

Study 11: Perfect Forgiveness

Not only is Jesus presented as being perfect in terms of the sacrifice that He made, but the Hebrew writer now presents our relationship through Jesus as being one of perfect forgiveness, with some direct applications for us.

How does the writer describe the Law?

Did the Old Testament predict that the Covenant would change?

What is the effect of the Old Covenant sacrifices, compared to the New Covenant?

Because of this, what should we do, and how should we live?

How can we help one another?

If Jesus gives us perfect forgiveness, then can we keep on sinning?

What was it like when you first became a christian?

Homework:

Read the notes, as a review of the study.

- *What are some of the practical ways that you (personally) can help others, so that they might grow in love and good works.*

Read Chapter 11 in preparation for next week.

Study Notes for: Study 11: Perfect Forgiveness

Not only is Jesus presented as being perfect in terms of the sacrifice that He made, but the Hebrew writer now presents our relationship through Jesus as being one of perfect forgiveness, with some direct applications for us.

This is strongly linked to the previous examples, and the writer intertwines the ideas, especially those related to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. There are some practical applications of all of this for us, and he will spend a large part of the remaining section of the letter getting us focussed on serving God.

How does the writer describe the Law?

It is “...but a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things.”

The writer has already discussed this idea in the previous chapters. The sacrifices were offered continually, and therefore they never accomplish the perfect sacrifice that Jesus made in the “one time” sacrifice of himself. If perfection had come from those sacrifices, then they would have stopped being offered – because perfection would have already been achieved.

In the sacrifices, remembrance is made (of the same sins) every year. This is the case, because the blood of Bulls and Goats could never take away sins.

The writer again points to the fact that the things of the Old Covenant were only temporary and transient. They were only there “to bring us to Christ”, and not (as the Jews thought) the be-all and end-all of the things of God. God had foreseen the New Covenant and reflected that when He instituted the Old.

The Jewish Christians – of all people – should have been aware of the fact that *in Christ* is fulfilment and completion of the Old Testament. He now moves towards answering an obvious question:

Did the Old Testament predict that the Covenant would change?

He presents a series of quotes from the Old Testament, supporting the fact that Christ was the fulfilment of the promises.

Ps 40:6-8

The true desire of God was not in the sacrifice and offering of animals – it was in a meaningful sacrifice - a body that was prepared for God.

This raises a really interesting “hard” question – why is it that God required a sacrifice? It is not to say that having His son put to death (or anyone else put to death for that matter) was what God *really wanted*. Why is it that there has to be a sacrifice for sins? Why couldn't God just forgive our sins if we are sorry for them?

The answer to this “big question” can be made in several ways.

First, there is the Law of Parity. Parity means “opposites”. If good exists, then evil must also exist. If light exists, then darkness must also exist. In physics, Newton's First Law is a Law of parity (to every action on a body, there is an equal and opposite reaction).

Applying the Law of Parity to this situation, if we have broken God's Laws (through sin), then there must be a consequence of that sin. If there is no punishment, then there cannot be anything wrong with what we have done – we might just as well keep doing it, because there are no consequences! The Law of Parity demands that there be some form of consequence, punishment, or recompense.

Second, by observation we find that in order for us to have a benefit, everything must die. This is true for the food we eat – unless it died first, we would have no nourishment from it. It is true of the vegetables, and it is true of the meat. It is also true for the living trees that were cut down to make a wooden table, or wooden chairs, or wooden houses, or newspapers. They had to die first before we could get a benefit. It is also true of the plastic chairs that are made from oil – it used to be plants once upon a time! The law of death sees us all gain a benefit by that death.

Thirdly, sacrifice is rooted into our nature. A simple observation of our society (and today more than ever!) people are looking for someone to blame when things go wrong: *My son died, and someone must pay* is the cry. *I've been injured and I demand compensation* (recompense). God has been hurt, and our relationship injured by our sins. *Someone has to pay* for that relationship to be put right again. That someone who should pay is us! And we will pay, unless we can find someone else to pay on our behalf.

