

Summary of the Doctrinal Part of Hebrews (1:1-10:18): The book of Hebrews is a letter written to Hebrew-Christian converts who were suffering under persecution. Some of them were inclined to turn from Christianity back to Judaism. The letter persuasively argues they should stand fast in the faith in spite of persecution for what they have is much superior to what they left behind.

The author uses frequent Old Testament quotes to argue his case. In simple terms, the message is: Each of you chose to follow Christ. That was the right thing to do. Christ and His New Covenant fulfill Judaic promises and prophecies providing new advantages. Christianity is superior in every respect to what you left behind in Judaism. Stick with the decision you rightly made.

Persevere! Looking back at Judaism, its primary purpose was to restrain sin and point to Christ through sacrifices and ceremonies. Christ fulfills the promises of Judaism. Converts did the right thing in choosing to follow Christ. Don't think about turning back. Your true destination can be reached only through Christ. Judaism was the path leading you to Christ. It has served its purpose. It has nothing more to offer.

The New Covenant is superior to the Sinai Covenant. Do the author's comments imply the Sinai Covenant was not good? No! All God's covenants with people are good and served a necessary purpose. From the first Covenant with Adam and Eve, to those with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and David, each covenant was a step forward on the path leading to Christ. Each covenant was holy, good, and right for its time and circumstances. Each step was all of grace, a move closer to the promised Messiah. Then, at just the right time, the promised One came in the flesh, dwelling on earth with His people as He accomplished His mission of salvation.

Just before He went to His death on the cross, Jesus declared a New Covenant to be established in His blood. The New Covenant is a great step forward in terms of gracious benefits to sinners. There were difficulties with earlier Covenants, not because the covenants were faulty, but because sinful people were incapable of keeping any covenant. The great need was for a covenant which could provide a way to transform sinners from the inside out. Their "inner person" needed to be regenerated, transformed, and made holy.

Sinners needed to be enabled to trust God and made able to live righteous lives. How could that happen? The prophet Jeremiah prophesied God would provide a New Covenant which would enable hearts to be renewed. Under that New Covenant, God's Law would be put into people's mind and written on their heart.

The New Covenant would produce the results God desires by changing the innermost being of people. The Old Covenant provided right instruction which if it could be perfectly followed would produce righteous people. But it was incapable of changing the sinful hearts which were the source of the sin problem. Through Christ, Jeremiah's prophecy of a New Covenant having power to change hearts was fulfilled.

Jesus lived His life on earth under the Old Covenant, fully obedient to every nuance of the Sinai Law and in accordance with the will of the Father, even to death on a cross. Christ obeyed and fulfilled the Sinai Law. Out of that fulfillment He brought to His people a New Covenant. The New Covenant has the power necessary to solve the sin problem from the inside out. The very nature of people would be changed. It would be as if sinners were born again as new creatures. People with a new spiritual nature making them capable of living a righteous life before God would become a reality. A key element of the New Covenant is the sending of the Holy Spirit to indwell the people who were being regenerated and continue their transformation.

Jesus came into the world at just the right time. He came into the Roman Empire at a time of relative peace, easy travel, having a common language understood by many people. This framework had been developed over many hundreds of years. It prepared the way for the rapid spread of the blessings brought about by Christ's life, death, resurrection, and return to heaven.

The Old Covenant formed the matrix which made the New Covenant possible. As the author Hebrews says, it is true that the Sinai Covenant never made anyone perfect, but that was not its purpose. The Sinai Covenant was an essential part of the path to Christ, but the path's destination needed something more.

Christ, the promised One, paid the price to fix the sin problem. He made it possible for everyone who "trusts and obeys Him" to be without condemnation. That

possibility was not only for Jews but for all people, whether of Old Testament times, today's generation, or future generations.

Jesus' self-sacrifice was and is sufficient for salvation for all sinners – past, present and future. Everything necessary for salvation was done by Christ for all who come in faith, trust, and willingness to obey. Christ welcomes people with open arms, cleanses sin and, as strange as it may seem, He makes people new. You recall Job's being perplexed by the dreadful things which happened to him. He asked God "why?" God asked Job who is this who dares to question what the Almighty has done. Questioning why things happen to us remains a common issue today. We are to be thankful for the New Covenant, but we should never question the necessity of the Sinai Covenant. It was holy and good and necessary. Its goal was Christ.

Hebrews 10:19-25: *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

We Have Confidence to Enter the Holy Places: Based on all the author has said to this point, believers should be confident of access to God as well as confident in their hope in the promises of God. They should actively encourage one another in love. The admonition to actively encourage one another begins a series of practical exhortations concerning a believer's logical and appropriate response to what their Lord and heavenly High Priest has done for them. Old Testament believers were denied direct access to God. They could only contact Him indirectly through the priestly system. The author says that has all changed dramatically.

