

## Hebrews Chapter 10 - John Karmelich

1. What does God think when we make sacrifices on His behalf? How do our sacrifices for Him compare with just having faith in His existence? Do we have to make sacrifices in order to earn His respect? What about when we do some sort of act because we are sorry for something we have done wrong or out of guilt of some sin. How does all of that fit in with "faith" in Him?
  - a) Those questions are in effect, my lesson title for this week. If you want a shorter title, it might be simply, "understanding the difference between sacrifice and confession."
2. To explain Chapter 10 of Hebrews, one has to understand that the key issue comes down to the role and purpose of sacrifice in the life of the Christian believer. In effect, this lesson focuses on understanding the difference between acts of sacrifice versus acts of confession. My goal is not to make one feel guilty about any particular sin issue. My goal is to help us understand that if we trust in Jesus, we don't have to make any sort of sacrifices in order to earn His love.
  - a) OK, so why is that significant? It is because most people make efforts to do good things in effect, to earn God's respect. It is as if they are saying to God, "Look at me. I am doing now, which should make up for the sins I have committed in my life". Most Christians understand the fact that we can't earn one's salvation. At the same time, many of us in our own way, make sacrifices in our lives to try to earn God's respect.
  - b) Let me try this concept another way: As a Christian, we often make sacrifices for the benefit of others. For example, we may work hard so our children have good things and give up stuff for ourselves. We may be helpful to others around us to the point of giving up things we may desire for ourselves. In effect, that is a sacrifice. The question of this lesson is in effect, "Is that wrong?" Is it wrong to sacrifice for others? I thought the bible teaches us to put the needs of others before our own. Isn't that what biblical love is all about, to care about the needs of others?
    - i) The issue of the moment is not the sacrifices we make, but the reason why we make those sacrifices. If we are doing them in order to prove our value to God, then we are making a mistake. If we are doing them strictly out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us, then we are doing them for the right reason.
  - c) What about confession of sin? When we mess up, doesn't God want us to try harder to make up for our mistakes? In effect, the answer is no. What He wants is for us to admit our errors and yes turn from sin. However, He wants us to rely upon His power to turn from those sins and not try to do it by willpower. God wants us to trust Him to overcome sinful issues? That is why we confess them as wrong, so we can acknowledge to Him that His way of living life is superior to the choices we have made in our past.
3. In this chapter, we finish the writer's discussion of the Old Testament way of worshipping God. What the writer wants to convey is the idea that if one is making sacrifices in order to be pleasing to God, then one is in effect turning one's back on Jesus single sacrifice for sins. Hebrews goes on to point out that if an Old Testament believer was condemned for willfully turning from God's laws, how much more condemned would a Christian be if they willfully decided they want to prove their own worth to God through sacrifice as opposed to trusting in Jesus' full payment for their sins. If one can grasp that concept and avoid the idea of doing good things in order to prove oneself to God, then one has gotten the main point of this chapter.
4. The last part of the chapter is a reminder that Jesus will return one day. Therefore, if one thinks they are doing a good thing by sacrificing in order to earn God's respect, that person will be in big trouble when they face God's judgment at either their death or Jesus' return.
  - a) In effect, this whole chapter is a reminder that we "live by faith". The key point is that we don't have to prove our worth to God by our actions if we are trusting in Jesus complete payment of our sins. The idea is not to avoid sacrifice but to properly understand our motivation for sacrifice. With that said, I believe we are ready for Verse 1.

5. Chapter 10 Verse 1: The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup> If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. <sup>3</sup> But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, <sup>4</sup>because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
- a) The main idea to get across here is the simple fact that the system set up to deal with sins in Old Testament system didn't take away sins, but in effect, covered them up. Coming back to my lesson theme, those sacrifices were often used as confessions, but know that this system had to be repeated on a regular basis, it could never bring an end to one's sins.
  - b) A good illustration on this principal would be sweeping dirt under a rug as opposed to actually cleaning it up and throwing it in the trash. The idea is like taking short cuts in cleaning up a mess by not actually removing the mess that one has made.
    - i) I give that analogy because in effect that is what is in play here in these first four verses of Chapter 19. The author's point is that this Old Testament ritual to seek forgiveness of sin, one must regularly perform it, because offering up animals on a regular basis never takes away the guilt one has over sins.
  - c) Let me explain this concept another way: Many Christian churches offer times and places for people to confess their sins. That ritual is to relieve the guilt we feel over our sins. Isn't that similar to these ancient Jewish rituals of regularly offering animals for one's sins? How is one concept any better than the other?
