



# HEBREWS 10: The Grounds for Faithfulness

HPC Trinity Class  
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Thus far, our mysterious author has given his readers reason after reason for remaining faithful to Jesus Christ. (Apparently, they had recently replaced their long-held Jewish beliefs with Christian ones, but are now wavering.)

We can understand why this could happen:

- Until now their very identity has been that of Jews, as sons of Abraham;
- Undoubtedly, any friends and family who continued as Jews would ostracize them. No longer would they be welcome at family gatherings, weddings, and Jewish religious celebrations;
- Business relationships would be strained; etc.

In other words, amongst themselves these new Christians might be strong and firm in the faith, but in their day-to-day existence—having to confront the rest of their world-- both life and faith would prove a continuous challenge. The writer of Letter to the Hebrews recognizes this, so here in chapter 10 he reminds them of a major problem with their former Jewish system: **sacrifices**.

## [READ HEB. 10:1]

Our author summed it up in his first sentence:

“The [Jewish] law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves.”



There was nothing wrong with performing annual sacrifices to God.

**However,**

sacrifices were required by law

*year...*

*after year...*

*after year.....<sup>1</sup>*

“It was ultimately futile in that it never made anyone mature in faith and trust. If it had made perfect believers, it would not have been replaced.”<sup>2</sup> [READ HEB. 10:2-4]

That is why Jesus came.

<sup>1</sup> “repeated endlessly.” In Greek it’s *diênêkês*, which means “perpetually” or “unceasingly.”

<sup>2</sup> Wycliffe, p. 1419.



To emphasize the point that these annual Jewish sacrifices were not desired by God, the text refers us to the Psalms in the Old Testament:

**[READ PSALM 40:6-8]**

(Why is it slightly different than Hebrews 10:5-7?)

This Psalm or hymn, which was probably originally written about David, fits Jesus and his message perfectly: God doesn't want or require these burnt and sin offerings; he wants us to follow the one (Jesus) who says, "I have come to do your will, O God."

Yes, Rabbinic Law had required that blood sacrifices be made every year, but **"he sets aside the first..."**



**...to establish the second."** (v. 9)<sup>3</sup>



v. 10-- "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all."

**[READ HEB. 10:11-14]**

One sacrifice is all that's required.....**and Jesus has done that.**

Note how v. 11 ("every priest stands") is contrasted with v. 12 (Jesus "sat down at the right hand of God").

Also note: Jesus' sacrifice of himself was a one-time event, but for us as believers he continues to intercede in our lives daily.

"...for those who are being made holy." (i.e., sanctified)

**[READ HEB. 10:15-18]**

"The Holy Spirit is regularly regarded in the NT as the one who inspires and thus who speaks through the writers of the OT."<sup>4</sup>

**[READ HEB. 10:19-22]**

v. 22—"washed with pure water" refers to a new concept for these former Jews: a Christian baptism.



If the original readers of this letter had come from a Jewish background, however, this phrase of being washed with pure water would have certainly brought to mind the ceremonial washings for purification

<sup>3</sup> "sets aside" is a mild translation of the Greek word *anairê*, meaning "to destroy or abolish."

<sup>4</sup> Hagner, p. 66, regarding Heb. 3:7-11. Also see Matt. 22:43; Acts 1:16; 28:25; 2 Pet. 1:20f.

conducted by their former rabbis. But this is something new: a once-and-for-all cleansing.

v. 23-25—We are encouraged to hold fast to our Christian faith:

- Spur each other on toward love and good deeds
- Christian fellowship is vital. Keep meeting. Make it a part of your life to gather with and encourage your fellow believers.  
...because “the Day” of Jesus’ return is coming.<sup>5</sup>

v. 26-39-- The rest of chapter 10 deals with a thorny question:

### Can a true Christian “fall away” and then receive forgiveness again?

NO	YES
<p><b>Bonhoeffer:</b> “Just as Christ died once and for all, so we are baptized and justified once and for all. Both events are in the strictest sense <i>unrepeatable</i>.....The Epistle of Hebrews is right in insisting on this.” (CoD, p. 276-77.)</p>	<p><b>Martin Luther:</b> “In the preface to his September Bible of 1522 [Luther] describe the rejection of a second repentance [in Hebrews] as contrary to all the Gospels and the Letters of Paul.” (Lohse, p. 202)</p>

#### [READ HEB. 10:26-27]

Part of the answer rests on the phrase “deliberately [*or willingly*] keep on sinning” (v. 26).<sup>6</sup> “There can never be another sacrifice on the cross in order to forgive the individual who willfully rejects Christ. A ‘fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire’ awaits one who received the knowledge of God’s truth, but chose to forsake it.”<sup>7</sup>



Another factor: **Does this include both big and small sins?**

How can murdering someone carry the same weight as neglecting to tip your waitress?

<sup>5</sup> We do not know exactly when this Letter to the Hebrews was written. “The Day” may also have alluded to the anticipated fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. “From the perspective of the author and indeed all Christians of that era, the destruction of Jerusalem would have been thought to signal the appearance of the eschaton.” [end of the world & God’s final judgement]—Hagner, p. 168 citing F.F.Bruce.

<sup>6</sup> During the first four or five centuries of Christianity, one would often wait until death was imminent before being baptized, thus avoiding further sinning. (Oxford, “Baptism” p.127.)

<sup>7</sup> NIV fn. to Heb. 10:26f.

vs. 28-29—The Old Testament showed how Moses dealt with such errors: a sinner would immediately be killed based solely upon the accusation of a couple of witnesses. But this would seem mild compared to the damning effect of rejecting the work of Christ, once he/she has received it as truth. The Lord shall be the final judge.

### **A Final Plea**

vs. 32-39—Remember how you have already suffered because of your new faith in Christ. Don't throw away the confidence you have placed in him. The reward will be your own salvation.



**“IT IS A DREADFUL THING  
TO FALL INTO THE HANDS  
OF THE LIVING GOD.”** (v.31)

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