *are* eternal life. We cannot have eternal life without having them.

Before we had this deep, intimate relationship with God, our sins separated us from him. They severed our relationship with God. “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Is. 59:2).

This is why the Scriptures say that we were dead in our sins:

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:4-5).

We were dead (separated from God and Christ) in our trespasses and sins but now God has made us alive (united with God and Christ). However, those who never put their faith in Jesus Christ will be separated

from God (not have a relationship with God) for eternity. This is why the punishment for sin is eternal death.

Death and life, of course, are opposite terms. Biblically speaking, they are also relative terms. By that, I mean that if you are alive to something, you are also dead to something else. If a man marries a woman, he is alive to (united with) that woman but dead to (separated from) all other women. You are always dead and alive at the same time. What you are dead to and what you are alive to depends on your relationship.

Paul uses this principle to talk about our relationship to God and to sin: “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:11). Before we became Christians, we were alive to (united with) sin but dead to (separated from) God. Now that we are Christians, we are to consider ourselves as dead to (separated from) sin but alive to (united with) God in Christ Jesus.

God, therefore, is in the process of saving us from our sins because our sins separate us from him and he so very much wants us to be with him. He has chosen to save us through a three-step process.

The Scriptures tell us that there are three parts to our being. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). The three parts are the spirit, soul, and body.

The three parts were designed by God to work in a certain order:

This is how it is supposed to work:

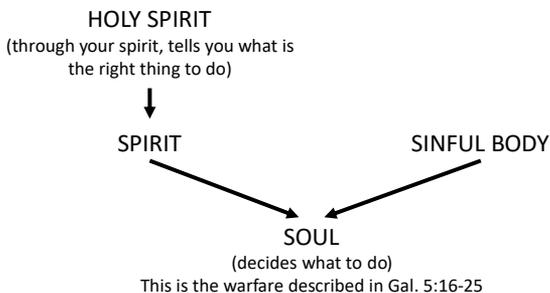


But sin has reversed this:



God wants to redeem all three parts. The process of redemption (salvation) begins when we put our faith in Christ and become one with him. At that moment, our spirits are born again and are saved from sin. This is why some Scriptures speak of salvation as a past event. Our spirits are now united with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

When a person is born again, the spirit is made alive again:



While we are here on this earth, our minds (which are a part of our souls) are being renewed. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Our souls are being redeemed (saved) while we live on this earth.

But our bodies have not yet been redeemed (saved). Sin still remains in our bodies. As Paul confesses in Rom. 7:18, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.” That is why, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom 7:25). A day is coming in which our bodies will be redeemed. “Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Rom. 8:23-25).

Our bodies will be redeemed when Christ comes back and resurrects us with bodies that are free from sin. That is why Hebrews 9:28 says that Christ will come back a second time for salvation, for then the process of saving us from sin will be complete. Then, and only then, will we inherit salvation and be completely free from sin.

Lesson 10

Predestination or Free Will or Both?

Heb. 2:1-4

This passage, Heb. 2:1-4, brings up the difficult and controversial subject of whether or not we can lose our salvation. If I am saved, will I always be saved? Or can I lose my salvation? If so, how do I lose it? Along with this subject inevitably comes the equally difficult and controversial subject of predestination versus free will. Does the Bible teach predestination or does it teach free will? Or does it teach both? To answer these questions, we must cover a lot of information and background material. In this Lesson, I will talk about predestination and free will. In the next Lesson, I will talk about whether we can lose our salvation.

In Heb. 2:1-4, the writer of the Epistle gives the first of five warnings to his readers. The other warnings are in 3:6-4:13, 6:4-8, 10:23-39, and 12:12-29. We must remember that the Epistle is addressed to a group of Jewish believers who are considering abandoning Christianity and returning to Judaism. The writer alternates giving them positive reasons why they should

stay with Jesus with warnings about what will happen to them if they leave Jesus.

In this passage, the writer contrasts the message which the angels spoke, which is the Law, with the message which the Lord spoke, which is salvation. When people disobeyed what the angels said, they “received a just reward,” that is, they were punished. How much worse will the punishment be for those who disobey what the Lord has said?

“Therefore” in verse 1 refers back to 1:14, which says that the angels are ministering spirits to those who will inherit salvation. It also refers back to the writer’s point in chapter 1 that Jesus is better than the angels. “More earnest” in the Greek also means more abundant. “Drift away” more literally means “to flow by, to pass by.” It was sometimes used by Greek writers to refer to forgetting something (“it escapes me,” “it slips my mind”). The writer of the Epistle is saying, “Therefore, since Jesus is greater than the angels and since we will inherit salvation, we must give heed all the more abundantly to the things we have heard, lest we pass them by and forget them.”

The Old Covenant, the Law, which was spoken by the angels, “proved steadfast,” but the greatness of the salvation spoken by the Lord has additional witnesses who can confirm its greatness. First of all, “those who heard Him,” that is, the Lord’s disciples, confirmed that the Lord did speak of this great salvation.

Second, God himself bore witness to the truth of what the Lord and the disciples had said through signs and wonders and miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. “Gifts” here is actually the Greek word for

“distributions,” which refers to the fact that the Holy Spirit distributes the gifts as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11).

If we neglect this great salvation which was spoken by the Lord, confirmed by his disciples, and witnessed by God himself, what makes us think that we can escape the judgment that must surely come? The writer is so concerned that his readers will neglect this salvation that he makes the same point again near the end of the Epistle: “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (Heb. 12:25).

Salvation, as we learned in Lesson 9, is a process. In one sense, we have already been saved (because our spirits have been born again). In another sense, our salvation will not be complete until we are resurrected with our immortal and sinless bodies. If we drop out of the process, the process will not be completed, that is, we will not be saved. The writer of the Epistle is telling us that it is possible to drop out of the process by drifting away and neglecting this salvation.

By saying that we can drift away, the writer is not saying that this happens overnight. You don’t go to bed one night as a believer and wake up the next morning an unbeliever. It is a gradual process, usually so gradual that you are not aware you are doing it. When you became a believer, you had an intense love for the Lord and a zeal for the Lord and because of that, you had a high standard for yourself. You wanted to become like Christ. You wanted to become perfect. You wanted to become holy. But somewhere along the way you

lowered the standard a little bit, and then a little bit more, and then a little bit more. You started to justify behaviors that you know are not Biblical, but “Well, you know, God understands.” If you continue to lower the standard, your behavior will become no different than the behavior of the world. You will go back to doing what you used to do before you became a believer.

This process of drifting away is happening to more and more Christians today. I recently saw a video of a pastor who said that he has been in ministry for the past 25 years, but in the last 5 years he has seen more Christians in his office who want a divorce than he had seen in the previous 20 years. This is happening because the churches themselves are drifting away. A church may start off teaching and doing everything that is 100% Biblical, but then they accept a doctrine that is 99% true but 1% lie, then they accept another 1% lie, and then another, to the point where they are now telling the people to not bring their Bibles to the services because it might offend the unbelievers who are sitting nearby.

This passage, and many others like it throughout the New Testament, teach that it is possible to walk away from salvation. Many Christians, however, argue that the Bible does not teach that we can walk away from salvation, that once we are saved, we are always saved. To answer whether or not the Bible teaches that we can walk away from our salvation, we need to start with what the Bible says about how we acquire salvation in the first place. Did God choose us before the foundation of the world to be saved? Or did we choose to be saved?

Those who say that God chose us before the foundation of the world believe in the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine has existed since the first century, but it was most ably defended by John Calvin (1509-1564), a French reformer who headed the church in Geneva, Switzerland. Because of this, the doctrine is also known as Calvinism. This is the belief held by the Southern Baptists and the Presbyterians.

Calvinism emphasizes the sovereignty of God. Before the foundation of the world, God in his sovereignty chose who would be saved and who would not be saved. That decision was not based on anything any person would do, but on the purposes and will of God. People choose to get saved because God has already chosen them to be saved. Each person's choice to be saved or not to be saved, therefore, is determined by whether God has already chosen to save that person or not. In other words, you chose to be saved *because* God chose you to be saved before the foundation of the world.

There are Scriptures which support this doctrine:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:3-5, see also vv. 6-11).

Rom. 8:29-30

Rom. 9:10-21

Prov. 16:4

John 1:11-13

John 15:16

This is why the Scriptures sometimes refer to the believers as the elect:

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering” (Col. 3:12).

1 Pet. 1:1-2

Those who say that we chose to be saved believe in the doctrine of free will. This doctrine has also existed since the first century, but it was first systematized by Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch professor and former pastor. Because of this, the doctrine is also known as Arminianism. This is the belief held by the Methodists and most Pentecostal churches, including the Assemblies of God.

Arminianism emphasizes the responsibility of man. Each person is free to choose to be saved or not to be saved, and therefore, each person is responsible for the choice he or she makes. If a person ends up condemned to spend eternity in hell, it is because that person chose to be condemned. God certainly does not predestine anyone to condemnation. The Scriptures that speak about predestination mean that God, before the foundation of the world, foresaw who would freely choose to be saved. Those are the ones he

predestined for salvation. God's choice to save a person, therefore, is determined by that person's choice to be saved or not to be saved. In other words, God chose you to be saved before the foundation of the world *because* you chose to be saved.