    - i) The idea for us as Christians is we are completely forgiven of our sins when we accept Jesus full payment of our sins. Yet, when we become aware of sins we have committed, we should confess them as wrong as to remind ourselves that God is in charge of our lives and we are taking that issue and giving it to Him. It is like saying, "Dear God, I can't handle this sin issue. It is your problem. Help me not to deal with it by will power, but by trusting in You to change me to be the type of person that You desire me to be." That is a true confess of sin.
    - ii) Often we still have to suffer for sins. My view is that is God's way of guiding us to "clean us up" after we have committed that sin. It is separate from forgiveness.
  - d) OK John, I may express that a different way than you, but I get the idea. How is this different from this Old Testament system to help those people deal with sins they have committed back them? Why is that system no longer valid? It is not that confession is wrong. It is that this system as set up in Old Testament doesn't take away one's sins. In effect, that whole system is a poor substitute for what Jesus did on the cross. The idea is to explain that the entire methodology to deal with sins as described in the first few books of the Old Testament point to Jesus.
    - i) To understand this better, notice the word "shadow" in Verse 1. The writer of Hebrews in effect is calling the entire system of animal sacrifices a shadow of what is to come. That is the writer's way of saying the entire system of offering animal blood, points to what Jesus did, by shedding His blood on our behalf.
    - ii) Visualize an Old Testament priest going through the rituals of offering animals for the sake of sins. After a bunch of times doing this, he might think, "You know this is getting old and repetitive. I just offered up animals today and I have to do it again tomorrow." One of the visual pictures to consider of that temple (tabernacle) structure was that there was no place to sit down. Those people called to work in that structure had to work hard and regularly to deal with people's sins.
  - e) This might be interesting if I were a Jewish person living a few thousand years ago. ☺ Tell me why I as a believing Christian should care about any of this stuff? It is to remind ourselves that we don't have to perform rituals for forgiveness. Yes we should confess our sins, but that is different from offering sacrifices in order for God to forgive us.

- f) My point being is that we don't have to try to earn His God's respect by performing those rituals or any rituals for that matter. Christianity is just a matter of telling God the Father, here is how I sinned and I need to turn from that. We then should say to Him, "I know I can't be a better person without Your power, so You guide me to deal with this issue."
- i) That concept of how we confess sin versus trusting in rituals to take away our sins, is the main point of the first few verses of this chapter.
  - ii) Let me at this point move on to the next set of verses, and that might help to explain how it ties to my lesson title and theme.
6. Verse 5: Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. <sup>7</sup> Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.' "
- a) If you have been with me for more than one lesson in Hebrews, you know by now that the unnamed writer of Hebrews has a hard time going more than a chapter without quoting from somewhere in the Old Testament. The writer does this because the original intended audience of this letter did believe the Old Testament is the Word of God.
    - i) OK John, you can stop beating that point over our heads now. ☺ Tell us what these verses mean, why they are here and how they tie into this lesson?
  - b) To explain them, first know they are a quote from Psalm 40, Verses 6-8. Know that if one reads these verses from Psalm 40 they read a little different than here in Hebrews. That is because our English translation of the Psalms is taken directly from the original Hebrew language. The writer of Hebrews here is quoting from the Greek Psalm translation, which was the common translation at that time. The point being is the key concepts that were based on Psalm 40 are the same, but the translation itself is a little different.
    - i) All right John, stop with the background concepts. What does this mean?
  - c) Let's start with Verse 5. The writer is making the point that Psalm 40, Verse 5 is predictive of Jesus coming into the world. Picture God the Father saying: "I don't desire sacrifice and offerings in order to draw close to Me. I just want you people to trust in Me directly. In fact in order to make it easier for people to understand Me, I am going to enter the world." That is what is meant by "a body you prepared for me". It is an Old Testament prediction about Jesus as God entering the world He created.
    - i) Most of us who read this study are already Christians and believe that. So what? It is to remind us that God does not desire sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin as Jesus Himself paid the price. One more time, so what? It is the reminder that we don't have to prove our worthiness to God by doing things for Him. We don't have to earn His respect by making sacrifices on His behalf. We don't have to say to God, look how good I am because I am doing this thing for You right now.
    - ii) So how is sacrifices different than God calling us to make a difference for Him? The point is not to try to earn His respect. Because He already loves us, He wants us to draw upon His power for us to make a difference in this world.
    - iii) This comes back to my concept of "necessity versus gratitude". The key problem with the Old Testament is the belief that one had to sacrifice out of necessity to be forgiven. A key point of the New Testament is that system of sacrifice is no longer needed to try to prove our worth to God. Instead, we are to make a difference for Him strictly out of gratitude for what He has done for us.