The problem is, finding an acceptable payment. (I have reached the end of my credit limit of my Visa Card before I can even begin!). There are only two possibilities. The first is that I pay – but that will mean my eternal punishment and separation from God. The second is an acceptable sacrifice – something that God will accept as payment on my behalf – and the only acceptable sacrifice is that of someone who is pure and sinless, or else he (or she) would have to pay for their own sins and then couldn't pay for mine.

Enter the perfect Son of God. A perfect life, and a perfect sacrifice.

But how to make men understand the weight of the sacrifice that was made? How could man possibly understand what it meant, and what it was going to cost?

Enter the Law, and the Old Testament sacrifices.

So, God predicted that the old sacrifices would end and pass away. The prophecy of Psalm 40 was one concerning Christ entering the world "... *when Christ entered into the world...*" (Heb 10:5).

Further, the perfect sacrifice of Christ (as predicted by the Psalmist) meant that the Old Covenant was going to be taken away, and the New Covenant established (10:9)

Notice the concluding (in this section) argument by the writer:

"And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (10:10 NIV – emphasis mine – GO)

It was not through the former will that we were made holy (ie set apart – or called as God's children to be His), but by the New Covenant.

What is the effect of the Old Covenant sacrifices, compared to the New Covenant?

The old sacrifices were offered over and over and over again. Yet (as we have already observed), these could never take sins away.

This is compared to the sacrifice of Jesus, who after He had in just one time made a sacrifice, He sat down at God's right hand (in the position of authority).

The sacrifice of Jesus is therefore concluded to be perfect, since it accomplished what had never, would never, and could never be accomplished by the sacrifices under the Law.

"...His enemies are made His footstool..." is a quote from Ps 110, and is always used to refer to the reign of Christ (Jesus reigning as King). We can see clearly that this is the case in this instance (*Sat down at God's right hand ... waiting ... until His enemies have been made His footstool...*)

But notice what the writer concludes about that sacrifice: *"...by this one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are made holy"*. Those who are made holy are the Christians who have been justified (made right) with God. *How* we are made perfect is by the sacrifice of Jesus. This was never achieved under the Old Law. Forgiveness never really occurred *in actuality*, (although it did *in effect* – we discussed this in the last lesson). The forgiveness from God is therefore complete (perfect), but only through Jesus. The forgiveness achieved *is forever*. Jesus not only took away the past sins of the world for all of the time before the cross, but He also took away the sins of all the world for all time after the cross. He did not have to go and repeat the sacrifice. The sacrifice was complete and perfect, and God's forgiveness of our sins is complete and perfect – but only to those who have been made holy through obedience to Jesus.

The Old Testament prophets predicted that this would be the case. The writer quotes from Jeremiah 31, and specifically applies this to the New Covenant – that unlike the physical characteristics of the Old Law which was prescriptive and ritualistic, it was a Law that was to be written on our hearts. The writer then links this prophecy concerning the New Law, to that of forgiveness of sins: *"Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more"*. But notice what the writer says next:

"Where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins" God's forgiveness is complete. It is utterly final. It does not need to be repeated. It is perfect. Only through Jesus do we have this perfect forgiveness.

Because of this, what should we do, and how should we live?

Firstly, *"we have confidence..."* we do not need to approach God with apprehension, because we are His children, and Jesus has gone before us to make intercession directly with God on our behalf.

Our confidence is to enter the Holy Place – paralleling the Holy of Holies in the Temple, but rather referring to heaven itself. Indeed, we will enter heaven itself, and Jesus has gone there before us. He will come again to show us the way and take us back there with Him (Jn 14:2-6).