There are Scriptures which support this doctrine as well:

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deut. 30:19).

Josh. 24:14-15

John 3:15-16

Rev. 22:17

So which doctrine is correct? Who chose to save us? Did God choose to save us before the foundation of the world (predestination)? Or did we choose to be saved (free will)?

The answer is Yes. Since the Scriptures teach both doctrines, both of them must be true. There are also passages in the Scriptures in which both doctrines appear.

In Acts 13:44-48, the Jews chose to reject the Gospel. That's free will. So Paul and Barnabas preached to the Gentiles. "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." That's predestination. In Jer. 18:1-10, God first tells Israel that he can do with them whatever he wants. That's predestination. He then tells

them that whether he punishes or blesses a nation depends on what they choose to do. That's free will.

This is not to say that everything Calvinism or Arminianism teaches is true. All I am saying is that the Calvinists are correct when they say that the Scriptures teach predestination and that the Arminians are correct when they say that the Scriptures teach free will.

How can both of these doctrines be true at the same time? How do we reconcile these two doctrines? We don't. The Scriptures do not try to reconcile these two doctrines, so neither should we. We should just accept the fact that both are true even though they appear contradictory to us. I found this interesting statement in a commentary:

“Most people in ancient Judaism stressed both God's sovereignty and human free will, which they saw as complementary. (Modern views that see them as contradictory are based more on Greek logic than on Jewish thought or the Bible.)”

It is only our limited human understanding that makes us see these two as contradictory.

Trying to reconcile these two doctrines is like trying to reconcile how Jesus can be fully God and fully man at the same time. These two truths seem contradictory to us, but the Scriptures do not try to reconcile these two. In fact, every human attempt to reconcile these two has been declared a heresy by the Church because every attempt inevitably denies the full deity of Christ or the full humanity of Christ. Any attempt to use our limited human understanding to reconcile free will

and predestination will inevitably lessen one or the other.

Even though we do not understand how these two can work together, we can trust that God is knowledgeable and wise enough to know how they work together. Is. 46:8-11 tells us that God sees the end from the beginning and that God has a predetermined plan. God is so wise and powerful that he can give all of us free will and still pull it off. God, therefore, knows how to make predestination and free will work together.

What should our response be to all of this? Since God did not predestine everyone to eternal life but he did choose to predestine us, our response should be thankfulness.

Praise the LORD!

Praise the name of the LORD;

Praise Him, O you servants of the LORD!

You who stand in the house of the LORD,

In the courts of the house of our God,

Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good;

Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant.

For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself,

Israel for his special treasure (Ps. 135:1-4).

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

We should be thankful that God, before the foundation of the world, chose us to be saved even though he did not have to do so and even though we certainly did not deserve to be saved.

If the Scriptures teach both predestination and free will, does that mean that we can lose our salvation? That is the subject for the next Lesson.

Lesson 11

Can We Walk Away from Our Salvation?

Heb. 2:1-4

When we studied Heb. 1:14 in Lesson 9, we saw that salvation is a process. There are Scriptures that speak of salvation as a past event (we were saved). There are also Scriptures that speak of salvation as a future event (we will be saved). And there are still other Scriptures that speak of salvation as an ongoing event (we are being saved). But if salvation is a process, can we drop out of the process before it is finished? Can we walk away from salvation?

The question is more popularly phrased as, “Can we lose our salvation?” We can phrase the question this way as long as we understand, as we shall see, that we do not accidentally lose our salvation the way that we accidentally lose our car keys. We “lose” our salvation when we make the conscious decision that we no longer want it, so we give it back or we walk away from it. But can we walk away? Do the Scriptures teach that we can actually walk away from salvation?

Heb. 2:1-4, says that we can. We can neglect salvation. We can drift away from the things we have heard about salvation and forget the words which the Lord himself spoke concerning salvation. If those who disobeyed the words spoken by the angels when the Law was given are punished, how much stricter will the punishment be for us if we disobey the words of the Lord?

Another Scripture that says we can walk away from salvation and drop out of the process is Matt. 10:22, in which Jesus, speaking to the disciples, says, "But he who endures to the end will be saved." In context, Jesus is talking about the persecution the disciples will face. The implication is that it will be tempting to avoid the persecution by giving up the faith, by walking away. But the believer who endures to the end, even in times of persecution, will be saved.

This statement raises a couple of questions. Does the believer automatically endure to the end? Or is it possible for the believer to stop enduring? How you answer those questions depends on whether you are a Calvinist or an Arminian.

As we saw in the last Lesson, the Calvinists believe in the doctrine of predestination. They also emphasize the sovereignty of God, meaning that God is in charge of everything and so whatever God wants, God gets. If God did predestine you to be saved, that is, if he chose you to spend eternity with him, then yes, you will automatically endure (or persevere, the word they prefer to use) to the end because God will make sure that you do. The believer cannot lose his or her salvation, the believer cannot give it back, and the believer cannot

walk away from it. God will see to it that the believer will make it to heaven. So the Calvinists believe in the doctrine popularly known as “once saved, always saved.”

There are Scriptures that support this answer:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:37-40).

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand (John 10:27-29).

The Arminians, however, believe in the doctrine of free will. They emphasize the responsibility of man.

Since the believer can freely choose to be saved, the believer can also freely choose to walk away from salvation. It is the responsibility of the believer to constantly choose to endure to the end. If he or she fails to do so, he or she will not be saved.

There are Scriptures to support that answer:

Speaking of Israel, Paul says, “For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Rom. 11:16-22).

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every

creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister (Col. 1:21-23).

2 Pet. 2:20-21

Heb. 6:4-8

Heb. 10:26-31

In the last Lesson, we learned that since the Scriptures teach both predestination and free will, then both doctrines must be true. We also learned that even though these two doctrines seem contradictory to us, we should not try to reconcile them because the Scriptures never try to reconcile them. The Scriptures simply acknowledge that both are true.

We have the same situation here. The Scriptures teach that God will make sure the believer endures to the end and they teach that the believer will endure to the end as long as he or she remains in the faith. How do we reconcile these doctrines? We can't, because the Scriptures never reconcile them.

And yet, the Calvinists and the Arminians do try to reconcile them. They try to explain away the Scriptures that support the other side. The Calvinists say that the Scriptures which warn the believer that he or she can walk away from salvation are speaking hypothetically, that they are speaking of something that is impossible for the believer to do. If that is so, then why did God bother to make sure these warnings made it into the Scriptures? Why would God warn us about something which is impossible for us to do?

Suppose I were to write a book about exploring the Earth and I say in there, "You can explore any part of

the planet you wish to explore, except the Land of Oz, because if you go there, the wicked Witch of the West will turn you into a flying monkey. Of course, I am only speaking hypothetically because the Land of Oz and the wicked Witch of the West and flying monkeys do not exist, so it is impossible for you to visit the Land of Oz. But I thought I would warn you anyway.” Would it be sensible for me to put that in my book? Of course not. Why, then, would God warn us about dropping out of the process of salvation if it is impossible for us to do so?

The Arminians argue that the Scriptures which say that Jesus will not lose any of the believers but will present them in heaven holy and blameless are all conditional. Jesus will accomplish this but only if we constantly choose to endure to the end. No one may be able to snatch us from Jesus’ hand or the Father’s hand, but we can choose to jump out of their hands. There is some truth to that last statement, as we shall see, but the Arminians put such an emphasis on our responsibility that they make it sound like if we do make it into heaven, it will not be because Jesus was faithful but because we were.

This leads me to one of the major problems with both the Calvinist and the Arminian positions. For all their differences, they wind up looking at Matt. 10:22 the same way. Jesus said that he who endures to the end will be saved, but both positions conclude that to prove you are a real Christian, that you are really saved, *you*, by your own strength, on your own, must endure to the end. Even though both agree that we are

saved by grace through faith, they make it sound like we maintain our salvation through faith and works.

To be clear, the Scriptures teach that if you have the true faith in Jesus Christ, you are truly saved, and if you are truly saved, you will do the good works that God has given you to do. Salvation produces good works, but good works do not produce salvation, nor do they maintain it.

The Calvinists have to acknowledge that people who at least claim to be Christian do walk away from the faith. In *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, Chuck Smith talks about a man, whom he never names, who was on Chuck's staff at Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, and who zealously preached the gospel. However, because of a disagreement with Chuck, the man resigned from the staff, left the church, and even left the faith. Instead of zealously preaching the gospel, he began to zealously preach against Christianity.

Since the Calvinists believe that it is impossible for a believer to leave the faith, they have to logically conclude that anyone who leaves the faith was never a believer in the first place. That person never had eternal life. That person was never saved.

Interestingly, because of this idea, the Calvinists, in general, are more afraid of not making it to heaven than the Arminians are. They tell themselves, "Today, I look like a Christian and act like a Christian. But what if tomorrow I stop being a Christian? Or I stop being a Christian ten years from now? That means that *today* I am not really a Christian. How, then, can I possibly know if I have truly been predestined to be saved?" The Calvinist cannot know if he or she has been saved until

he or she makes it into heaven. But to get there, he or she must endure or persevere to the end. And so, despite the Calvinists' belief that God will make sure that the believer will persevere to the end, it actually falls upon the Calvinist to make sure that he or she perseveres just to assure himself or herself that he or she is actually saved.