    - iv) So what if my life is not going so well? What should I be grateful for? When those really bad days come, the first thing we have to remind ourselves is of the fact that no matter what, we are still saved. Despite whatever problems we may be dealing with at the moment, we are still saved. Even if our efforts for God are not doing well at the moment, we need to remember that we can't earn His respect. We are called to keep moving forward and trust in those dry times that He is guiding us.

- d) There is a misconception about Verse 5 that I want to state here. This is the false idea that when Jesus became human, He became human on the outside and stayed fully God on the inside. When Jesus became a man, He became fully human and at the same time was still fully God. I hold the view (I may be wrong) that as a human at that time, He didn't know all things about all people, but had to rely upon God the Father in order to do what God the Father wanted Him to do at any given moment.
- i) The idea is to teach us that we are to rely upon God the Father in order to guide our lives, and that is why Jesus became fully human in order to teach us that.
  - ii) My point being is that Jesus was not "this part of him was God and that part of him was human." He was and remains fully God and fully human at same time.
- e) As to Verse 6, I have already beaten it over our heads the concept that God the Father is not pleased with those Old Testament animal sacrifices. To summarize, the idea is that they were ordained in the Old Testament in order to point the way to Jesus.
- i) Think of it this way: The blood of a lamb is not a true substitute for our own sins as we ourselves deserve to pay the price for displeasing God. We deserve to be punished ourselves for the sins we have committed. All of those animal sacrifices don't make up for what we have done. It may have relieved people's guilt, but it could never take away those sins. That is the concept behind this verse.
- f) This leads me to Verse 7, which again, is a quote from Psalm 40, Verse 8. This verse is saying in effect, the Old Testament scrolls point to Jesus Himself. It is more than saying Psalm 40 or all of the Psalms point to Jesus, it is saying the Old Testament points to Him.
- i) OK John, remember you are speaking to Christian believers. We already believe Jesus is God. Explain to us why we should care about this point.
  - ii) Let me explain with this illustration: Let's suppose one is reading a passage in the Old Testament and one is confused as to what it means. May I suggest trying to put Jesus in the middle of that passage and then watch it make more sense.
    - a) When I am personally confused about some passage in the bible, I pause, pray for guidance, and try putting Jesus in the middle of that passage. It has amazed me over the years as to the insights I have received from studying the bible, just by remembering that simple concept.
  - iii) In past lessons, I have mentioned friends of mine who are devout Jewish believers. They will argue that I read the Old Testament out of context when I put Jesus in the middle of those passages. I then realize they don't have the Spirit of God to guide their lives and that is why they don't see the passage as clearly (for the lack of a better word) than I can see it, and seeing Jesus all over the Old Testament.
    - a) It may help to give a simple example. In Genesis 1:26, the passage says, "Let us make man in our image". A Christian can easily see the fact that the word us refers to God the Father and Jesus. A religious Jew struggles with this passage and has to make the difficult argument that God the Father is so big, He has to speak of Himself in the plural at that point.
- g) OK John, I accept the idea that the Old Testament speaks of Jesus. Why does the book of Hebrews make that point here and again, why should I care?
- i) It is to teach us how to draw upon God's power. The point is one reason Jesus became human is to show us how God the Father wants us to live. Jesus relied upon God the Father's power in order to do what He did 2,000 years ago. God the Father wants us to rely upon Him daily to guide our lives to make that difference for Him. In effect, Jesus led the way so we can do likewise.
  - ii) If that is true, why can't I say walk on water like He did? The specific answer is that it is not God the Father's will for us to walk on water at this moment. What God does desire of us, is to live to make a difference for Him out of gratitude for the sacrifice that Jesus has made on our behalf.

7. Verse 8: First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made).<sup>9</sup> Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second.  
<sup>10</sup>And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- a) One of the hardest concepts to grasp if one has a Jewish background is "How can one say that the Old Testament system of sacrifices and offerings is no longer needed when it is ordained in the bible to begin with?" Even for many Christians, they feel they need to prove their worth to God by doing things in order to earn His love.
    - i) If you think this is not a big deal, I once watched a short documentary where an interviewer randomly picked people walking down the street and asked them, "Do you believe in God and do you believe you are going to heaven". For person after person, the same answer was effectively given, "I believe my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds and therefore, I am going to heaven". Yes that is a false concept in Christianity, but it is also a most common lie held in our society.
  - b) This leads me back to the verses. The point is the Old Testament system was necessary for a long time, simply to show that people are not capable of pleasing God based on our own will power. It is also to show that the Old Testament system of offering animals was not good enough to deal with the sins problem of our lives.
    - i) As I like to say, the Old Testament lacks the power source (the "engine") for us to deal with our sins. We may feel forgiven if we offer a sacrifice, but that guilt may return the next time we commit some sort of sin, or we may feel guilt for a sin we think we forgot to confess with that last sacrifice. That is why that system had to go on, day after day and year after year. It never ended.
