Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 15

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Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews

LESSON XV

EXHORTATION TO CHRISTIAN LOVE

A CALL TO COMPLETE SEPARATION FROM JUDAISM

Hebrews 13:1-25

The closing chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews falls logically into three parts: (1) An exhortation to Christian love, verses 1-6; (2) a call to complete separation from Judaism, verses 7-17; and (3) the conclusion to the entire epistle, with an exhortation to prayer, the apostolic benediction, and personal greetings, verses 18-25. And again, there is no break in thought between what has gone before and this closing chapter of the book. It is just the continuation of the practical portion of the epistle, which begins with Heb. 10:19. The conclusion to the entire letter, recorded in verses 18-25, portrays our Great High Priest in His Person and work, reminding us once more of the theme of the epistle; while the benediction, one of the most beautiful passages in all the Word of God, gives us a final picture of our risen Lord continuing His Priestly ministry, working in us and through us for His own glory. Let us read the chapter prayerfully, that the Holy Spirit may take the things of Christ and show them unto us.

EXHORTATION TO CHRISTIAN LOVE

Heb. 13:1-6

The chapter opens with an appeal to believers for right social relationships with their fellow-men, an exhortation to Christian love, prompted by the all-sufficient love and grace of God. The text speaks so plainly that we can not miss its meaning. We shall read from the Revised Version this five-fold exhortation:
1. To Brotherly Love, verse 1.

"Let love of the brethren continue."

"The brethren" are, of course, fellow-Christians, an expression so used in all the New Testament. Genuine love for the Lord Jesus will manifest itself, not only in love toward other Christians, but also in a love for the lost souls of men.

2. To Hospitality, verse 2.

"Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

In Old Testament days God often spoke to men through angels, who appeared at times in the form of men. Abraham entertained angels before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The parents of Samson and many other Old Testament saints "entertained angels unawares."

3. To Compassion, verse 3.

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; them that are ill-treated, as being yourselves also in the body."

Very many Christians were prisoners for Christ's sake; and others knew that they also might be bound for the testimony of the Lord Jesus. Some may well have been fleeing from their persecutors, seeking refuge among fellow-Christians. "Remember them that are in bonds," Paul said; and he knew from experience what imprisonment and Roman chains were like.

4. To Purity of Life, verse 4.

"Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

God has ordained that the Christian home be kept sacred; He honors the sanctity of the marriage covenant. What tragedies might have been avoided if men and women had heeded this exhortation throughout the centuries!

5. To Contentment, verses 5, 6.

"Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say,

The Lord is my helper; I will not fear:

What shall man do unto me?"

"The love of money is the root of all evil." "Contentment with godliness is great gain." (See I Tim. 6:6, 10.) And besides, with the God of glory as our never failing Helper; what more do we need? Even the fear of wicked men is taken away; and with the inspired apostle we also can echo the word of the psalmist,

"What shall man do unto me?" (Psalm 118:6).

Even the bitterly persecuted Hebrew Christian could express that confidence, knowing that martyrdom for Christ's sake would only send him home to heaven and the presence of the Lord.

When writing to the Philippian Christians, Paul uttered similar words, saying,

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

If only all of us who love the Lord could make that statement from an honest heart, how much of restlessness and self-seeking and unrest would be replaced by the contentment which only Christ can give! "Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have," the inspired apostle wrote to the suffering Hebrew saints. And that admonition comes to us today, by the Spirit of God, exhorting us to find our rest of heart in the Lord Himself.

The unsaved world knows nothing of this contentment; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). George Eastman, founder of the kodak company
that bears his name, gave millions of dollars to philanthropic causes. He had power in the business world. But concern-
ing eternal things and his future, he could only say, "I don't
know." All that the world had to offer did not satisfy; and
he ended his own life, going to a Christ-less grave.

"I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise
forsake thee!"

In view of such reassuring words from our Lord Him-
self, worry is a sin; for worry is unbelief. No Roman sword
could separate the Hebrew Christian from the love of God.
No lack of temporal things, no perplexing circumstance, can
separate us today—or ever—from "the love of God which
is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The love of money would drag
us down in discouragement, away from a close walk with
God. But just as a mother holds out an orange to her baby,
so that he will throw down a dangerous pair of scissors, even
so the Lord offers us heavenly treasures, in order that we may
be occupied with eternal values, that "the things of earth"
shall "grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and
grace."

