

YOUR ETERNAL INHERITANCE

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A fresh perspective is often helpful. Seeing life from another's point of view. Walking a mile in another person's shoes.

One of the benefits is the simple discovery that the world is not all about you! It is not all about what has happened to you, nor about what you want to have happen. Other people, other dreams, and other needs abound. In fact, much of the joy of life comes not from satisfying your own desires, but instead from satisfying the desires of someone else.

And when we add to this growing picture God the Creator and His perspective, a thorough paradigm shift is introduced. At their best, our plans are mere subsets of God's plan. You and I are just a chapter in the story He is writing. It is not an unimportant chapter or meaningless filler, but it is only one of many.

The Book of Hebrews attempts to offer perspective to the religious life of the Jewish people—historical perspective and spiritual perspective. The writer attempts to lead his readers from the past to the present, to lift them from the mundane to the sublime, and to free them from the script of rituals to the movement of the spirit. This is not as easy as one might think.

Words of Truth

For one thing, words are insufficient for the task. Yet words are primary tools for such efforts. But they are only tools—forms for the truth, but not the truth itself. They point us to what is real, what is to be. But when we arrive at what is real, we find it is not the form but something within it—the heart, the substance.

In the same way, truth is not the words that describe it, but something more solid, more alive.

Jesus said to the Jewish scholars of His day, *"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life"* (John 5:39-40). The words are pointers, only signs.

Which would you rather see? A sign that reads, "The Grand Canyon," or the canyon itself? You can take in all that the sign has to offer in a few moments, but it will require days and nights, or months and years to discover all that the Grand Canyon itself has to offer.

This is why we urge you to read and re-read and read again the Bible, for you can only begin to plumb its matchless depths with each cycle of reading. And that is why we urge you to read with an open ear and an open heart, for you must discover the voice of God behind the words about Him.

And that is why we urge you to pray—freely revealing your heart and also earnestly seeking the heart of God—daily, and even more frequently than that, and patiently and persistently over time. For the glory of prayer is not to be found in your many words, but in the discovery of Christ's presence—His radiance, His warmth, His strength, His understanding, His wisdom, and His grace.

First Impact

There is much about the First Covenant (what we call the Old Testament), that seems foreign to us, and more than that, cumbersome and even burdensome and distasteful. As a result, many will shy away from it completely. Regrettably, those who do will then miss its intended impact. For although we are not under the First Covenant, from God's perspective, if we do not feel the weight of its burden as we read it, we will never grasp nor enjoy the fullness of our freedom in Christ.

Primarily, the First Covenant was replete with regulations—regulations for daily living, but especially regulations for worship. The very experience which has been intended to release the human spirit into contact with our Maker and our Purpose and our Destiny, instead became an unbearable weight of numerous and specific rules and details, leading to distracting self-measurements and comparisons with others.

The second component of First Covenant worship was location. Places were important—landmarks, altars, furnishings—and eventually, one single place: the Temple in Jerusalem—the place where God put His name, His stamp of authority, the promise of His presence. All Jews of that time were very familiar with these elements, having been schooled in them from childhood.

Of course, even if you are not Jewish by birth or tradition, you will have developed similar elements to guide your life's meaning—principles and regulations by which you attempt to conduct yourself, and a place or places where you walk out those rules. You don't escape those elements by not being Jewish or religious. They are part of the human psyche and society.

Therefore, what the writer to the Hebrews had to say can have great meaning and application to you and I, even after so many years have passed and culture has shifted so much. Let's hear him once more.

Holy Places

Hebrews 9:1-5

¹ That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on earth. ² There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. ³ Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. ⁴ In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark's cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.

He is describing the Tabernacle that Moses and those Jews who escaped Egyptian slavery with him constructed and used during their journey through the desert to the land God had promised to give them. This massive, but portable, tent—made of wood and metal and fabric and animal skins—was the forerunner of the Temple which King David conceived and which his son, Solomon, built in Jerusalem. Its specific design—and the regulations for its use—had been given to Moses by God during his meetings with Him on Mount Sinai. It was modeled after something like it in Heaven; in this sense, it was an earthly copy of the real, heavenly Temple.

Why is this important? Because the model that Moses built was designed to reveal something about God's own nature and character, and about the nature and character of true worship. If we ignore this, we risk missing completely our opportunity for spiritual maturity.

The first room, the Holy Place, was a lighted room, with food for the priests. The first room was separated from the second room, the Most Holy Place, by a heavy curtain. Behind that curtain it was dark, lit only by the smoldering pot of incense that burned on a golden altar. Behind that curtain was also a wooden chest, overlaid with gold, that contained memorabilia of Israel's journey to freedom to remind them of God's miraculous provision of food, of leadership, and of revelation. This chest was covered with a gold sculpture of heavenly winged creatures that guarded the glory of the God of mercy.

Priestly Heights

Hebrews 9:6-8

⁶ When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. ⁷ But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. ⁸ By these regulations the Holy Spirit

revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

The first room, the Holy Place, was also separated from the second room, the Most Holy Place, by an invisible line that no one was permitted to cross except the High Priest, and even he only once each year, and only in a certain manner and for a certain purpose.

The High Priest was unique among his brothers. No one ascended to this position by his own choice or by the choice of other people. God gave this position to only one man, Aaron, and his descendants, and so it was passed from one generation to the next, by divine appointment. Those who tried to usurp the role of the High Priest found themselves in serious trouble with God, from whom there was no escape.