    - ii) My point being is that the Old Testament system was necessary in order to show that we can't be pleasing to God based on will power. We need His "engine" to guide our lives.
  - c) OK John, you keep talking about God as if He is an engine. Explain to me how I draw upon that power source for my life? Let me answer with a prayer, "Dear God, I don't know what to do about the situation I am in. I have prayed about it, and I am still stuck in this rut. Help me to have the proper perspective and guide me as to what to do next. Help me to make the best decisions possible and trust You to guide my life. Help me to live by the principals as taught in the bible and by living by those principals, know that You can't love me any more or less than You already do right now. With that said, I will go forward, make the best decisions possible and trust that You are guiding me."
    - i) I have been amazed that when I pray something like that, how things work out a little better. Yes my problems are still there, but somehow I just know that God will see me through my issues of the moment. I trust in His "engine" to get me through whatever it is I am dealing with at that time.
  - d) Gee John, that was nice. What does it have to do with these verses? The tie-in is to realize that the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf is the reminder that because we are now fully forgiven of our sins, we don't have to prove our worth to God. We are now free to live to make a difference for Him just out of gratitude and not based on fulfilling a need.
8. Verse 11: Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.<sup>12</sup> But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.
- a) To summarize these verses, we may understand we are fully forgiven of our sins, but the writer of Hebrews is dealing with people of Jewish backgrounds. It is necessary to "beat the point to death" in order to have it sink in they don't have to sacrifice for their sins.
  - b) So are you saying these verses are repetitive? I am saying that one has to read this whole chapter (or at least these verses in context of the surrounding verses) to appreciate them.

- c) In Verse 11, the writer of Hebrews is giving us a visual picture that when the priests in the Old Testament had to offer sacrifices for sins, they had to do this day after day. Again, there was no place to sit in this tabernacle. To be a priest back then, means that one had to constantly work at it. There was no rest, at least until their shift was done for the day.
- i) The point being is to compare Verses 11 and 12. In Verse 11, the priests had to work all the time at sacrifices. In Verse 12, it makes the point that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, because the work for sin had been finished.
  - ii) This leads me back to the question of how much is the tabernacle that Moses was told to build exactly like the one in heaven? We were told in a previous chapter in Hebrews and in Exodus (25:9) that Moses was commanded to build this tabernacle structure exactly as it looks in heaven. Yet in that tabernacle, there were no places for anyone to sit down. At the same time, Verse 12 makes the point that Jesus can sit in heaven as the works is done. Therefore, it brings up the question of when we get to heaven, is God's throne room exactly like the Old Testament structure?
    - a) I don't know if I have a great answer for you on this issue. I do believe that Jesus is somehow sitting in heaven. Let me put it this way: If Jesus still is fully human as well as fully God, then there has to be a physical place where heaven is located. If we are to spend eternity with God, there must be an actual place we go to when we die.
    - b) Since the system for sacrifices is no longer needed, I don't know how much the throne room in heaven is exactly like the model that Moses built. It is one of those questions I keep under, "we'll find out one day in heaven".
    - c) In the meantime, I do know my focus in life is to live to make a difference for Jesus. That is part of my daily prayer. As to what God's throne will look like, I'll wait until I get there, and find out at that point.
  - d) That's another nice little speech. ☺ What does it have to do with these verses? The main point is we don't have to worry about pleasing God. No matter what heaven looks like, the point is God the Father has fully forgiven us of all our sins, so therefore we no longer have to make any sacrifices or do any "works" in order to earn His respect. We are only called to make a difference for Jesus out of gratitude for what He has already done for us. That is the main point these verses are trying to get across to us.
9. Verse 13: Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, <sup>14</sup> because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.
- a) Verse 13 is a rough quote from Psalm 110, Verse 1. When one thinks of a footstool, one thinks of a place to rest one's feet. The word picture here is that there is a coming a future day when those that oppose the idea of Jesus ruling over their lives will come to an end.
    - i) A footstool is to rest one's feet. The idea is one day God the Father can "rest" when there will be no more opposition to Jesus' ruling the world at His Second Coming.
    - ii) OK John, that day obviously has not happened yet. Why should I care? This verse is a reminder that when people die, they will be judged based on what knowledge they did have about Jesus and what they did with that knowledge. For example, an isolated person who never heard of Jesus will be judged differently than one living in the United States, where the Gospel message is preached all the time.
    - iii) God's standard has always been about trusting in Him for one's salvation. The issue for Christians is what have we done with that knowledge that counts.