The Arminians, at least, believe they are saved. Today, anyway. Tomorrow is not assured. That is because the Arminians talk like a person can lose and regain his salvation daily. If you sin, you lose your salvation. But if you repent and get saved again, you regain your salvation. I have even heard some of them say, "You had better confess and repent of all of your sins before you die, or else you won't make it into heaven." In other words, if you sin and therefore lose your salvation and then die before you can repent, that's just too bad. You did not endure to the end. But that means salvation is based on works, and the Scriptures clearly teach that we are not saved by works.

Another problem with the Arminian position is that the Scriptures also teach in Heb. 6:4-6 that if a person falls away from salvation, "it is impossible" to renew them to repentance, because that would be the same as crucifying Christ all over again. If a person walks away from salvation, he or she cannot get it back.

Still another problem with the Arminian position is that even though they recognize that we are given eternal life when we believe in Jesus Christ and even though they recognize that eternal life is a gift from God, as Rom. 6:23 states, they make the mistake of viewing eternal life as a gift that is separate from God.

That is why they can picture salvation and eternal life as something that can be passed back and forth between God and the believer.

However, as we saw in Lesson 9, eternal life is not separate from God because God *is* eternal life, and, as 1 John 5:11 states, this life is in his Son, Jesus Christ. To have eternal life, therefore, we must have God and Jesus Christ, that is, we must enter into a deep, intimate marriage relationship with Jesus in which we become one with him. That is why Jesus says in John 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

We enter into this relationship through faith. Faith makes us one with Christ, and because we are one with Christ, Christ is our life, as Paul says in Col. 3:4. Paul also says in Gal. 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Eternal life is based on a relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

A man and a woman cannot get married unless both of them agree to enter into that relationship. The same is true with us and God. Predestination simply means that God chose, before the foundation of the world, to enter into this relationship with us. We, too, freely chose to enter into this relationship. Furthermore, a marriage will endure only if both the man and the woman agree to stay in the relationship. If either one of them drops out, the marriage is over. Again, the same is true with us and God. Our relationship with him will continue to endure as long as we both agree to stay

in this relationship. God will never drop out of it, but we can.

Eph. 2:8-9 tells us that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works. This means that we do not lose our salvation through works, that is, contrary to what the Arminians say, we do not lose our salvation by sinning. We lose our salvation through the opposite of faith, through unbelief. Rom. 11 tells us that the Israelites were broken off because of unbelief, which means that we, too, can be broken off because of unbelief. And Col. 1 says that Jesus will present us holy and blameless as long as we continue in the faith. If we turn from belief to unbelief, we sever our relationship with God and therefore cut ourselves off from salvation and eternal life.

Heb. 3:12-14 tells us how we turn from belief to unbelief. It tells us that, not just one sin or even a series of sins, but a lifestyle of sin will harden our hearts to the point that we no longer believe. That is when we sever our relationship with God and lose our salvation and eternal life. We get to the point where we say, "I no longer believe. I no longer want you God. I am ending this relationship." And then we walk away. This is not something that we accidentally do. This is a conscious and deliberate decision.

The Arminians, and the Calvinists as well, forget that salvation and eternal life are based on our relationship with God. The Calvinists emphasize God's sovereignty to the point that we basically contribute nothing to this relationship. But the Arminians emphasize our responsibility to the point that they forget God's promises to help us endure.

Paul did not forget. He understood that our salvation is based on our relationship with God. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” he says. Why? “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phi. 2:12-13). Since we are saved from sin, working out our salvation means learning to overcome sin, learning how to be obedient instead of disobedient, learning how to become like Christ. We are to do this with fear and trembling because we should be afraid of what God will do to us if we don’t work out our salvation.

But Paul also reminds us that we are not expected to do this alone or on our own strength. We can rely on God’s help because he is already working in us. And Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Our marriage relationship with God and Jesus is what will help us endure to the end.

I like to use the analogy of the doctor. Let’s suppose you have been diagnosed with cancer. The doctor tells you that he can operate and remove it, but first you must do certain things. You must see your regular doctor and go through the pre-op procedures. You must stop taking certain pills and vitamins. The morning of the surgery, you cannot eat or drink anything. After the surgery, you must go through radiation therapy. If you do all of that and the doctor operates and you are cured of the cancer, who gets the credit? The doctor does, because he knew what to do and he performed the operation to remove the cancer. But what if you don’t do any of those things and the doctor says, “Well, then, I cannot operate,” and then you die of the cancer. Whose fault is that? Yours.

Sin is the cancer that is sending us to eternal death. To get rid of it, we must work out our salvation and we must endure to the end. God has told us, in the Scriptures, how to do that. What's more, God is better than the doctor because he has also told us that he will help us work out our salvation and help us endure to the end. So, if we end up in heaven, sinless, blameless, and holy, who gets the credit for it? God does. But if we fail to work out our salvation and if we fail to endure to the end, and we wind up in the lake of fire for eternity, whose fault will that be? Ours.

How, then, can we know if we are successfully working out our salvation? How can we know if we are enduring? How can we know if we are drifting away? Those who believe in "once saved, always saved" criticize those who teach that we can end our relationship with God and say that we also teach people to constantly examine themselves to see if they are making progress. Paul does say to the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Cor. 13:5). The problem with examining ourselves, say the critics, is that we can focus too much on ourselves, which is true. Besides, we cannot trust ourselves to be objective. After all, our hearts are wicked and deceitful. They lie to us. This is also true.

So, before we get too focused on ourselves, let us hear what Paul says about judging himself. "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am

not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:3-4). Paul lets the Lord tell him when he is doing something right and when he is doing something wrong. He takes the same attitude that David did in Psalm 139:23-24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,”

Taking all of this together, the Scriptures are telling us that, yes, we should examine ourselves honestly, but we should also present ourselves to the Lord and ask him to show us what needs changing in us, to show us if we are working out our salvation successfully, to show us if we are enduring, to show us if we are drifting away. God may speak to us directly, or he may send someone to tell us. Are we humble enough to listen to God? Are we humble enough to listen to others?

The critics also say that we are teaching people to be afraid of losing their salvation. Instead, we should be reminding them of God’s love for us because love is a better motivator than fear. But the Scriptures do tell us to be afraid. Paul says in Rom. 11:20, “Do not be haughty, but fear.” He also says that we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We should fear what will happen to us if we walk away from our marriage relationship with God. At the same time, we can be assured that God loves us and wants us to succeed and is helping us to succeed.

I am secure in my marriage with my wife because I know that she loves me and she knows that I love her. But I also know that it is a real possibility that some day she may decide, for whatever reason, to leave me. So

I make it a point every day to spend time with her and to tell her and show her that I love her. I tell her every day that she is beautiful. And I regularly tell her that I appreciate all that she does. Do I do all of this because I love her? Yes. Do I do all of this because I fear she will leave me if I don't? Again, yes.

We have a relationship with God, but it is a relationship that can end. So every day we should be spending time with God and every day we should be thanking God for all that he has done for us and every day we should be relying on him to help us endure. Do we do all of that because we love him? Yes. Do we do all of that because we fear the relationship will end if we don't? Again, yes.

God has done so much for us because he loves us. He does not want us to end up in the lake of fire. He has made a way to save us from our sins. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us and to take our punishment for our sins. And he chose us before the foundation of the world to enter into this relationship with him. Be thankful for this relationship. But also, don't take it for granted. You can lose it.

Lesson 12

**Jesus: The Exalted
Bondservant**

Heb. 2:5-9

The passage for this Lesson is Heb. 2:5-9, but its context begins at 2:1.

We must remember that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is writing to a group of Jewish believers who are considering leaving the faith and returning to Judaism. Throughout the book, the writer alternates between positive reasons to stay in the faith with warnings about what will happen to the believer if he or she leaves the faith.

Chapter 2:1-4 is a warning. The writer warns his readers that they should give heed to the things they have heard because if they do not, they could drift away and neglect their salvation, about which the Lord Himself spoke.

The passage starts with “Therefore.” The “therefore” refers back to chapter 1, in which the writer gives a positive reason for giving heed to what they have heard and therefore stay in the faith. That reason is: Jesus is better than the angels. According to the

Jewish tradition, God made his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai through the angels. But Jesus is the Son of God, and is, in fact, also God, and he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, meaning that he is second in command over the universe. The covenant which he brought, therefore, is better than the covenant which the angels brought.

After giving the warning, the writer in verses 5-9 gives another positive reason for why his readers should give heed to what they have heard and stay in the faith. Verse 5 starts with “For,” meaning they should stay in the faith because of this positive reason. That reason is: the world to come will not be subjected to (or ruled by) the angels but will be subjected to (or ruled by) Jesus. The writer continues his contrast between Jesus and the angels. Jesus is better than the angels because Jesus, not the angels, will rule the world to come.

To prove his point, the writer quotes from Ps. 8:4-6, which says starting in Heb. 2:7,

You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of Your hands.
You have put all things in subjection under his feet.

David, who wrote this psalm, is addressing God the Father. So the writer of the Epistle quotes this psalm to show that God the Father has himself put all things in subjection under the feet of Jesus.

Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, as Heb. 1:13 states, which means that he is already the ruler over this present world. However, as Heb. 2:8

states, not all things have been made subject to him yet. The writer of the Epistle does not say why that is so, but the reason is that the majority of people are still rebelling against the Lordship of Jesus. One of the problems with the way many Christians evangelize the lost is that they say, "You need to make Jesus the Lord of your life." That is incorrect. Jesus is already the Lord over everybody. The problem is that the majority of the people refuse to acknowledge his Lordship. What we should say to the lost is, "You need to acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord of your life and stop rebelling against him and start obeying him."

Jesus is not only the Lord over this present world, he will also be the Lord over the world to come, the world in which there will be no more sorrow or pain or death, the world in which we believers long to live, the world into which only the believers may enter. Only those who have acknowledged Jesus as the Lord of all and who have entered into a marriage relationship with him and remain in that relationship until the end will get to enter the world to come.

The writer, therefore, is encouraging his readers to give heed to what they have heard and to stay in the faith, to stay in the new covenant and not return to the old covenant, because Jesus, who gave them the new covenant, who spoke the words of salvation, who saved them, is the one who will be Lord over the world to come, the world into which his readers long to enter.

Other Scriptures also refer to Jesus as the Lord over this present world and the one to come:

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:15-23).

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all

things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:20-28).

Notice that Paul in this last passage also quotes from Ps. 8. Here Paul is saying that God the Father has put all things, except himself, under Jesus and that when all things are finally subject to Jesus, he, Jesus, will be subject to the Father, so that he, the Father, may reign supreme over everything.

By quoting Psalm 8, the writer of the Epistle also notes that Jesus humbled himself before he was crowned with glory and honor, before all things were put in subjection under his feet. The Psalm says,

What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?
You have made him a little lower than the angels.

In ancient Jewish thought, the angels ruled over the world (under God’s rule, of course), so when God the Father made Jesus lower than the angels when Jesus took on flesh and came to live on this earth, he lowered the rank of Jesus. The writer of the Epistle tells us that being made lower than the angels included “the suffering of death,” that he “might taste death for everyone.” So Jesus humbled himself to the point of death. Of course, being lower than the angels was only a temporary position. Right after the psalm says, “You have made him a little lower than the angels,” it says, “You

have crowned him with glory and honor.” The Greek in verse 9 suggests that Jesus was crowned with glory and honor *because* he suffered death.

The writer of the Epistle, therefore, acknowledges what his readers already knew, that Jesus was a man who was made lower than the angels for a while. But the writer also points out that Jesus is not a mere man, that because he tasted death for everyone, he has been crowned with glory and honor and eventually all things, including the angels and the world to come, will be put in subjection under his feet.

Paul says the same thing about Jesus in Phil. 2:5-11. “Form” (*morphe*) in this passage means “external appearance.” The word “appearance” (*schema*) in v. 8 means essentially the same thing. In saying that Jesus changed his external appearance from that of God to that of a bondservant, he is saying that Jesus only changed how he appeared. He did not change his essence, who he really is.

“Robbery” in verse 6 means “the act of seizing,” like a thief does during a robbery. A thief takes what does not rightly belong to him. Jesus did not think that being equal with God was something he should seize because it rightly belonged to him already. So, even though Jesus had the external appearance of God and even though he was equal with God, he took on the external appearance of a bondservant. In fact, he humbled himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Because he did this, God has highly exalted him. We learned in Lesson 4 that “name” means “authority,” so when God gave Jesus “the name which is above

every name,” he means that he gave Jesus the authority over all other authorities.

“Name” in verse 10, however, means the label given to Jesus. When that name is proclaimed, “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.”

Eventually, everyone who has ever lived will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Lord over everybody. Some will do so willingly while they live here on earth and will get to enter into the world to come. Others will be forced to do so on Judgment Day on their way to the lake of fire.

Not only will they acknowledge his Lordship, they will also acknowledge his divinity. In verses 10-11, Paul is quoting from Isaiah 45:23, in which God says,

I have sworn by Myself;
The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,
And shall not return,
That to Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall take an oath.

Where Isaiah has God, Paul has Jesus, meaning that Jesus is the God that spoke through Isaiah. One day, every knee will bow before Jesus and acknowledge him as both Lord and God.

Jesus deserves this worship because God the Father has highly exalted him, and the Father has done so because Jesus humbled himself and became a

bondservant who obeyed his Father, even to the point of death.

Notice, however, that Paul says that Jesus was setting an example for us to follow, for in verse 5, Paul says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Actually, Paul began discussing humility two verses earlier, in verses 3 and 4: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

“Lowliness of mind” translates one long Greek word, which is a combination of two words. The Greek word means “a mind not far above the ground.” “Better” (*hyperecho*) means “to hold over oneself.” It can also mean “to be superior in rank or authority.” Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition and instead of thinking of ourselves as better than we really are, we are to view ourselves as being barely above the ground and we are to view everyone else as superior to us in rank and we are to hold everyone else above us.

Paul says that is what Jesus did for us. Instead of keeping the rank which his divinity deserves, he humbled himself and became a bondservant to everyone and then died for everyone. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews also says that Jesus did this for us. He was made a little lower than the angels so that he might taste death for everyone.

Are we willing to do the same for everyone else? This applies to not only how you treat the members of the church, but also how you treat the members of your family. Are you a bondservant to the members of your

family? Do you serve them? Do you esteem them better than yourself? Learning how to be a bondservant to your family will help you be a better bondservant to the church and to everyone else. And remember that your children are watching you. If they see you behave one way towards the church members and a different way towards the members of your family, what exactly are you teaching them?

Teach them to have the mind of Christ. Set the same example for them that Jesus set for us.

Lesson 13

Jesus, Both Sanctified and Sanctifying

Heb. 2:10-11

We will be discussing two important topics in this Lesson. The first will be the topic of making Jesus perfect. What does the writer of this Epistle mean when he says that Jesus was made perfect through sufferings? Hasn't Jesus always been sinless? Why would he need to be made perfect? The second is the topic of sanctification. What is sanctification and what does it mean to be sanctified?

Verse 10 starts with the word, "For," which points us back to verse 9. There it says that Jesus "was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death." Why did he have to suffer death? Verse 10 says he did so because it was "fitting," that is, it was proper, it was the right thing to do.

The "Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things," is the Father. The Father's goal is to bring many sons (children) to glory, to bring them to heaven so that they can be with him forever. To accomplish that goal, he had to make Jesus, "the captain of their

salvation,” the sons’ salvation, “perfect through sufferings.”

The Greek word for “captain” (*archegos*) has several meanings. It literally means “the first leader.” Twice (Acts 3:15, 5:31) Peter uses this word to describe Christ as “the Prince.”

It can also mean “the first one to begin something.” Hence, it means “the beginning,” “the originator,” “the author.” In Heb. 12:2, Jesus is called the author of our faith because he is the originator, the beginning, of our faith.

Since the first leader is also the one who goes ahead of everyone else, the Greek word can also mean “pioneer,” the first one to a new location, the one who blazes the trail for everyone else.

All of these meanings apply to Jesus. As we have seen, salvation is a process that will not be completed until we receive our new bodies in heaven. Jesus is the leader who began that process and who goes before us, blazing the trail of salvation that will eventually bring us to glory.

Why, then, did Jesus need to be made perfect? Hasn’t he always been sinless? To be made perfect does not always mean to be made sinless. Certainly, when we are finally perfect in every way, we shall be sinless. But the Greek word for “made perfect” (*teleioo*) means “to complete, to bring to an end.” The word can mean “to be or become mature” because mature people have completed the growing up process; they have come to the end of the growing up process. Jesus did not endure sufferings so that he could become perfectly sinless. He endured sufferings so that he could

complete the process of becoming the perfect captain of our salvation.

Jesus had to endure sufferings because we do. As the writer of the Epistle will say in 2:14, Jesus had to partake of flesh and blood because we do. And as the writer of the Epistle will say in 2:18, because Jesus suffered and was even tempted, he is able to help us when we suffer and are tempted.

Soldiers respect a captain that has endured what they are enduring. They know that he knows what they are experiencing because he has already experienced it. The same goes for Jesus. When we suffer and when we are tempted, we can go to him for help, knowing that he knows what we are experiencing because he has already experienced it.

Since the captain is the first leader, since he is the trailblazer who goes before everyone else, he also sets the example for everyone else to follow. As the captain of our salvation, because Jesus lived a sinless life even though he endured sufferings, he demonstrated that it is possible for us to live a sinless life even though we endure sufferings. More importantly, because Jesus lived a sinless life even though he endured sufferings, he demonstrated that he is able to help us to live a sinless life even though we endure sufferings. Are we able to follow his example perfectly? No, because we still live in these sinful bodies.

But the process is not yet finished. We must remember that salvation is the process of being set free from sin. Jesus, the captain of our salvation, is the one who began this process and is blazing the trail ahead

of us and is enabling us to walk this trail so that we can complete this process of being set free from sin.

Which leads me to the second topic. Verse 11 says that “He who sanctifies,” that is, Jesus, and “those who are being sanctified,” that is, us, “are all of one,” that is, all of us belong to the one God, the Father. All of us are the sons of God. Jesus, of course, is the only begotten Son of God and the rest of us are the adopted sons of God. Even so, Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers because we are being sanctified. But what does it mean to be sanctified?