But the High Priest was also just like all of his brothers, for he was human, and as a human, he sinned and was in need of repentance and forgiveness. So, when he came each year into the Most Holy Place, he always brought the prescribed offering of blood, which he had taken from a young bull. This offering was first for his own sins, that he might become acceptable (spiritually clean) in God's presence.

It is remarkable that his sins did not prevent him from such duties, but neither could they be ignored; they required atonement. So, the High Priest was an ordinary man, but divinely appointed to this service of worship. And, as such, he did not only represent himself before God. After cleansing himself by means of the blood offering, he represented all of God's people—the whole nation—and offered blood for their atonement also. It was not possible, however, for the High Priest to fully represent the people or atone for all of their sins. His act of worship could only cover *“the sins the people had committed in ignorance.”* For the people's known sins, each had to bring a sacrificial offering of his or her own.

Are you paying attention? No one else can repent of your sins for you. And no other person's prayers can atone for the sins you have committed. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, entered the real Most Holy Place with an offering of His own blood (not for His own sins, for He never sinned, but) for the sins we have committed in ignorance—for which we are culpable, even though we didn't realize our errors.

Humans are sinful by nature. Therefore, we are naturally unaware of our offenses. We must be taught to distinguish right from wrong. And then, there are social offenses and there are also divine offenses. The psalmist lamented to God, *“Against You, and You alone, have I sinned”* (Psalm 51:4).

The blood shed and offered by Jesus Christ covers the innumerable sins of which we are generally unaware. When, upon reflection, we become aware of our wrongdoing, we then become responsible to repent, with the divine assurance that our every sin is

already covered by Christ's magnificent sacrifice. *"If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness"* (1 John 1:9). *"And the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

There is something else revealed in this passage that expresses the beauty of our God and the tender generosity of His heart. That the High Priest was able to represent others in his service and atone for their sins is remarkable. Long before this was established as a pattern, Job practiced something similar on behalf of his children.

Job 1:4-5

⁴ *Job's sons would take turns preparing feasts in their homes, and they would also invite their three sisters to celebrate with them.* ⁵ *When these celebrations ended—sometimes after several days—Job would purify his children. He would get up early in the morning and offer a burnt offering for each of them. For Job said to himself, "Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular practice.*

May I simply add that the head of every family, the head of every household, has the same privilege, for under the Second Covenant, we are the priests of our homes. We may—and should—represent all the members of our household before the Lord, claiming the sufficiency of the blood of Jesus for ourselves and for the sins committed by our family members in ignorance. In this way, you cover your family with mercy and release illumination in their hearts.

The most important thing we can draw from the words written to the Hebrews is what comes next.

Heavenly Realities

Hebrews 9:9-12

⁹ *This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them.*

¹⁰ *For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established.*

¹¹ *So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world.* ¹² *With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.*

All of this has been an illustration. That does not mean imaginary—a fable—but that from these realities we can derive principles that apply also to us, even thousands of years removed. The blood of animals could only purify people outwardly, with respect

to their social and religious mores. It could not cleanse their consciences; it could not remove the bruise or stain or shame of their sins. Neither can the social or religious principles and regulations by which you lead your life. You may tell yourself it's okay, you're only human, and move on, trying to improve, but the stain remains. Only one thing can wash it away. No offering imagined or contrived by humans—no rituals, no service, no restraints, no sacrifice, no self-denial, no punishments—can cleanse the human conscience. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can bring relief from shame and guilt and the assurance of true forgiveness. He has *“secured our redemption forever.”*

Highest Aim

Hebrews 9:13-15

¹³ Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. ¹⁴ Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. ¹⁵ That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.

This final paragraph reaches a crescendo of revelation. The author leaps to the highest heights of human potential and destiny.

The forgiveness of your sins and your salvation has not been bought at such a price so that you could simply “feel better” about yourself. Christ's work had a much higher aim, which was expressed with these words: *“So that we can worship the living God.”*

This, my dear friends, is what you were made for, and what you have been called to. This is your highest privilege and deepest joy, whether you know it yet or not. Every fiber in your being and every synapse have been created for this purpose and expression: *“So that [you] can worship the living God.”*

You were made to enjoy Him, to love Him, to be with Him. As Saint Augustine of Hippo put it: *“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”*

What if the rest you have longed for is never to be found by either the cessation or the multiplication of activities? What if the rest you have sought after can never be found in human relationships or the seclusion from them? What if the peace you dream of can never be found through alcohol or drugs or sex? What if the fullness you have desired can never be achieved, no matter how many sights or sounds, or other beauties or joys of this world you embrace? What if there can be no lasting rest apart from God? What if God is all you need to find immeasurable rest and peace and hope?

I believe that the reason we all seek this—in the multitude of ways we do—is because it is, in fact, our eternal inheritance; it is our destiny. And if this is so, as I believe it is, it would be an immeasurable tragedy to ignore it or to squander it.

This is why Jesus came. This is why He consecrated Himself. This is why He laid down His life. For you. For me. For us to discover what we were truly made for: fullness of life with our Creator.

This is why there is a Second Covenant, a New Testament. Because there is a new way, not made with human hands or crippled by human design. This should be the objective of Bible reading. This should be the purpose of prayer. This should be the aim of church meetings. To lead us to Jesus. To teach us to worship Him.

When we actively love God with all of our hearts, we will have love for the people around us, and wisdom for the situations in which we find ourselves. When we actively love God and other people, we will involuntarily satisfy God's commandments. This is the real Christian life.

Come, let's live it together!