Notice the parallels and contrasts that the writer presents here for us with the Old Covenant worship:

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Apprehensive approach to God The most Holy place (blood of bulls and goats) Through the curtain (Veil of the Temple) Levitical High Priest Approach God through the Priests Alter sprinkled with blood (ceremonial washings for “uncleaness”)	Boldness & full assurance (Heaven itself) Blood of Jesus Through Jesus body Great High Priest after Melchisedek Draw near to God himself Hearts sprinkled with Jesus blood Bodies washed with pure water (= baptism into Jesus Christ)

The writer implores the christians to *hold unswervingly to the hope that we have in Christ*. It is evident that they might be tempted to turn back, to want to go back to the Jewish ways (and therefore make Jesus’ sacrifice of no effect).

How can we help one another?

Christians *need one another*. We cannot exist in isolation. We need the encouragement of one another as we face *the trials and tribulations of life*. Sometimes we just get weary and want to give up. The writer says “...spur one another on towards love and good works...” But notice that he says more than just that. Spurring one another on is good and right and proper – but he says “...consider how you might...” It is one thing to encourage each other, but we need to do this in a considered way. We need to understand the needs of others. We need to *understand* them! We cannot do this without sharing and fellowship.

But there are some outcomes of this. Christianity is *practical*, not just theoretical. If we get all the theory right and miss out on the practical applications, then we have missed the point. And the practical applications and outcomes are “*love and good works*”.

So, how do we (both as individuals, and as a part of the collective body), get to the position of understanding one another so much, that we will be in a position of spur them on to achieve *love and good works*? And importantly, how do we allow ourselves to be open and touched by the spurring on of our other brothers and sisters in the faith?

The writer starts to address some of these issues, and in fact spends a considerable part of the rest of the book focussing on these things.

Meeting together. This is a strong and important part of our process of learning more about God, thinking about spiritual things, and encouraging ourselves and others to *continue in the faith*. There were some of the Hebrew christians who were apparently

somewhat tardy in their attendance. Unfortunately this is no different today. In chapter 12, the writer urges the readers to “*fix your eyes upon Jesus...*” When we lose sight of Jesus, we lose sight of our purpose in life and our purpose on earth.

If Jesus gives us perfect forgiveness, then can we keep on sinning?

The idea of perfect forgiveness encompasses the thought that we don't need to offer sacrifices day after day and year after year. These sacrifices were for the same old sins again and again, but also for the new sins. So if Jesus made the perfect sacrifice, then He has already taken away the sins that I haven't committed yet! And if that is the case, then why can't I just keep on enjoying *the pleasures of sin*?

The real answer to this question lies with our hearts. Why would we *want* to keep on sinning? But Jesus was our sacrifice. If we deliberately keep on sinning after He has cleansed us, then what are we saying to Him and His sacrifice? We are saying that we don't regard it as being anything of value! And if that is the case, then what sacrifice is there that can cleanse us????

The only thing that is left for us is the righteous judgement of God, and the punishment that we really do deserve, but we were redeemed from by Jesus blood.

Even under the Old Covenant, wilfully despising the Law of Moses received the death penalty. Since the New Covenant is so much better than the Old one, how much greater will be the punishment for wilfully flaunting the perfect sacrifice of Jesus?

What was it like when you first became a christian?

The weight of sin was lifted from our shoulders, we were happy because we have been redeemed, we wanted to share the gospel with everyone and go out and convert the world! We were *on fire for God*!

It didn't matter what others said about us, or did to us, we were right with God and no-one could take that away from us! The things that we had in this life became totally meaningless – heaven was what was important – *this world is not our home, we are just passing through!*

But somehow, things got a little cloudy. The cares of the world overtook us. We get bogged down by our possessions. Our worldly friends and family become more important than our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not encouraged by our brethren. We are no longer spurred on to love one another, and to do good works to others. Going to church is alright, but it just doesn't have the spark that it used to have – and I don't get anything out of it any more!

Well, some of this comes from our culture – we want to “collect” rather than give. John F Kennedy once said “Do not ask what your country can do for you, but rather ask what you can do for your country”. Jesus said “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*”.

When we look to what we can get out of our worship, rather than what we can give to others, we have lost the plot about showing proper respect to Jesus who gave up His position in heaven to come and die a cruel death for your sins and for mine.

HEB 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (NIV)