“Sanctify” is the translation of the Greek word *hagiazō*, which means “to purify, to cleanse.” To be sanctified, therefore, means to be purified, to be cleansed of sin. Perhaps most Christians know that meaning of the word. But it means more than that. It also means “to set aside from common things and dedicate to God.”

In a cafeteria, say a school cafeteria or a hospital cafeteria or a cafeteria at a Christian retreat center, there may be thousands of plates. They all look the same. You cannot tell one from the other. They are common because there are so many of them. And they are used for common purposes. They are used to feed perhaps hundreds of people at a time. And the next day, they get to do that again.

But if some of those plates were set aside to be used in the service of God, they would be sanctified. Because they are being set aside for the service of God, they would be thoroughly purified and thoroughly cleansed, so that not a single spot of filth would be on them.

Furthermore, once these plates have been set aside for the service of God, they cannot go back. They cannot be returned to the cafeteria and become common again, to be used for common purposes again. Nor can they be used in the service of others, including other gods.

Many cups, plates, utensils, tables, and altars were set aside for the service of God in the Temple in Jerusalem. These items were not common items and could not be used for common purposes. Nor could they be used in the service of other gods. However, because of the Jews' continued rebellion against God, the Jews were sent into exile in Babylon. The Temple cups, etc., were also taken to Babylon. Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, held a party for the leaders of his kingdom. He had the cups from the Temple brought to the party so that he and his guests could drink from them. Furthermore, while they were drinking from them, they praised other gods. In other words, he took what was set aside for the service of the one true God and used them for common purposes and even used them in the service of other gods. That is why he and his leaders were all killed that very night (Dan. 5:1-31).

Before we became Christians, we were common sinners, just like the billions of other sinners in this world. When we became Christians, we were sanctified. We were set apart for the service of God. We were purified and cleansed from the filth of sin. We are now expected to continue in the service of God. We cannot go back to being common sinners again. Our primary purpose is to serve God. We are not to be used in the service of others, including ourselves. In the course of

serving God, we will serve others, but that is not our primary purpose. Churches and Christians go astray when they forget that. Our primary purpose is to serve God. Nor are we to be used in the service of other gods, including the god of this world, Satan.

Understanding that being sanctified includes being set apart helps us to better understand certain Scriptures. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matt. 6:9). The word "hallowed" is the Greek word, *hagiazō*, "sanctify." The Father's name, of course, does not need to be cleansed of impurity. Jesus means, "Your name has been set apart, your name is not common; rather, your name is holy." In John 10:36, Jesus says that the Father sanctified him and sent him into the world. Jesus, of course, did not need to be cleansed of sin. He means that the Father set him apart for his service. In 1 Pet. 3:15, Peter says that we should sanctify the Lord God in our hearts. He does not mean, of course, that we have to cleanse the Lord God of sins. He means that we should set God apart in our hearts and stop treating him as common and treat him as the most important person in our lives.

"Sanctify" is the verb. The noun is "sanctification." In the Greek, "sanctification" is *hagiasmos*, which means "the process of setting aside, the process of purifying and cleansing."

The word is often translated as "holiness" because that is the end result of the process. The purpose of sanctification is to produce holiness and holiness is supposed to be one of the more important characteristics of believers. This is why Christians in the New

Testament are very often referred to as saints. The Greek word for “saint” is *hagios*, which literally means “holy one.” The Greek words for “sanctify” (*hagiazō*) and “sanctification” (*hagiasmos*) are derived from this word. The end result of the sanctification process is supposed to be holiness.

Yes, sanctification, like salvation, is a process. Like salvation, there are Scriptures that speak of sanctification as a *past* event:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10).

Like salvation, there is also a Scripture that speaks of sanctification as a *future* event:

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness [sanctification], without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

And like salvation, there are also Scriptures that speak of sanctification as an *ongoing* event:

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11).

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:14).

Sanctification, therefore, just like salvation, is a process that will not be completed until we get to heaven, that is, this process of setting us aside for God's service and cleansing us of all of our sin will not be completed until we replace these sinful bodies with our immortal and incorruptible bodies at the resurrection.

All three members of the Trinity are involved in this process of sanctifying us. Heb. 2:11, says that Jesus sanctifies us. This is why Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:30 that Jesus is our sanctification.

Jude 1 says that the Father sanctifies us: "Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ."

The Holy Spirit also sanctifies us: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

We have seen that even though we are saved by grace through faith and not by works, we are still commanded to participate in the process of salvation. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," declares Paul in Phil. 2:12. So, too, even though all three members of the Trinity are involved in the process of sanctifying us, we have been commanded to participate in the process of sanctification: "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness [sanctification], without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says here that if we fail to pursue sanctification, if we fail to pursue holiness, then we will not see the Lord, or rather, we will see him, not as our Savior, but as our Judge. This sounds like if we fail to do this work, we will lose our salvation, but this is not what the writer of this Epistle means. He knows that we do not get saved by works, so he also knows that we do not lose our salvation by failing to do works. What the writer is implying here is that if your heart is not pursuing holiness, if your heart does not desire to be holy, then perhaps you should question whether you are really saved.

The Father's goal, Jesus' goal, is to bring many sons to glory. We cannot enter that glory without holiness because sin will spoil that glory. And we cannot become holy unless we complete this process of sanctification.

Will we be able to go through this process perfectly? No, because we still live in these sinful bodies. When we do fail, we need to ask the Father to forgive us and then pick ourselves back up and try again.

When I was a young Christian, I hated this process. I got tired of trying to fight the sin in my life and constantly failing. I asked God, "Wouldn't it be better if you just made us perfect as soon as we get saved? Wouldn't we be better witnesses that way? Wouldn't it be better if we didn't fail you all of the time?" One day, I was walking alone through the cafeteria at the Bible college I was attending when Jesus spoke to me. He did not speak to me audibly. Inside of my head I heard his voice. He said, "Am I the Lord of your life?" I said (inside my head), "Yes, you are." He said, "Am I the

Lord of every part of your life?” I said, “Yes, you are.” He said, “Am I the Lord of your sanctification?” That’s when I knew I had to stop fighting God and stop fighting the process. I sighed and then said, “Yes, you are.” He said, “Then I will decide which sin we will work on and when. Your job is to simply follow my lead.”

That is how the process of sanctification works. We are to pursue sanctification, but we are not doing this alone. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are also sanctifying us. And the captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ, is leading the way, clearing the path before us and strengthening us to walk this path. He is the Lord of our salvation and he is the Lord of our sanctification. He will decide how this process works out in our lives. Our job is to simply follow his lead.

Lesson 14
No Need to Fear
Heb. 2:11-15

In this Lesson, we will focus on Heb. 2:11-15, but you need to read 2:10-18 to see the writer's complete thought.

In the last Lesson, we saw that Jesus was made the perfect captain of our salvation through sufferings. He had to suffer because we do, and, as the writer of this Epistle says in this passage, because he suffered like we do and because he was tempted like we are, he is able to come to our aid when we suffer and are tempted.

We also saw in the last Lesson that sanctification is a process in which we are set aside from common things and dedicated to God. Because we are set aside to serve God, we are also cleansed from our sins. All three members of the Trinity are involved in this process of sanctifying us, but we have also been commanded to participate in this process.

In 2:11, the writer states that "He who sanctifies," that is, Jesus, and "those who are being sanctified," that is, us, "are all of one," that is, all of us belong to the

one God, the Father. All of us are the sons of God. That is why Jesus can call us brothers, and that is why we can call Jesus our brother. I have heard some Christians speak of us believers as if we are the children of Jesus. We are not. We are the children of God the Father and the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

However, the rest of the Scriptures tell us that there is a distinction between Jesus and the rest of us. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, that is, he is the only Son who has the same divine nature as the Father. The rest of us are the adopted sons of God. We do not have the divine nature. We are still human.

There is another distinction between Jesus and the rest of us. Jesus has always been the Son of God. The rest of us became the sons of God when we believed in Christ. John 1:12-13 says, "But as many as received Him [Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." And Gal. 3:26 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

The writer of the Epistle then goes on to quote passages from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, with the intent of proving that it has been God's plan all along for Jesus to have brothers and sisters. The first quote is in v. 12:

I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.

This quote is from Psalm 22:22.

The next quote, in verse 13, is, “I will put My trust in Him.” This is a quote from either 2 Sam. 22:3 or Is. 8:17, but the writer is most likely quoting from the latter verse because the next quote is from Is. 8:18: “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.” The prophet Isaiah is here referring to himself and his children, but the writer of the Epistle reinterprets the verse to mean that the Father has given his own adopted children to Jesus to be his brothers and sisters.

The use of these quotes, however, raises an important question. The first and the third quotes fit the writer’s purpose because they refer to brothers and to children. But the second quote does not say anything about brothers or children. Why, then, did the writer include this quote?

What is common to all three quotes is that they come from passages that show God delivering from their enemies the people who trust in him. Ps. 22 prophetically speaks about the crucifixion of Christ. It starts with, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”, which is a statement which Jesus said while he was on the cross. Verse 8 says, “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”, which is similar to what some of the people said when they mocked Jesus while he was on the cross.