A missionary friend, who had been laboring for Christ in
South America, showed me some time ago what it meant to
say in his heart,

"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear:
What shall man do unto me?"

We were leaving a meeting in Atlantic City; and as we
walked, I asked him to tell me something of his experiences
on the mission field. Until one o'clock in the morning we
kept walking; and all the while my heart was warmed by his
testimony to God's power and protection in the midst of
peril. Among other things, my friend said, "I was going
through a forest one day, knowing that three Indian chiefs
were following me with knives, intending to murder me.
Humanly speaking there was no hope that I could escape out
of their hands. But when I first went to South America for

Christ, I took Jer. 20:11 as one of my God-given promises." Then he quoted that wonderful verse:

"The LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one:
therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall
not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall
not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be
forgotten."

"The first line of that verse," my friend continued, "is trans-
lated in Spanish to read like this: 'The LORD is with me as
a mighty giant.'" He kept repeating the lines to himself, as
he was being stalked by the savage men. And God answered
his prayer, delivering him out of their hands. That is what
it meant for him to trust God utterly.

Now the Holy Spirit, writing through Paul, did not be-
gin this Epistle to the Hebrews with the exhortation, "Be...
content with such things as ye have." First He flooded
the souls of those persecuted Christians with the glory of
their crucified, risen, and interceding Great High Priest.
Then, with the vision of His matchless Person and mighty
work on their behalf filling their hearts and minds, He urged
them to keep "looking unto Jesus... content with such
things" as His wisdom and love bestowed upon them. That
is the secret of a life of peace and rest and usefulness in His
vineyard.

A CALL TO COMPLETE SEPARATION FROM JUDAISM
Heb. 13:7-17

Faithful to his God-given task of proving to the perse-
cuted Hebrew believers that "Christianity is better than
Judaism as seen in its Founder, Christ," the inspired apostle
sounded a final call to complete separation from the Christ-
rejecting nation of Israel, as recorded in the long paragraph
of Heb. 13:7-17. To understand the full significance of this
stirring appeal, we must remember that the Jewish temple
was still standing when this epistle was written; that the Mo-
saic ritual was still being enacted, even though Christ had
fulfilled its typical meaning, and had forever done away with

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it; and that it was not easy for the loyal, patriotic Hebrew to bear the scorn of his fellow-Israelites, who considered him a traitor to his nation. And yet that was exactly the position of the Hebrew Christians before the temple was destroyed by Titus, the Roman emperor, in the year 70 A.D.

Now let us read this paragraph together. Perhaps a simple outline of its main thoughts will help us best to grasp the message it has for us. It is an exhortation to those early Hebrew Christians:

1. To Follow the Example of Faithful Ministers of the Word of God, verses 7 and 17. These two verses are very much alike; but as we read them in the Revised Version, we note that verse 7 refers to the men of God who had been the former teachers and ministers of His Word, and had died, or perhaps had gone elsewhere to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth; whereas verse 17 refers to those who were still living in their midst, leading them in spiritual things:

"Remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith," verse 7.

Plainly, this is a call to follow the example of those who, in times past, "had the rule" over the flock of God, who "spake" the Word of God, even as their manner of life was consistent with their message. Doubtless some of these were the apostles, all of whom except John laid down their lives as martyrs for their Lord. Some were pastors and teachers who had ministered by their godly lives, as well as by the spoken word. And now Paul was urging his fellow-Christian Hebrews to emulate the lives of these faithful ones who had gone on before them.

In verse 17, however, he continued,

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this were unprofitable for you."

Here the present tense is used; for the pastors and teachers who were still ruling over the flock of God, watching on behalf of their souls, are presented as those who were to give an account of their stewardship to the Lord Himself.

In both passages it is made very clear that God has ordained that men should exercise leadership in spiritual matters, to be pastors and teachers and missionaries of the Gospel; and in both passages it is made very clear that those early leaders, whom Paul urged the Hebrew Christians to "remember" and "obey," were true to the whole Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The verses in between these two leave no doubt in the matter. Men who taught "divers and strange teachings" were to be avoided; their doctrines, shunned. Whatever the age, there is only one doctrine of salvation; for there is only one Saviour of sinners, even the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

2. To "Be Established by Grace" through Faith in "This Same Jesus," the Lord, verses 8 and 9.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever. Be not carried away by divers and strange teachings: for it is good that the heart be established by grace; not by meats, wherein they that occupied themselves (i. e., 'walked') were not profited."