His first point is every Christian has direct access to God the Father through Jesus the Son. It is God's intent that believers regularly exercise their right to draw near to the throne of grace. Our direct access to God should be confidently and continuously used. The provision for every believers' access to the Heavenly Most Holy Place was bought by Jesus at an enormous price, the price of His life of perfect obedience and His cruel death on a cross.

Christ's death opened the way through the dividing veil into the holy of holies, providing access to God for everyone who believes in Him. For Christians failing to use this precious access on a regular basis is sad and dangerous. The Hebrew-Christians who first received this document particularly needed the understanding and blessings which awaited them if they would regularly approach the throne of grace with confidence. There they will find Jesus constantly interceding for believers.

God has a "house" where He dwells. He has family and servants who dwell with Him. Over this glorious and huge establishment, Christ rules. Believers are adopted into God's family and will ultimately live in God's presence forever. Christ is the Great Priest over the house of God.

Drawing near to the throne of grace is accomplished through "trusting and obeying." A true heart, true faith, hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience (being justified before God), and bodies washed with pure water. Any known sin is to be confessed and repented.

At first the washing sounds like a reference to baptism. But second thoughts reveal that cannot be true. Hearts sprinkled clean seems to be a figurative reference to the Holy Spirit cleansing the inner being. Washing with pure water must also be figurative and seems to refer to cleansing the outer life of unclean practices.

Holding fast to our confession of hope refers to believer's confession that Christ is their hope. Wavering in holding fast indicates a tendency toward ceasing to confess. We are to confess our hope regularly knowing that He who promised is faithful.

Believers need the company of other Christians for encouragement to stand firm in Christ. If we are to encourage others to do good works, we must ourselves do good works. To have others love us, we must love others. To accomplish such goals,

believers must meet together and encourage one another. The last day, the day when Christ will come again, draws nearer with each day we live. That thought should cause every believer to seek other believers for mutual encouragement.

Faith, Hope, and Love: The author draws on the familiar pattern of faith, hope, and love. When all things come to fruition and there is certainty, faith and hope will no longer be necessary. But love persists forever.

Because of Christ's accomplishments on our behalf, there are three things believers are exhorted to do. (1.) Believers are to draw near to God with the full assurance of faith and trust which arises from a true heart which Jesus has sprinkled with His blood to ensure a clean conscience.(2.) Hold fast to the soul's heavenly anchor (6:19). That wonderful anchor is our hope in Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father. (3.) Stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another.

Believers are not meant to be loners. They are intended to be active members of the family of God. Each is to interact with others in a manner which uplifts all members of the family and brings glory to God. Worship and fellowship are interactive functions of the family of God.

It is a sad and dangerous thing for believers to fail to use their precious access to God on a regular basis, or to fail to gather together in mutual support. All need the understanding and blessings awaiting them in regular visits to the Most Holy Place where Jesus constantly intercedes for believers.

Hebrews 10:26-29: *“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*

Another Warning – Danger of Continuing to Willfully Sin After Believing:

It seems the thought of neglecting to gather together in worship triggers the author to write another warning. Remember, the author's primary purpose is to address the problem of the continuing attraction Judaism exerts on many of these converts. Continued willful (habitual) sinning after receiving knowledge of the truth shows a lack of repentance, and in effect, the rejection of the once for all time sacrifice Christ made for the remission of sin. If Christ's sacrifice for the remission of sins is rejected, then there is no further sacrifice available for sins.

The one and only way to remove sins is through Christ's self-sacrifice on behalf of sinners. Specifically, the sacrificial system of Judaism offers no hope. The author sternly warns against apostasy. To abandon Christ is to commit the grave sin of apostasy. Accountability must balance the privilege of receiving salvation earned by Christ and given as a gift to believers.

The knowledge of truth which the author mentions is each person's personal experiential knowledge, a living perception of who Christ is and what He has done for us. The overall point is that the people the author is talking about had been thoroughly enlightened and personally received the heavenly gift. They needed to behave accordingly.

Punishment for Violating the Law of Moses Compared to Punishment Deserved for Deliberate Sin After Believing in Christ: To make his point about the risks involved in deliberately and routinely sinning after receiving knowledge of the truth, the author points out that apostasy from the Law of Moses was punished by death (without mercy) on the evidence of two or three witnesses. The punishment was usually carried by "stoning" the accused. Death could come quickly, or it might take many stones. When the stoning was finished, the ones carrying out the sentence would have before them a corpse battered out of easy recognition and often under a pile of stones. That was dreadful punishment for apostasy from the Mosaic Law. How much greater then is the punishment deserved for one who tramples underfoot the Son of God?

These Hebrew-Christians had been regenerated, justified, and were being sanctified. Why would they deliberately sin? To continue deliberate sin is to trample

the Son of God underfoot, to profane the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified. Such actions outrage the Spirit of grace.