But David may not have known that he was speaking prophetically about the crucifixion. The psalm is primarily about the trouble he was experiencing. In the first 21 verses, David describes the trouble and asks God to deliver him. In the rest of the psalm, he praises God for delivering him.

The context of Isaiah 8:17-18 is Isaiah chapters 7 and 8. In those chapters, God, through Isaiah, declares that he will deliver Judah from Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel by sending Assyria against them. Assyria will then invade Judah. At that time, Isaiah and his children will serve as signs to Judah, reminding them that, even though many in Israel and Jerusalem will fall, those who trust in the Lord will be delivered from this invasion.

Even if the second quote, “I will put My trust in Him,” is from 2 Sam. 22:3, the theme is still God’s deliverance of those who trust in him. 2 Sam. 22 is a song and the introduction to it in verse 1 says, “Then David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.”

What the writer of the Epistle is implying, therefore, is that Jesus and his brothers and sisters have another commonality. In verses 10 and 11, the writer states that Jesus suffered because his brothers and sisters do. In verses 12 and 13, the writer implies that Jesus’ brothers and sisters put their trust in God because Jesus did. Jesus trusted that God the Father would deliver him from all of his enemies, including death. Jesus went to the cross because he trusted that God would raise him from the dead after he died on the cross. Jesus’ brothers and sisters trust that God the Father will do the same for them, that he will deliver them from death.

And that is precisely what verses 14 and 15 are about. They are about how Jesus delivered us from death. Jesus took on a body of flesh and blood be-

cause we have bodies of flesh and blood. And he took on a body of flesh and blood so that he could die. And he died so that he could destroy the devil, who had the power of death. Notice the past tense: the devil *had* the power of death. He still has the power of death over the unbelievers, but he no longer has that power over the believers.

Jesus also died so that he could “release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (v. 15). How does that work? How does the fear of death lead people into bondage?

We see how that works in the Garden of Eden. When God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, he “commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen. 2:15-17). But Satan says to Eve, “You will not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). In other words, Satan convinces people that they will avoid death by disobeying God. He doesn’t usually phrase it that way. He convinces people that doing what they want to do is the best thing to do because they will avoid death. Of course, he is lying to them, but when people believe the lie and act on it, they sin. And Jesus said, “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34). That is how the fear of death leads people into bondage. The irony is that people’s efforts to avoid death actually lead them right into it.

This is why Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake

will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). Satan says that in order to avoid death, you must save your life, you must preserve it, you must keep it. Jesus says that is precisely how you lose it. The only way to save your life is to lose it for his sake.

This brings up the second reason why the fear of death leads people to bondage. Jesus says that the only way to save your life, the only way to avoid death, is to die. But because people are afraid of death, because they do not believe that there is eternal life waiting for them on the other side of death, because they do not trust that God the Father will raise them from the dead to live forever, they are not willing to do that. They are not willing to take up the cross and follow Jesus. And so, they remain in bondage to sin.

But for us believers, Jesus has released us from the bondage of sin. And he has given us a reason to no longer fear death, because Jesus demonstrated that for the Christian life always follows death.

Our bodies must still die because “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27) and because this sinful body of flesh and blood must be replaced by our immortal and incorruptible bodies which are waiting for us in heaven (2 Cor. 5:1-5). This is why death is the last enemy that will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26), because Jesus is waiting for the last person who must die to actually die.

But in another sense, because of what Jesus did on the cross, death has already been destroyed. Paul says to Timothy, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the

power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:8-10). Jesus has replaced death with life.

What Jesus has actually done is that he has changed what death means for us Christians. The unbelievers still fear death and therefore are still in bondage to Satan because for them death is still the doorway to eternal death, to eternal punishment. But for us Christians, death has now become the doorway to eternal life. This is why we Christians do not need to fear death. Life is waiting for us on the other side. That’s the gospel. That’s the good news.

But this is also why we Christians do not need to fear change. Change is just another form of death. We have seen that death is separation whereas life is union. Change occurs, therefore, whenever people separate themselves from something old and unite themselves to something new. When people change the furniture in their house, the old furniture must go away. When people move to a new house, the old house must go away. When people change jobs, the old job must go away.

And when people make changes like that, they must adopt new habits, new ways of doing things, which means that the old way of doing things must die. And until they are convinced that the new ways of doing

things are not going to harm them or kill them, they will be insecure. They will feel threatened.

But when God makes the changes in our lives, we do not need to fear. Our flesh may be afraid. Our flesh may fight it because it does not want to die. But if we put our trust in him, in God the Father, something will die because of the change, but something new, something alive, will take its place. For us Christians, life always follows death.

Lesson 15

Who Are the Seed of Abraham?

Heb. 2:16

In Heb. 2:16, the writer of the Epistle states that Jesus does not give aid to angels but does give aid to the seed of Abraham. That is because Jesus is not an angel, nor did he become an angel. He is God who became a man, lived in a body of flesh and blood like we do, suffered like we do, and was tempted like we are. Therefore, because he experienced what we experience, he knows how to give aid to the seed of Abraham.

“Seed,” of course, is what is planted in the ground to produce more plants. It also means “descendant.” The word has both meanings in Greek, Hebrew, and English. The seed of Abraham are the descendants of Abraham. At first sight, the writer seems to be saying that Jesus offers aid only to the Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham. Does this mean that Jesus does not offer aid to the Gentile believers? Of course, he does. Who, then, are the seed of Abraham according to the Scriptures?

To find out, we must go back to the story of Abraham. In Gen. 15, God appears to Abram and makes a covenant with him. God promises him that his seed will possess the land in which he is living. God also promises him that he will have many descendants. “Then He [God] brought him [Abram] outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he [Abram] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (verses 5-6). God called Abram righteous simply because he believed. This will be important later.

In Gen. 17, God appears to Abram again, changes his name to Abraham, and makes another covenant with Abraham. In verses 6-8, God says, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Here God makes several promises to Abraham and to his seed. He again promises Abraham that he will have many descendants. He again promises that Abraham and his seed will possess land, specifically the land of Canaan. Later in the Old Testament, that promise is expanded. In Is. 54:3, God says to Israel, “For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.” God also promises Abraham that this

will be an everlasting covenant, meaning that Abraham will continue to have descendants forever. Since in those days the people thought that their lives carried on in their descendants (which is why it was important to them to have children), God essentially promises Abraham everlasting life.

In Gen. 22, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. As he is about to kill Isaac, the Angel of the Lord stops him and declares to him in verses 16-18, “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” God again promises Abraham that he will have many descendants. He also promises that his seed will overcome their enemies. And he promises that his seed will bless all of the nations.

To summarize, God promises Abraham in these covenants many descendants, land (the land of Canaan at first, then eventually the whole earth), the overcoming of his enemies, the blessing of the nations, and everlasting life.

But these promises are not given to all of Abraham’s descendants, that is, to all of his seed. By the time God appears to Abraham in Gen. 17, Ishmael had been born. He, too, is Abraham’s seed, one of Abraham’s physical descendants. When God makes his covenant with Abraham, Abraham wishes for God

to also bless Ishmael. “And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year” (verses 18-21). The covenants and the promises, therefore, are restricted to Isaac.

Years later, God appeared to Isaac. “There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the LORD appeared to him and said: ‘Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Gen. 26:1-5). The covenants and the promises that God had made to Abraham are now given to Isaac. They were not given to Ishmael. Being a physical descendant of Abraham, therefore, does not

automatically entitle anyone to the covenants and promises of Abraham.

The covenants and the promises were also given to Jacob, Isaac's son. As Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau and heading to Haran where his uncle Laban lived, he stopped so he could sleep. "Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, 'I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (Gen. 28:12-14). The covenants and the promises that God had made to Abraham and to Isaac are now given to Jacob. They were not given to his brother, Esau, even though he, too, was a physical descendant of Abraham. Being a physical descendant of Abraham does not automatically entitle anyone to the covenants and promises of Abraham.

In fact, being a physical descendant of Abraham does not automatically make anyone the seed of Abraham. After Isaac is born, Ishmael makes fun of him, so Sarah demands that Abraham send him and his mother, Hagar, away. This displeases Abraham but God says to him, "Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called" (Gen. 21:12). Here God declares that Isaac, not Ishmael, is the true seed of Abraham. As far as God is concerned,

being a physical descendant of Abraham does not automatically make anyone the seed of Abraham. A person is the seed of Abraham only if God declares that person to be so.

This is why Paul can say that not all of the Israelites are in fact the true Israel. “For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed” (Rom. 9:3-8). The children of the flesh, those who are merely physically descended from Abraham, are not the true Israel. Only the children of the promise, the ones that God has declared to be the seed, are counted as the seed.

John the Baptist acknowledges this fact when he says to the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matt. 3:7-9, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” If God did in fact turn the stones into people, they would not have a father and a mother and

therefore could not be the physical descendants of Abraham. But they would still be considered the children of Abraham because God would declare them to be so.

In short, being a physical descendant of Abraham or NOT being a physical descendant of Abraham has nothing to do with whether or not a person is one of the seed of Abraham. Not all of the physical descendants of Abraham are the seed of Abraham. Those who are not the physical descendants of Abraham can be the seed of Abraham. What matters is whether or not God has declared a person to be the seed of Abraham.