Those former ministers of the Word of God, whom Paul urged the Hebrew Christian to emulate, as well as those still guiding them in their Christian experience, had proved by their manner of life that the eternal, unchanging Lord Jesus was the sole Object of their faith. Their hearts had been "established by grace," not by ordinances and ritual. The grace of God, not the Law of Moses, had saved their souls—the grace that was poured out when Christ died and rose and ascended into heaven, there to live forever at the right hand of the Majesty on high. False religions come and go. "Divers and strange teachings" deceive many. But the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel of grace are "the same yesterday, and to-day, yea and for ever."
When the risen Lord ascended into heaven, the disciples must have been sad to see Him go. But then,

"... while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10, 11).

One day we shall see "this same Jesus"—"the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever." He is the "same Jesus" who took little children in His arms and blessed them; who said to the sinful woman, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11); who wept at the tomb of Lazarus; who shed tears over His beloved Jerusalem. "Change and decay in all around" we see; but our Lord never changes. His love never fails.

We have seen, from our study of the first chapter of this epistle, that God the Father addressed God the Son as the eternal, unchanging Creator and Lord in the Jews' own Old Testament. The whole Bible is filled with this truth; for in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). In view of this central truth, it is not strange that Satan has based the false religions upon a denial of this fundamental fact. As we examine the cults that flourish today, comparing their teachings with those of false religions of the ancient past, we find that every one of them strikes at certain foundation truths, such as the eternal deity of Christ, His incarnation, His vicarious suffering and death for sinners, His bodily resurrection, His ascension into heaven, His present ministry of intercession, and His coming again in bodily presence to rule over a purified earth. One or all of these fundamentals of our faith are denied by the false systems, which are the works of the devil himself. But thank God! Satan and all his hosts can never alter the fact that God's Word is infallible; that His Christ is eternal, unchangeable, the God of all grace. To Him Paul begs us to adhere, following the example of His faithful ministers who have preached Christ crucified, risen, ascended, interceding, and coming again in power and great glory. There is no other hope for a lost world.

3. To "Go Forth unto" Jesus "without the Camp" of the Nation of Israel, verses 10-14. The Christ-rejecting rulers of the Jews were still trying to keep the Law of Moses, occupying themselves with "meats" and ordinances. But they "were not profited" thereby. They were still offering the lambs and calves and goats upon the brazen altar in the outer court of the temple, refusing to accept the Lamb of God who had come to fulfill and do away with all the Old Testament types. The Christ-rejecting priests were still entering the Holy Place of the temple to eat the shewbread and to burn incense upon the golden altar, refusing to feed their souls upon Jesus, the Bread of Life, refusing to go to Him in prayer before the throne of grace, refusing to believe that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4). It was of such as these that Paul wrote, saying to the Hebrew Christians,

"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle," verse 10.

Those Christ-rejecting priests had "no right" to feed their souls upon the Bread of Life because they refused the only One who is that Living Bread. Calvary's Cross is our brazen altar; and they scorned it. In the "true tabernacle" in heaven, which "the Lord pitched, and not man," is the altar where our prayers are heard and answered, in fulfillment of the typical meaning of the golden altar in the earthly sanctuary. But Christ-rejecting Israel refused the only One who "ever liveth to make intercession" for His own. Therefore, they "have no right" to access into His presence.

These are fitting words to explain to the godly Hebrew the meaning of Calvary's Cross. Every Jew knew that Paul was not thinking of an altar of wood or precious stones; that he did not have in mind our mourners' bench. Every intelli-
gent Jew understood fully what Paul meant—that he was emphasizing the whole message of the Epistle to the Hebrews, stating once more the often-repeated truth of the book, that Christ Jesus had come to fulfill and set aside the ritual of Judaism, that He is "better than" the very best that Judaism could offer. He was saying that, to be a Christian, one has to accept Him fully; that there is no middle ground. The Hebrew Christian could not worship Christ, and at the same time return to the temple worship, in fellowship with the Christ-rejecting nation of Israel.