  - b) One more key thing to notice about Verse 14: Notice the phrase "being made holy":
    - i) This verse is not saying we are already fully holy, but are being made holy. To explain, first I need to explain what holy is:
      - a) It is the idea of being set apart for a particular use. It would be like owning a particular dinner plate and saying that dinner plate is only for the use of this one particular person. Being set apart is what holy means.

- ii) With that understood, next question is, "how are we being made holy?" Is there something more I have to be doing in order to be made "more holy"? If one believes that, one is missing the point.
    - a) The point is until Jesus comes back, there will always be more people trusting in Him to guide our lives.
    - b) Let me return to the three part definition of salvation I like to quote every now and then. We were saved when we first accepted Jesus. We will be saved when we get resurrected. We continue to be saved as we grow in our trust of Jesus every day of our lives. That last line is the key here. We continue to trust in Him to guide our lives and we are being "more set apart" (i.e., holy) as we trust Him to guide our lives.
  - iii) Does this mean I have to work "harder" for Jesus? I guess that depends on what it is God has called you or me to do at the present moment. The issue of the moment is not what we are called to do, but our attitude about what we do. We are back to "gratitude versus necessity". If one is truly grateful for what God has done for our lives, then one will live in effect to express that gratitude back to Him.
10. Verse 15: The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: <sup>16</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." <sup>17</sup> Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts will remember no more." <sup>18</sup>And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.
- a) OK, it's time once again for more Old Testament quotes. For the record, these quotes are from Jeremiah 31:33 and 34. This is not the first time these verses are quoted in Hebrews.
  - b) Assuming we don't remember why these verses are quoted before, tell us why they are here and how it is relevant to the topic of sacrifice and confession. The point is made in Verse 18 where it states that since all our sins were forgiven, sacrifice is no longer needed.
  - c) Let me explain this concept another way: The last time I talked about these verses from the book of Jeremiah, I debated whether they are referring to some future utopia time where Jesus comes back and all is forgiven for Jewish believers, or do these verses refer to life now where, all of our sins are forgiven now. I came to the conclusion it refers to both.
    - i) In other words, all Christians who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins have no need to prove to God the Father that we are worthy of Him. The idea is we don't have to perform any rituals to earn His favor, as we were completely forgiven of our sins at the cross.
    - ii) I also hold the view that there is coming a future day for people of Jewish decent when Jesus returns. At that unknown time, a large group of Jewish people will accept Jesus as their long awaited Messiah and at that time God the Father will forgive them for not believing in Jesus. (That in effect is Romans Chapter 11.)
    - iii) My point is simply that these verses do refer to both now and the future.
  - d) When one reads these verses one has to remember that when Jeremiah wrote them, the "cross" was still centuries in the future. Therefore Jeremiah is simply referring to a future time from his perspective when Jesus blood becomes the central point of forgiveness and the Jewish people no longer needed to offer sacrifices for their sins.
    - i) Think how literally that came true: Before the time of Jesus, consider how many non-Jewish people trusted in the God of the Jews? I would argue very few. Since then, there are now billions of people who believe in their God. Also consider the fact that the main Jewish temple was destroyed roughly 40 years after Jesus and it has not been built since then. My point being is that Jeremiah's prediction about a new system came very literally true and has been since then.
  - e) OK John, tell me why I should care. It is to consider when we do good things. This is to remind us we don't have to earn God's love. Any good deed we do should strictly be out of gratitude for what Jesus did, and not out of necessity to earn His love.

11. Verse 19: Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.
- a) Let me give my loose translation: Since we as Christians are fully forgiven of all of our sins (past, present and future), we can freely approach God the Father. There is nothing that can separate us from His love now that the complete price for sin has now been paid.
  - b) Let's assume that we are already believers in Jesus. Why do we need to be reminded of this truth? The answer we feel guilty over things we have done wrong and we can feel like we are not worthy to approach God because of our mistakes. We may feel we have to prove ourselves to God by doing some sort of good deed. That is what these verses are warning against. Yes we should confess our sins, but that is a different issue. The issue here is that we can let go of our guilt because the complete price for the sins we have committed has already been paid. We don't have to prove ourselves worthy to God.
    - i) In fact, notice the phrase "guilty conscience" in Verse 22. The issue is that even though we believe Jesus died for our sins, we still carry guilt over things we have done wrong. What Hebrews is trying to teach us is to let go of our guilt.
    - ii) Think of it this way: We believe in a God that knows all things. Therefore, He is aware of all the things we have done wrong and will do wrong in the future. Why live with guilt, if the complete price for our mistakes has already been paid?
    - iii) Does this mean I am free to sin all I want? As I have stated in past lessons, we are free to sin all we want. The issue is, how much do we want to sin? If we want to be pleasing God out of gratitude for what He has done for us, why should we be motivated to not please Him in the first place?