And God has declared that all believers, all of the saints, whether they are the saints of the Old Testament or the saints of the New Testament, are the true seed of Abraham.

The word “seed” in English can be singular or plural. It can mean a single seed or many seeds. It can mean one descendant or many descendants. The same is true of the Greek and Hebrew words for seed. Paul uses this fact to his advantage when he looks back at the promises given to Abraham and makes his own interesting declaration in Gal. 3:16: “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” In the promises which God gave to Abraham in the book of Genesis, the word “seed” was usually interpreted as plural, that is, the promises applied to all of those who were the seed of Abraham. But Paul says that God meant the word “seed” to be singular, that the promises were intended

for only one seed of Abraham, only one descendant of Abraham, and that one descendant is Jesus Christ.

Everyone else becomes the seed of Abraham through faith. Paul goes on to say, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile], there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26-29). It does not matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. If you put your faith in Jesus Christ, then you are the seed of Abraham and an heir of the promises given to him.

It is thought by many Christians that because the promises of Abraham have been given to the believers in Christ, that is, to the Church, and because the new covenant, under which the Church lives, has replaced the old covenant, under which Israel was supposed to live, the Church has replaced Israel. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does say in 8:13 that the new covenant has made the old one obsolete. But Paul reminds us in Rom. 4:13-16 that becoming the seed of Abraham and obtaining God's righteousness and obtaining the promises of Abraham has always been achieved by faith: "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law; but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might

be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.” The promises given to Abraham were never intended for the physical seed of Abraham. They were intended only for the spiritual seed of Abraham, for those who walk by faith.

This is why it is perhaps better to say that the Church has joined true Israel (Eph. 2:11-22). We Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, but in Christ we are now members of that commonwealth. We were strangers and foreigners, but in Christ we are now fellow citizens with the Old Testament saints. Christ has reconciled both the Circumcised and the Uncircumcised to God by bringing them into the same body, creating a new man who is neither Jew nor Gentile. Christ has joined them together. The Church has not replaced Israel. It has joined the true Israel.

Therefore, when the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states that Jesus provides aid to the seed of Abraham, he means that Jesus provides aid to the believers in Christ because the believers in Christ are the seed of Abraham.

Lesson 16

Jesus, the Merciful and Faithful High Priest

Heb. 2:14-18

In 2:17, the writer of the Epistle for the first time refers to Jesus as the High Priest. You might find this reference odd if you know what the Old Testament has to say about the High Priest.

The High Priest, of course, was the priest in charge of all of the other priests. All of the priests of Israel were descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses. But not just any priest could become the High Priest. The High Priesthood was inherited. Just as kings usually pass the kingship to their oldest surviving sons, so, too, the office of the High Priest was passed on to the oldest surviving son of the last High Priest.

Referring to Jesus as the High Priest is odd for two reasons. First, if the Epistle was written before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, then a High Priest was still serving at the Temple. Second, all of the priests, including the High Priest, were descendants of Aaron, meaning that they came from the tribe of Levi. Jesus, however, is not a descendant of Aaron and he

came from the tribe of Judah. The writer himself will note this fact in Heb. 7:11-16.

The writer will go on to argue that the fact that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah and not Levi means that there has been a change in the priesthood. Jesus can be called the High Priest, even though he is not a descendant of Aaron, because he is the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the order of Aaron. Just as the new covenant has replaced the old covenant, so, too, the order of Melchizedek has replaced the order of Aaron. We will discuss this more when we get to those passages in Hebrews.

Even so, the writer points out more than once that Jesus shares many similarities with the High Priests of the Old Testament because what the High Priests did for Israel, Jesus does for us believers, the Church. In this Lesson, I will look at the functions and expectations of the Old Testament High Priest and see how they are similar to what Jesus does today. In doing so, I will bring in Scriptures not only from Hebrews but from other parts of the New Testament as well.

Aaron, of course, was the first High Priest. What is interesting is that he is never referred to as the High Priest. He is quite often referred to as simply “the priest.” Some of the laws, especially in Deuteronomy, prescribe what “the priest” is supposed to do, and these functions would almost certainly have been performed by the High Priest. The title, “the High Priest,” appears in the Law only in Lev. 21 and again in the law concerning the cities of refuge in Num. 35. We will get to those passages shortly.

The functions of the High Priest included:

1. Offering sacrifices

This was his primary function. He offered up sacrifices on behalf of the people of Israel mainly to atone for their sins. So many sacrifices had to be made that the other priests helped him. 1 Chron. 6:49 summarizes the work of the High Priest and the other priests: “Aaron and his sons offered sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense, for all the work of the Most Holy Place, and to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded.”

The most important sacrifice was made on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place, also known as the Holy of Holies, and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of all of Israel.

Jesus also made a sacrifice (himself) to atone for our sins: “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:24-28). Jesus, therefore, offered a sacrifice to atone for sins just as the High Priest did.

2. Teaching the Law

That is, he was supposed to teach them the word of God, the truth. “Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying: ‘Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses’” (Lev. 10:8-11).

Jesus was known as “the Teacher.” In fact, he calls himself a teacher in Matt. 23:8-10 and John 13:13. He taught us what was holy and what was not holy. He taught us what the statutes of the Lord really meant. And he taught us the truth so that we could recognize lies when we heard them. Jesus, therefore, taught the word of God just as the High Priest did.

3. Being a Judge

During the exodus, Moses set up a series of judges who handled the majority of cases so that only the more difficult cases came to him. The same series of judges was set up in Israel, so that only the difficult cases came to the priests, including the High Priest (Deut. 17:8-13). This law says that “the priests” (plural), along with the judge, would pass judgment, but it ends by saying that if a man acts presumptuously and disobeys “the priest” (singular), meaning the High Priest, and the judge, then that man should be executed.

Jesus has been appointed by the Father to be the judge of mankind (John 5:22-30). Jesus gets to pass judgment on every person and his judgment will stand. Anyone who has done evil, that is, anyone who has acted presumptuously by continually disobeying him, will be “executed” by spending eternity in the lake of fire. Jesus, therefore, will be a judge just as the High Priest was.

Those are the functions of the High Priest. He had to offer sacrifices, teach the law, and be a judge. The High Priest also had to meet certain expectations:

1. The High Priest had to marry a virgin.

Lev. 21:1-9 gives the expectations of the priests. They could not touch a dead body unless the person was a member of his immediate family. They also could not marry a divorcee or an immoral woman, but they are not specifically told that they could not marry a widow. Lev. 21:10-15 then gives the expectations of the High Priest and this passage is the first one in the Bible to use that title. This is because God wanted to distinguish the High Priest from the other priests. The High Priest was held to a higher standard than the other priests. He could not touch any dead body, not even if the person was a member of his immediate family. And he is specifically told that he must marry a virgin. He cannot marry a divorcee or an immoral woman or a widow. In other words, he must marry a woman who is pure and spotless.

Jesus will one day marry the Church, but before he does so, he will make sure she is pure and spotless on her wedding day by cleansing her from all of her sins (Eph. 5:25-27). It was also Paul's desire to see that the Church is pure and spotless on her wedding day. To the Corinthians he said, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Jesus, therefore, will marry a virgin just as the High Priest did.

2. The High Priest had to be physically perfect.

Lev. 21:16-24 says that any priest (which would include the High Priest) who had any sort of physical blemish could not offer the sacrifices. The priests, including the High Priest, had to be physically perfect.

But now see what Lev. 22:18-25 says about the sacrifices themselves. The language God used to describe the blemished priests he also uses to describe the blemished sacrifices. The sacrifices had to be as physically perfect as the priests were.

In the Old Testament, God used the physical to help us see the spiritual. Jesus did not have to be physically perfect to make his sacrifice, but he did have to be spiritually perfect. And his sacrifice did not have to be physically perfect, but it did have to be spiritually perfect. That is why Jesus had to be sinless. He was both the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice. He was the perfect priest who offered the perfect sacrifice: himself.

The Bible tells us that we are expected to do the same. Peter tells us in 1 Pet. 2:9 that we are a royal

priesthood and John tells us in Rev. 1:6 that Christ has made us both kings and priests. As priests, we are expected to offer up a sacrifice. What is that sacrifice? Ourselves. Paul says in Rom. 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." We are expected to be perfect priests who offer up the perfect sacrifice: ourselves. Do we do this perfectly? Of course not. But that is the standard, that is the goal.

Those are some of the expectations of the High Priest. He had to marry a virgin and be physically perfect.

I mentioned that Lev. 21 is the first passage in the Bible to use the title, "the High Priest." The title appears again in the Law only in the law concerning the cities of refuge in Num. 35. Once Israel conquered the Promised Land, each tribe was given its own territory. However, the tribe of Levi, which included the priests, was not given its own territory. Instead, God told Moses to give 48 cities scattered throughout Israel to the Levites. Six of those cities were also designated as the cities of refuge. Three of them were on the eastern side of the Jordan River and three of them were on the western side. In the Old Testament days, if you killed someone, whether purposefully or accidentally, a relative of the deceased had the right to kill you. This relative was called the avenger of blood. However, if you accidentally killed someone, you could flee to a city of refuge and once you got inside, the avenger of blood could not touch you. You still had to stand trial to see if you in

fact did kill accidentally. If the congregation decided in your favor, you could remain in the city of refuge.