This call to complete separation from Judaism is emphasized yet further by the continuation of the thought, as developed further in verses 11-14. Speaking still of the animal sacrifice of the sin-offering, the inspired apostle wrote:

"For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come." (Heb. 13:13, 14)

Every Jew of Paul's day knew that, whereas the burnt-offering was sacrificed wholly as an offering unto the Lord, yet the sin-offering was not completely burned upon the brazen altar. The burnt-offering was a type of the sinless perfections of the Lord Jesus, wholly acceptable unto His Father. But the sin-offering represented the sins of God's people. Upon the head of the animal that was to become the sin-offering the priest laid his hands, confessed the sins of his people, figuratively laying upon the innocent victim the sins of the nation. Then portions of the offering were burned upon the altar; but the body itself was taken outside the camp of Israel, as an accursed thing, the symbol of sin, and burned to ashes. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Sin-Offering, was crucified without the city gate of Jerusalem.

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21).

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12).

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

Without the gate of His beloved Jerusalem our Lord suffered and died, not only for Israel, but for all the world. In so doing, He fulfilled the typical meaning of the sin-offering in the Jewish ritual; and that is what Paul was explaining to the Hebrew Christians in the text before us. Then he continued,

"Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Heb. 13:13, 14).

With this final call to complete separation from Judaism, the inspired apostle reminded his people that they could well afford to be outcasts from their own city of Jerusalem, in view of the New Jerusalem which they were to inherit for all eternity. Moreover, the city of David, the king, was soon to be destroyed by the Roman soldiers; for Christ Himself had told His disciples that not one stone would be left upon another. Even as Moses had regarded "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt," so also the persecuted Hebrew Christians were to be willing to bear His reproach outside the camp of Israel's national life; for their inheritance was to endure throughout the endless ages with the Lord Himself.

Can we today fail to get the message which this appeal has for our own hearts? Many of us are Gentiles. We are not called to give up Judaism; the temple has been destroyed for centuries anyway. But we are called to put Christ first in
our hearts and lives, to separate ourselves from the things that would defile, to bear His reproach even as we journey to "that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

We may be outside the camp of our families or friends; the godless world will ostracize us; but "bearing his reproach" can become the most sublime of earthly joys, through the consciousness of His abiding presence, and the hope of eternity with Him in that heavenly city.

On one occasion a friend, in whose home I was a guest, invited me to go with him to a country club dinner. About forty-five people were present. When the lady sitting next to me learned that I was to preach in the city on the following Lord's Day, she began to ask what I thought about the virgin birth of Christ and His cross. When I told her, she replied, "Surely no intelligent person believes that Christ was born of a virgin, or that He arose from the dead! Surely you do not believe those things!" I told her that it was not a matter of what I believed; it was a matter of believing what God had said in His Word. Soon there was a stillness in the whole room. There were cynical expressions on some of the faces. I was "outside the camp" of that group. I was avoided by others after the dinner, as someone rather queer. But that was not surprising. The godless world does not know our Lord; they think Christians who seek to separate themselves from an unholy fellowship are narrow and peculiar. They can not understand the Christian's joy and peace of heart through fellowship with the Lord of glory. It is our mission to tell them of the Saviour, at the same time going forth "without the camp, bearing his reproach," acknowledging to men, angels, and demons that He alone can satisfy the heart.

4. To "Offer Up a Sacrifice of Praise to God Continually," verse 15.

"Through him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name."

5. "To Do Good through the Sacrifice of Giving," verse 16.

"... to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

"Communicate" in this passage means "to share what we have with others." We have the glorious Gospel of Christ in our hearts; we are to share it with the millions of others in the world who do not know the Lord. Thus Christian giving becomes a privilege, and is well pleasing to God. Indeed, we can not worship God with the greatest blessing to ourselves and glory to Him unless we do give of our money and time toward "the furtherance of the gospel." At the Church of the Open Door we worship God with our offering; we do not call our stewardship of possessions something separate and apart from our worship and praise.

All the riches in His vast universe belong to God; He does not need our paltry mite. But He wants us to be in

Those Hebrew Christians did not need the temple, in order to worship God. We do not have to wait until we go to His house to worship Him today. We need not wait till the Lord's Day to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually. In the kitchen, in the office, in the shop, on beds of illness, or in the active path of duty, the child of God has access to unbroken fellowship with God through praise and worship. Our hearts should be in tune with Him "continually"—Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday—always, in every place. Whether we have beautiful voices or not, God wants the praise of our lips. Mr. Moody, we are told, sang all the hymns in a monotone; but he sang them as unto the Lord, making melody in his heart to Him who died to redeem his soul. That is what God is telling us here in Heb. 13:15. Even when circumstances seem against us, when nothing seems right and everything seems to go wrong, still we have Christ as our portion, heaven as our home; and He never makes a mistake in His leading. "Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name."
partnership with Himself, sharing in His message of salvation to a dying world. The Jewish Christians of Paul's day no longer needed to take the lamb to the altar to offer it as a sacrifice; but they were urged to offer the sacrifice of praise and liberality. And what they were to do in apostolic days, we are to do today. God has no other plan for making known the love of His Son, our Lord.