    - iv) Along the same line of thinking, that is why we confess our sins. God is already aware of things we have done wrong. Confession is not about telling God what we have done wrong. It is about admitting to ourselves that "His way was right and our way was wrong" over some particular action.
  - c) Notice Verse 21 says "great priest". In effect, these verses give both roles of Jesus. They talk about His complete payment for our sin and Verse 21 here mentions in effect that Jesus is no longer dead. His function after He died for our sins is now to be our priest (representative) before God the Father. Quickly remind me again what that means:
    - i) A priest is someone who helps us draw close to God. Having Jesus as our priest reminds us that Jesus as fully human can relate to whatever issues we face in life. It would be like committing a sin and Jesus then saying to God the Father, "I know what he or she did was wrong, but I (Jesus) already paid the price for that sin so any sacrifice on their behalf is not needed." We may still suffer for that sin, but that is to make us a better person or pay back to society for what we have done.
  - d) The last thing I want to discuss in these verses is the phrase "pure water" in Verse 22. Does that mean if we don't bathe regularly, we will stink too much to be with God? ☺
    - i) Some commentators think it refers to baptism. They will argue that that phrase argues about the necessity of baptism in order to be saved. With all due respect to my Christian Baptists friends, I don't see that verse that way. I have always seen baptism is a public sign to confess what one already believes to begin with.
    - ii) OK then, so what does pure water mean? Think of pure water as a way of saying one is really clean. That is why a lot of Jewish and Christian ceremonies involve washing to symbolically show one is clean. The point being that when we first accepted Jesus blood payment for our sins, we are now fully clean of any and all sins we have committed as if we have just fully bathed in the purest of water.
    - iii) In summary, that phrase is a symbolic way of saying we are clean from sins.



12. Verse 23: Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup> Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
- a) Time for more of my "loose translation": Let us keep on believing that Jesus has already paid the full price for our sins. Also, let us keep meeting together with other believers in order to encourage each other keep on trusting in His complete payment of our sins. Also we need to encourage each other to trust in Jesus as our priest before God the Father.
  - b) OK, why give the "keep on doing this" speech here? The answer is that it is very easy to slip into an "I messed up and I have to prove myself to God again" way of thinking. One of the reasons the bible encourages us to spend time with other believers is to remind ourselves of the truth that we don't have to earn God's respect and to help others to trust in God to guide all of our lives.
    - i) I've always thought of church as a place to go to "refresh ourselves" in order to face the world we live in. It is like getting our mental batteries charged up so we can go be a good witness for Jesus. Christianity was never designed to be a bunch of solo efforts. God wants teamwork so we can encourage each other to trust in Him. Even if one thinks they can live the Christian life by themselves, we should gather with other believers as to encourage each other to keep on trusting Him.
    - ii) But what if I am really quiet at church? How am I encouraging others when I am not talking to anyone, but just watching the service? Sometimes just being there is a reminder to others to keep on trusting Jesus to guide our lives. Other times we may say something to someone right before or after a service that in effect offers a word of encouragement to help us grow in our faith.
    - iii) I have heard it said the most important time in the Christian week is the moments before and after church service starts, because that is when we do the most work of encouraging each other in our faith in Jesus. I have learned that to be true.
  - c) OK John, how often should we meet as Christians? It varies upon different churches and different people. The New Testament is silent on that issue. I suppose the correct answer is as often as you want to. At the least, I believe it should be once a week. As to where one meets and how often one meets, let God guide you to a bible believing church.
  - d) Verse 25 ends with, "you see the Day approaching". The "Day" refers to the time of Jesus return. It's been roughly 2,000 years since Jesus said He was returning. Yet the writer of Hebrews says in effect that the readers of that book should live as if the "Day" is going to happen at any moment. So how can it be 2,000 years and still be any moment?
    - i) The answer is that God wants us to live as if Jesus can return at any moment. Yes it has been thousands of years, but still, He can return at any time. I believe the apostles lived with that possibility and we too should live with that possibility.
    - ii) I like to think of this principal another way. How much longer do we have to live? Do we know for sure we will live another 20 or 50 or 100 years? Of course not. That is why the "Day Approaching" is in effect the end of our time on earth. It can come to an end at any moment. The point being is that we should live to make a difference for God, because we never know how much time we have. We should use the most valuable asset we have, our time to make a difference for Him.
    - iii) Are you suggesting I quit my life and go be a full time missionary? I am saying that whatever God calls us to do and wherever we are called to live, that is our mission field. The point is we should live our lives with the thought that our time is limited and short, and we should use our most valuable asset, our time to make a difference for Him. Grant it, we may live another 50 years (or pick your favorite number) or Jesus may not return for another 1,000 years. The question becomes, how are you using your time to make a difference for Him until that day comes?