However, if you left the city of refuge, the avenger of blood could kill you. The avenger, therefore, had the power of death, and if you feared death, if you did not want to die, you stayed in the city of refuge. But this meant that you actually lived in bondage. Yes, the city of refuge protected you from the avenger, but the city was also your prison. You could not go home and see your family, you could not go back and work in your own fields, you could not go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts. This fear of death kept you in bondage. And it kept you there until the day you died.

There was only one way out of the city of refuge. You could go free and the avenger could not harm you if the High Priest died before you did. The death of the High Priest set you free from your bondage.

Jesus did the same for us. Before we became Christians, because we feared death, we were subject to bondage. And Satan, because he constantly seeks to kill and destroy, would have loved to have killed us then and there. But Jesus provided a refuge for us and protected us from the devil until we came to see that the death of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, paid for our sins and set us free from that bondage. We no longer need to fear the devil and death.

The writer of the Epistle tells us that there is one more way in which Jesus is similar to the High Priests of the Old Testament. One of the advantages of the High Priests of the Old Testament is that every one of them was human. They faced the same struggles which we face. They had to deal with the loss of loved

ones, with the anxiety of not knowing what to do next, with people who did not love them and even criticized them mercilessly, with sickness, with money problems, with temptations, and yes, with sin, for they, too, just like us, sinned. That is why on the Day of Atonement, before the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place and make atonement for all of Israel, he had to make a sacrifice to atone for his own sin (Lev. 16:6, 11). The High Priest, therefore, could understand our weaknesses. He could sympathize with us. He could understand us.

The writer of the Epistle tells us that Jesus, our High Priest, took on human flesh and became a man so that he, too, could sympathize with us, just like the other High Priests did (Heb. 4:14-5:4). Because he chose to live in a body of flesh like we do, because he suffered like we suffer, because he faced the same challenges like we face, because he was tempted like we are, he understands our weaknesses, he can sympathize with us, he can understand us, and he can help us. He is like us in every way except for sin. This is why, going back to Heb. 2:17, Jesus “had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” Because he is a merciful High Priest, he knows that we need his help. And because he is a faithful High Priest, we know that he will indeed help us.

Lesson 17

What is Propitiation?

Heb. 2:17

The writer of the Epistle declares in 2:17 that Jesus had to be made like his brethren, like us, so that he could “make propitiation for the sins of the people.” “Propitiation” is a word few people understand, so in this Lesson we will answer the question, “What is propitiation?”

Biblically speaking, “propitiation” means “the turning away of God’s wrath from the sinner.” The English word, “propitiation,” appears several times in the New Testament and is used to translate more than one Greek word, but the essential meaning is the same. By making the propitiation for sins, Jesus turned God’s wrath away from those who put their faith in Jesus.

To fully understand what Jesus accomplished by making the propitiation, we must first understand what sin did to us and to our relationship with God the Father.

Before we became believers, our sin put us in a dangerous place. First, as Is. 59:2 says, our sins separated us from God. We saw in Lesson 9 that death is

separation, so our sins caused us to die to God. Because of our sins, we deserved to be eternally separated from God, to suffer eternal death in the lake of fire. “The wages of sin is death,” Paul declares in Rom. 6:23. He does not mean just physical death, but eternal death, eternal separation from God.

Second, our sin brought the wrath of God down upon us. God’s wrath is his punishment for sin. “But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath” (Rom. 2:5-8). The day of wrath, of course, is the day of judgment, when God, in his wrath, will cast the unrighteous into the lake of fire where they will be separated from God for eternity (Rev. 20:11-15).

But the Scriptures also tell us that the wrath of God already abides on the unrighteous. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them” (Rom. 1:18-19). John the Baptist told his disciples, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). Note the present tense: the wrath of God abides, is already on, the one who does not believe the Son.

This is why, when we were unbelievers, we were known as the children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). God's wrath was upon us until we became believers.

Our sin, therefore, put us in a dangerous place in which we were separated from God, God's wrath was already abiding upon us, and we were in danger of spending eternity in the lake of fire. However, because God loved us, he did not want us to remain in that dangerous place. "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:1-6). His love for us made him want to live forever with us.

But he could not ignore our sin. He could not pretend that our sin did not exist. Nor could he just forgive sin. His justice demanded that sin be punished. Suppose that a man murdered your mother. Suppose this man was caught and brought to trial, where it was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that he had committed this crime. Suppose the judge then said, "Even though you are guilty of this crime, I forgive you. I am dropping the charges. You are free to go." Would

that judge be a just judge? Would that judge be administering justice? Of course not. God is a just judge. He cannot let sin go unpunished.

The problem is that the punishment for sin is death. “The wages of sin is death.” Heb. 9:22 says, “Without shedding of blood there is no remission.” Whenever a living thing sheds its blood, it dies. Therefore, there cannot be remission of sin unless something—or someone—dies. But if we had died for our own sins, we would have spent eternity in the lake of fire because that is what we deserve. We needed someone else to die for us. We needed someone to turn God’s wrath away from us. We needed someone else to be our propitiation.

Interestingly, the Greek word for “propitiation” in Heb. 2:17 appears only one more time in the entire Bible in Luke 18:9-14. In that passage, Jesus tells the parable of the self-righteous Pharisee and the humble tax collector who went up to the Temple to pray. The tax collector’s prayer was simply, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” The phrase, “be merciful,” translates the Greek word for propitiation. The tax collector was saying, “Please provide a propitiation for my sins.” He recognized that he could not be the propitiation for his own sins. He also recognized that only God could provide that propitiation.

And God did provide that propitiation. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). God saw our need. He saw that we needed someone else to be the propitiation for our sins, so he sent his Son, who became just like us by taking on flesh

so that he could die on the cross and take the punishment for our sin, thereby turning away God's wrath from us. And not only for us: "And He [Jesus] Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The propitiation, the turning away of God's wrath, is available to anyone and everyone. All anyone has to do is put his or her faith in Christ.

Christ's death not only turned away God's wrath, it also reconciled us to God the Father. Our sin separated us from God. Christ's death made it possible for us to have an intimate relationship with God. This is why the King James Version has the word "reconciliation" in Heb. 2:17 rather than propitiation. Reconciliation is the end result of propitiation.

Reconciliation is also the end result of Christ's atoning work. The English word, "atonement," actually comes from the phrase, "at one." It signifies that the purpose of Christ's death is to help us become "at one" with God the Father. Christian theologians often use the word "atonement" to refer to Christ's death, because his death atoned for, that is, paid the penalty for, our sins. But the word "atonement" appears in English translations of the New Testament only in the King James Version of Rom. 5:11. The Greek word there actually means "reconciliation," which is how the New King James Version translates it. The writers of the New Testament emphasized the result of Christ's atoning work, which is reconciliation with God.

The word "atonement" appears frequently in the Old Testament, especially in Leviticus. The animal sacrifices atoned for, paid the penalty for, the sins of the

people and allowed God to forgive the people for their sins. For example, Lev. 4:26 says, “So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him.” The sacrifices were also intended to cleanse the people from their sins. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest made sacrifices that were intended to cleanse the Holy Place, the tabernacle, the altar, and the people of sin: “For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (Lev. 16:30). As we saw in the last Lesson, the animals for these sacrifices had to be physically perfect. This is another reason why we could not sacrifice ourselves as payment for our sins. Our sacrifices would have been unacceptable to God because our sin has made us imperfect. Christ is the only person who has never sinned. He is, therefore, the only perfect sacrifice that could have been made for us.

Christ’s sacrifice also did something for us that the sacrifices of the Old Testament could not do. The Hebrew word for “make atonement” is *kapar*, which means “covering.” The sacrifices of the Old Testament only covered sin. Christ’s sacrifice, however, did not merely cover sin; it eliminated sin. Jesus “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). As John the apostle states in his epistle, “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). John the Baptist introduced Jesus as, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Because he eliminated sin, we are no longer separated from God the Father but have now been reconciled to him. And

because he eliminated sin, there was no longer a need for the Father to pour out his wrath on us. By becoming our propitiation, by making propitiation for our sins, Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

Rom. 5:8-11 nicely summarizes everything we have discussed in this Lesson: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Glossary

Abide: live, dwell, remain

Confession: a statement of beliefs; a list of the doctrines which we believe to be true

Exhortation: a speech or a communication (such as a letter) strongly urging someone to do something; encouragement

Free Will: the ability to freely choose what you will do, without any outside forces coercing you or making the choice for you

Judaism: the religion of the Jews

Name: label (My name is Clayton), reputation (the family name), authority (Stop, in the name of the law), character (His name is holy)

Perseverance of the Saints: the doctrine taught by the Calvinists which states that all true believers in Jesus Christ will persevere (endure to the end)

Predestination: the doctrine which states that God chose before the foundation of the world who would be saved and who would be condemned

Propitiation: the turning away of God's wrath

Salvation: the process of saving the believer from sin

Septuagint: the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, made around 200 BC

Sovereignty: supreme power or authority

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