Recently I was in the home of a man who was once blessed with money, one who considered his wealth as a sacred trust from God. He told me he wanted to show me something, not for vainglory, but for the glory of God. Then he went into his private office and brought out cancelled checks representing $75,000. "These," he said, "are all I saved from the depression. If I had not given them to the Lord before the crash came, they, too, would have been lost." What my friend said might be applied to everything we possess in temporal things. All that we dedicate to God is saved for all eternity; what we keep selfishly is lost for all eternity.

THE CONCLUSION TO THE EPISTLE
Heb. 13:18-25

At the beginning of our study today we saw that verses 18-25 of this closing chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews form the conclusion to the entire book, and that it is in three parts:

1. An Exhortation to Prayer, verses 18, 19.

"Pray for us: for we are persuaded that we have a good conscience, desiring to live honorably in all things. And I exhort you the more exceedingly to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner" (R. V.).

Paul's letters are filled with exhortations to prayer, for he realized the power of prayer, his own need for prayer if he was to do the will of God. Here, also, as in many of his other letters, he longed to see these Hebrew Christians, to teach them the things of Christ, to warn them against the wiles of the devil, and to rejoice in fellowship with them.

Evidently he was in Italy when he wrote the epistle, for verse 24 tells us plainly, "They of Italy salute you." Whether he was in a Roman prison or not, we do not know. That he did refer to the Hebrew Christians' kindness to him when he was "in bonds," we do know from Heb. 10:34. And it hardly need be added just here that Paul's exhortation to prayer, on the part of these early saints, is one we today should heed; for "more things are wrought by prayer" than the world can ever know!

2. The Apostolic Benediction, verses 20, 21. Every Christian should memorize the beautiful words of the benediction of this epistle. Many pastors close their sermons with these memorable words:

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

"The God of peace" speaks peace to our hearts through "the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). "Through the blood of the everlasting covenant" He has reconciled us to Himself. Sin had separated us from His holy presence; but He removed the barrier of sin by taking our place on the accursed tree. That is the message of these wonderful lines; it is the message of all the Epistle to the Hebrews; it is the message of the entire Word of God. We have "peace with God" because we have been "justified by faith" in His atoning work on Calvary; for there He became our Great High Priest, and offered one sufficient Sacrifice "once for all." That is why we have "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). "The God of peace" has "made peace" for us by "the blood of His cross."

If He had died for us and remained in the grave, then we should have no Saviour. But He arose! He was "brought again from the dead," and is "alive for evermore." (See Rev.
1:18.) He is the risen Lord in glory; and He is “our Lord Jesus.” My friend, can you repeat these words with Paul today? Is the Lord Jesus yours? He longs to be, but He can be only if you trust Him for salvation “through the blood of his cross.”

He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep simply because He is risen. This is the only time in the Bible where He is called the Great Shepherd of the sheep; and here the title is linked with the statement that He has been “brought again from the dead.” All of this speaks to us of His present ministry of intercession for us before the “throne of grace.”

In John 10:11 we read that He is the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep. Here in Heb. 13:20 we see Him as the Great Shepherd, the risen Lord, working in us and through us during our earthly pilgrimage. In 1 Peter 5:4 we find that, as the Chief Shepherd, He will come again in glory, and will bestow upon His faithful servants “a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” Thus the Shepherd-work of Christ is presented to us in unmistakable terms. As our Good Shepherd, He died for us. As our Great Shepherd, He lives for us at the Father’s right hand. As our Chief Shepherd, He is coming for us, to take us to Himself, forever to behold and to share His glory.