13. Verse 26: If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,<sup>27</sup> but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.
- a) Here is another set of verses that if reads it out of context, one can get one in big trouble.
  - b) To explain, let us return to the original intended audience: These were Jewish Christians who were turning away from Jesus and returning o just believing in the Old Testament way of trusting God without believing in Jesus' complete sin payment for their lives.
    - i) The point being is that if one fails to trust in Jesus once they understand the Gospel message, in effect, hell awaits such a person. So are you saying that if I believe in Jesus and then stop believing in Him, I am in big trouble? In effect yes.
  - c) Let me put these verses another way: I don't believe one can sin enough to go to hell. As long as one is trusting in Jesus complete payment for sin for one's salvation one cannot mess that up if one tried. In other words, if it were possible for me to sin enough to lose my salvation, I would have blown it a long time ago. However, it is not up to me, but up to God Himself. That is why I live for Him out of gratitude and not out of necessity.
  - d) I am convinced the only unforgivable sin in the entire bible is to spend one's lifetime denying that Jesus paid the complete price for one's sins. I have read of people who have believed in Jesus for a while and then turned away from Him. I once read a book about a friend of the evangelist Billy Graham when both were young men. This other man, who was also a powerful preacher like Mr. Graham, turned away from Jesus and wrote a few books condemning Christianity. Near the end of this man's life, Billy Graham went to go visit him. That man's response to Mr. Graham's visit was in effect, "I miss Jesus, I miss Him being in charge of my life."
    - i) My point of that story is that it is up to God to judge who will spend eternity with Him in heaven. If heaven is God's home, He is in charge of deciding who gets to be with Him there. Our job is to trust in Jesus as complete payment for our sins.
    - ii) So how do we know if we are saved? All we can do is watch our behavior and judge others based on that behavior. We don't know who is saved. All we can do is watch people's behavior and see if they are trusting in Jesus by how they act. I am not saying to be judgmental. I am just saying that the evidence of salvation can only be observed by watching how people act based on their trust in Jesus.
    - iii) We can't judge for salvation, but we can act based on we observe human behavior.
  - e) On that convicting thought, I have covered the essence of these verses, and can move on.
14. Verse 28: Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.<sup>29</sup> How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?<sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people."<sup>31</sup> It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
- a) Speaking of convicting thoughts, I present these four verses. They are saying that in the Old Testament, if one is found guilty of deliberately turning from God's laws, one could legally be put to death if one lived in Israel at that time. (See Deuteronomy 17:6 or 19:15). The point is if one was in that much trouble for ignoring God's laws back then, consider how much worse of a sin it would be to ignore Jesus' complete payment for one's sin?
  - b) Let me explain this idea another way: Most Jewish people today, are not religious. Just as most people who live in Christian countries don't trust Jesus to guide them. Are these verses saying that such Jewish people should be killed for not obeying those laws? No they shouldn't. Just as we don't kill those living in Christian countries for not trusting in Jesus to guide their lives. The point is God and not us are to judge salvation. Our job is just to be a good witness for Jesus. Our job is to pray for others and when possible, guide those willing to listen into a saving knowledge of Jesus for their sins as well as ours.

- c) Let me also comment on the phrase "Spirit of grace". This is another way of describing the Holy Spirit guiding our lives. The idea is that once one commits one's life to Jesus, God in effect moves inside of us and wants to take over every aspect of our lives. The idea is that once one is a believer, the "Spirit of grace" is the concept that through prayer, through His word and through the Spirit guiding us we can know what is His desire for our lives.
- i) Remember why this is being emphasized here: The Jewish-Christians for whom this letter was originally written, did believe in Jesus but now were desiring to turn away from Him with their lives. The point being is that the Spirit of God has taken up residence within them, and now they desire to ignore that Spirit. Just like the old friend of Billy Graham who then used his life to worked hard to reject Jesus, so people can and do choose to reject God's desire for their lives.
  - ii) Let me explain it this way: God will never violate our free will. If we choose to turn away from Him, He will let us go down that path. Yes He desires we follow Him, but when we choose to ignore His will, He lets us go our way. That is why we as Christians get so convicted when we mess up. We realize that God's desire was and is the best path for our lives. We realize when we are ignoring His spirit and we realize that He desires we turn back to Him after we mess up.
  - iii) This is why I believe it is never too late in this life not only to be saved, but also to change one's life to do His will. Do these verses mean a person can lose one's salvation? It depends on whether or not one is continuing to trust in Jesus for forgiveness. Again, I don't believe one can sin enough to lose one's salvation. However, one can spend one's whole life denying Jesus payment for one's sins and that in effect is the danger that the writer of Hebrews is warning against.