Is Apostacy Possible for a True Believer: If a person continues to deliberately sin after receiving Christ's salvation, there is no further sacrifice possible for sins. There is only one way to salvation and that is through Christ. Is apostacy possible for a true believer? This topic was also discussed in comments on verse 6:6. There are two dominant views. The Armenian view (Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, etc.) which says yes, it is possible for a believer to lose their salvation. The Reformed (Presbyterian, Reformed Baptist, etc.) view says no, it is not possible for a believer to lose their salvation.

The Reformed view is that Scripture shows salvation to be eternally secure for true believers. Reformed commentators in commenting on this passage have said things like: (1.) The people mentioned have merely professed Christ but are not truly His, and (2.) this passage is a hypothetical example of what would happen if apostasy could occur. Some might object that hypothesizing about something believed to be unable to happen doesn't seem proper.

To object to hypothesizing about something believed to be impossible is to misunderstand the difference between God's sure plan and the means He uses for achieving that plan. The infant Jesus could not possibly be killed by Herod, because Jesus had not yet accomplished the mission for which He was sent (God's Word always accomplishes what it was sent to do, never returning void.) The threat from Herod sent Jesus and his family to Egypt for their protection. Contemplating an impossible event such as a true believer losing their salvation (which is not a part of God's plan) may well be a means God uses to prevent believers from apostasy (which is a part of God's plan).

Hebrews 10:30-31: *For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Important Scripture Quotes: The two quotes in 10:30-31 are from Deuteronomy 32:35-36. The second quote also appears in Psalm 135:4. The first

(“Vengeance is mine; I will repay”) differs from both the Hebrew and Septuagint Old Testament text and seems to be a paraphrase. Quite interestingly, it occurs in exactly the same form in Romans 12:19. Three possibilities: (1) The paraphrase was common among Christians at the time, (2) the author quoted from Romans 12, or (3) Paul wrote Hebrews as well as Romans.

Moses wrote both verses quoted. People cannot reject God with impunity. Many Israelites perished under the vengeance of God because they turned away from the God of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:15-16). For those who were to receive this letter, to turn away from Christ, even if they held on to Judaism, was to turn away from the living God whom Christ revealed (Hebrews 3:12).

As seen in Old Testament examples, it is awesome to contemplate the prospect of facing God’s judgment. To fall into the hands of someone means to come under their authority and be incapable of further resistance. ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”***

Our Living omnipotent, omniscient God is fully aware at all times of every deed and every thought. He is always capable of exercising His judgment and power with absolute justice. Flee to the Christ. His sacrifice is the only valid way for cleansing from sin. Merely claiming to be one of God’s people will not suffice. Matthew 7:22-23, ***“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*** God will judge His people. The only way to be safe is to have a right spiritual relationship with God the Father through Christ the Son.

Hebrews 10:32-39: ***“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.³⁷ For, “Yet***

a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him.”
³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

Remember What Christ has Done for You: The author says to those thinking of returning to Judaism, remember what you have gained in Christ. They had been enlightened about the things most important to life. Their spirit became strong and gave them endurance to persevere through hard struggles. They became sympathetic, tender, thoughtful to share in the burdens and trials of others. In the 49 AD time of persecution, some believers were imprisoned. Those not imprisoned chose to identify with the imprisoned ones, thereby risking their lives and property. Verse 34 gives the net result – *“For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”*

These Hebrew-Christians knew that demonstrating love to those in prison was risky. They willingly risked seizure of property, imprisonment, and other reproach and affliction. They were willing to accept that risk to do what love demands. That's the kind of life the author yearns for his readers as they face new persecution which is anticipated to be worse than before. He wants them to have the kind of faithful trust in God and His promises which leads to rightful actions no matter what the circumstances. Though they lost property in the earlier persecution, their hope for future glory in the presence of God was a more powerful motivator than trying to hold on to that earthly property.

They can in the same manner persevere through current trials and coming persecution. There is great reward for persevering in the face of difficult trials.

Good Advice from Habakkuk: Verses 37-38 are a paraphrase of Habakkuk 2:3-4. Paul uses this reference in Romans 1:17 to emphasize that a person becomes righteous by faith apart from the Law. Here in Hebrews the stress is on how faith enables faithfulness in life – *“my righteous one shall live by faith.”* Faith is not only essential to the first step into belief, but it is also essential to maintaining that initial trust of saving faith through sustaining faith.

Being accounted righteous through faith and living according to God's will through faithfulness are complementary concepts grounded in the trustworthiness of God. The author uses the pronoun "we" to include his readers with himself as those who have faith. These comments on the importance of faith lead to more detailed comments on what has been accomplished in the past through faith – resulting in the justly famous chapter 11 on faith with its list of heroes and heroines all intended to encourage and strengthen the readers in their own difficult circumstances.

What the Author has so far Done: The author has shown Christ, as a person, to be superior to angels, to Moses, and by implication to all other people. He has shown that Christ, as the Heavenly High Priest, exercises a priesthood superior to all who came before. In 10:19 he began to address the practical reality that it is faith which maintains believers' connection to Christ.

What is Next? Faith part 1.