We have often pointed out the fact that Psalms twenty-two, twenty-three, and twenty-four give us a prophetic picture of this three-fold Shepherd-work of our Lord. All three of these beautiful psalms were written by the shepherd-boy who became Israel’s king. They may have been written at different periods of David’s life; we do not know. But the Holy Spirit arranged them in our Bible in the right order; for He never makes a mistake! Psalm twenty-two is a graphic prophecy of the cross. Psalm twenty-three is a beautiful picture of our risen Lord, our Great Shepherd, “brought again from the dead,” leading us into green pastures, beside the still waters. Psalm twenty-four is a glorious picture of the Chief Shepherd who is coming again as the “King of glory.”

Dr. F. B. Meyer once called these three psalms a prophecy of “the cross, the crook, and the crown.” And the New Testament bears out the statement. And this Good Shepherd, this Great Shepherd, this Chief Shepherd, is “our Lord Jesus!”

He is ours by faith in His “blood of the everlasting covenant.” That is not the Abrahamic covenant, which gave promise to Abraham concerning his “seed” and concerning Abraham’s land. That covenant was made to Israel. The “everlasting covenant” is not the Mosaic covenant of the Law. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” “The everlasting covenant” is the “new covenant,” to which Jeremiah referred, to which our Lord referred when He instituted the memorial feast of the Lord’s Supper before He went to the cross. The “new covenant” has been sealed with His precious blood. By it we are saved for all eternity. By it the Hebrew Christians were exhorted to separate themselves from the ritual of Judaism, once and for all. By it we are exhorted to trust in the grace of God alone for our salvation. The Mosaic covenant was only a “shadow of good things to come” in Christ Jesus. Thus, in this beautiful benediction, we see once more the very heart of the Epistle to the Hebrews re-stated in terms that are both unmistakable and irrefutable.

On the basis of this new covenant we are strengthened and sustained for God’s work here in this earthly life, even as He is working in us “to do his will,” making us “perfect in every good work.” Only then shall we be “well pleasing in his sight.” Only then shall we be giving the Lord Jesus Christ the “glory for ever and ever.” Never sinlessly perfect in this life, yet we are made “mature and complete” in the Christian experience as we trust His shed blood, not only as an atonement for the soul, but also as the cleansing power from the defilement of sin in our journey from “Egypt to Canaan.”

The apostolic “Amen” means “Let it be so.” And with this prayer the beautiful benediction closes. “Let it be so”
in our own lives today, that our Great Shepherd, risen, interceding for us at the Father's right hand, may have His way in our lives, working in us that which is "wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord." To Him be the glory "for ever and ever. Amen."

3. Personal Greetings, verses 22-25. The last four verses of the epistle hardly need explanation or comment. They include a final word of exhortation from the apostle, the statement that Timothy had been released from prison, Paul's expression of his desire to visit the Hebrew Christians, salutations from the believers in Italy, with another special greeting to the spiritual guides of his readers, and the closing prayer of the apostle, often found at the end of Paul's letters:

"And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words. Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen."

As we bring these studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews to a close, let us thank God once more for showing us that our Lord Jesus is "better than" the prophets, angels, Moses, Aaron—"better than" all that Judaism had to offer. And, even as the high priest in Israel represented the very best in Judaism, so the "better" priestly Person and work of Christ forever establish the fact that He is preeminent in all things. Indeed, the Holy Spirit has abundantly proved to us on these pages that He is perfect in His Person, all-powerful in His work.

As our Great High Priest, He died for us, lives for us, and empowers us for His service. His work on the cross is forever finished. His ministry in heaven continues—a silent witness and an active intercession.

[18]

His silent intercession before the throne of grace has been beautifully expressed in the stanza from the old hymn:

"Five bleeding wounds He bears, 
Received on Calvary. 
They pour effectual prayers 
That strongly plead for me. 
'Forgive him, oh forgive, they cry, 
Nor let that guilty sinner die.'"

The seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel tells us the kind of prayer He is praying for us even now in the court of heaven. Let us read it again and again, thanking God that our Great Shepherd and Great High Priest is praying that we may be kept from Satan's wiles; sanctified, separated from the defilement of sin in our daily walk; unified, made one in Christ, who is the Head of the body which is His church; glorified, that we may behold and share His glory.

With "such an high priest" ever living "to make intercession for us," we may thank God and take courage. He who "hath appeared" to put away sin "by the sacrifice of himself" "now appears in the presence of God for us," and will one day "appear" to change these bodies of humiliation and fashion them "like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21). With "such an high priest" in the glory, our hearts are warmed by His own reassuring benediction,

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."