- d) With that horrible thought stated, let me now talk about Verse 30 that says, "The Lord will judge his people." The key point of Verses 30 and 31 is that we are not the final judges for our lives, but God is. We don't determine if someone is saved. Remember I stated earlier that all we can do as believers is watch behavior. All we can and should do is to live our lives to be a good witness for Jesus. We leave the eternal judging up to Him.
15. Verse 32: Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.<sup>34</sup> You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.
- a) It's time once again to return to the lives of those Jewish believers in Jesus at the time when this letter was written. To be a Christian in that culture often meant to be rejected by one's family and one's society. Hebrews is reminding them that when they first accepted Jesus, they probably suffered for that belief. They may have even visited others who were in jail for the crime of being a Christian. They may even willfully have accepted the loss of their possessions in exchange for accepting Jesus as their savior.
  - b) Today, in many parts of the world, to believe that Jesus is God and He alone paid the price for one's sins is a death sentence, or at the least, rejection by one's society. I know that when someone converts from being a Jehovah's Witness to an Evangelical Christian, everyone in his or her former society shuns that person. To become a devout Christian in many Muslim countries is a death sentence. A reason God calls on Christians to support one another is to help them recover from losses they receive from the rejection they get from their societies based on their conversion.
  - c) The point is that if we have not suffered through any sort of persecution ourselves, is to regularly pray for the persecuted church as well as be loving and supportive of other believers. We don't always know what one had to go through to become a believer. We just know people need love to overcome the loss of leaving their former cultures.

- d) Before I move on, let me briefly talk some more about giving up all of one's possessions for the sake of the Gospel. God never calls on people to take a vow of poverty in order to become a Christian. If that were true, then we become dependant on others as oppose to providing for ourselves if possible. The point of these verses is many people do suffer financial loss in order to accept Jesus as being both God and one's full sin payment. The question becomes if one is in that situation, "What is more important, one's salvation or one's collection of things that one cannot take with them in the next life?" For the most part, when one suffers that sort of loss, I usually find God finds a way to provide for them and lead them into a life to make a difference for Him.
16. Verse 35: So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. <sup>36</sup> You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. <sup>37</sup>For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. <sup>38</sup> But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." <sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.
- a) To understand these verses, again understand how much those Jewish Christians had to suffer in their society in order to accept Jesus as their Savior. The writer is encouraging them to keep on trusting in Jesus despite that cost of their possessions and the loss of friendships and often the loss of one's family turning away from them. To put it simply, the writer is saying, "It is worth it, despite the cost of losing one's old life."
- b) Let me try to personalize this: If one has suffered a big loss (or everything) for the sake of the Gospel message, what should one do? Yes the easy thing is to say to trust in God for guidance. I remember when I first got saved, I was grateful for some good friends who were there when I got baptized when others could not accept that idea. My point is God is well aware of what we go through when we have such losses and I am continually amazed how He provides for people when they go through terrible losses.
- c) Also, whenever possible, reach out to other believers who are going through their own losses. Ask them how we can be helpful to them. Christianity was always meant to be a team effort and when possible offer (not force) to help others in their times of need.
- d) Verse 37 then says, "He who is coming will come and not delay": My translation: Jesus will return one day and nobody knows how long we have to live. It is another reminder that life is short and we should use our time to make a difference for Him.
- e) Verse 38 is a key verse in this letter, and leads well into the next chapter. This verse says, "But my righteous one will live by faith". This is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4. This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament, as I stated back in my first lesson on Hebrews.
- i) I am convinced that the main point of the entire book of Hebrews is to explain what to "live by faith" is all about, which again is part of Habakkuk 2:4.
- ii) That is why the writer is encouraging these Jewish believers to still have faith in Jesus despite whatever they had to suffer for that belief. That is also why the writer spent a big part of this chapter explaining why it is no longer necessary to make sacrifices for our sins as stated in the early part of this chapter. To put this whole chapter together, it is "all up to Him" and not up to us to earn our salvation.
- iii) This point leads us well into the next lesson. It is all examples of how one does live by faith. It describes lots of Old Testament people and how they lived by faith in what God is and will do through their lives. More on that in the next lesson.
- f) Finally Verse 39 says in effect that despite whatever suffering we have in this lifetime, it is worth it, because we are saved. Sometimes when life is at its worst, I like to think about that no matter what else, I am saved. No matter what, I still trust in Jesus to guide my life no matter how good or bad life is going at the moment. I can't think of a better closing prayer than to remind us that we are saved. Finally, remembering to live in order to make a difference for Him is what matters for eternity. In Jesus name, we ask that You guide us to live our lives to make a difference for You, Amen.