

Study Guide November 18, 2018

Once and for All

The new covenant differs from the old in its interiority. The Lord puts his laws in the hearts of his people. He writes them on their minds. The people don't have to be taught the covenant, they know it because it's in them (Hebrews 8:11). It also means-- and this is important-- that the people of God are able to abide by the terms of the new covenant. The children of Israel, the recipients of the old covenant, were not able to continue in the covenant (Hebrews 8:9). But the scene is different in the new covenant. Because of Christ, we can do it!

2. *The new covenant differs from the old in its effectiveness.* As a result of the death of Christ, God "will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more" (Hebrews 10:17). The author of Hebrews thinks that the sacrifices of the old covenant were ultimately ineffectual because they were "only a shadow of the good to come" (Hebrews 10:1). Christ's sacrifice, on the other hand, was effective, and dealt finally and fully with sin. "Where there is forgiveness of [sins and lawless deeds], there is no longer any offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:18).

In Hebrews, the theological arguments-- which are made in gloriously complex detail-- are not made just for the sake of being made. Instead, these arguments always have ethical implications. The indicative in Hebrews is always followed by the imperative... or in this case, by the hortatory subjunctive.¹

In Greek, verses 19-25 are a single sentence with three main verbs, all hortatory subjunctives: let us approach (verse 22), let us hold fast (verse 23), and let us consider (verse 24). Verses 19 and 20 give the basis for these hortatory subjunctives. Quickly summarizing the argument of the preceding chapters, the author states that the blood of Jesus (a way of referring to Jesus' death that highlights its sacrificial nature) has given us the necessary confidence to enter the presence of God, and Christ is our high priest. As a result of these actions on our behalf, the author of Hebrews tells us to do three things:

1. *Approach.* While it is not specified, we are told here to approach God. This word is at home in the sacrificial cult of the Old Testament, referring to the worshiper's approach to the presence of God. Here it is "used in a broader metaphorical sense to refer to the Christian's appropriation of that access to God made available in Christ."²

2. *Hold fast.* The original recipients of Hebrews seem to have been at risk of loosening their hold on the faith in light of pressure exerted on them from outside (see 6:4-6). But, the author of Hebrews wants his audience (and us) to hold fast. One of the results of the accomplishment of Christ in his death ought to be our steadfast adherence to the hope of the Gospel, even in the teeth of opposition or suffering.

3.

Consider. In particular, we are to consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. The implication of the previous two verbs, given that they are cast in the first person plural, is that approaching and holding fast are more ecclesiastical activities than individual ones. The church does these things together. That implication is now made explicit here. One of the results of the death of Christ for us is that we, the people of God, ought to work together to encourage one another to live lives that are more faithful to God. The author of Hebrews recognizes that real faithfulness cannot be done alone. It requires community..

1. What do you do when the trials of life overwhelm you?
2. What do the scriptures say to do?
3. What is the purpose of the church?
4. Why do we attend church?
5. How do you provoke one another to love and good deeds?

Pray for yourself, your church and the worldwide community