

After 50 lessons in Hebrews that began a little over a year ago, we today come to the final text of the book. All that is left after today is a final reflection on the book, to be given next week.

In this final text, we find a request for prayer, benediction and closing personal notes.

OUR TEXT

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

Grace be with you all.

A REQUEST FOR PRAYER

We will be focusing on the author's magnificent benediction. But first let us note his request for prayer in verses 18 and 19.

That this author specifically requests prayer for himself and his fellow workers teaches us that requesting prayer is a worthwhile and appropriate Christian endeavor. If we truly believe that prayer “works” and arouses the hand and heart of God to do His will, then we should desire all the prayer others would give on our behalf. One of the precious promises regarding prayer is found in 1 John 5:14-15.

1 John 5:14-15 *This is the confidence which we have before Him that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.*

Here we learn:

1. We must ask according to God's will, best as we can know it
2. We can then be confident God hears our prayer
3. We can be confident our prayer request will be answered

This reaffirms what Jesus taught us in His Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7:7 *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

The asking is the “due diligence” I must give to receive – not just hoping for it or expecting it; the seeking is the knowing of God well enough to ask for that which would be His will; and the knocking is the persistent conviction and belief that trusts God to answer my request in His perfect time.

Therefore, to request prayer is to ask for diligence in seeking God and confidence in believing God for the answer. Remember that when you say you will pray for someone, you are promising diligence and confidence. Prayer is indeed a sacred privilege, granted by the Almighty through our High Priest, Jesus.

The author mentions that he and his fellow leaders have a GOOD CONSCIENCE and desire to conduct themselves HONORABLY in ministry. That this surely was true, was a great

encouragement for his listeners to honor his humble request for prayer.

As I read this I was struck in knowing how many of you tell me that you pray for me regularly. May I say a sincere and grateful “THANK YOU” for your prayers on behalf of both myself and the Elders and leadership Council of our church. And may I offer a brief but critical “prayer list” for which I request prayer? I am confident that these requests are God’s will for all church leaders, and so you can be confident that your diligent prayer will result in God’s hearing and acting.

1. Please pray that I and all Oaks’ leaders will effectively carry out these 3 God-given tasks:
 - a. Teaching God’s Word – handling the Word accurately and fully (2 Tim. 2:15)
 - b. Shepherding God’s flock – balancing truth and love (Eph. 4:15)
 - c. Leading God’s church – equipping for service (Eph. 4:12)
2. Please pray that we and our families would be protected from shaming our Lord by scandalous acts of unrighteousness. We need protection from the enemy without (the devil and the world) and the enemy within (our own sinful natures)

A MAGNIFICENT BENEDICTION

The benediction closing the Hebrews letter is one of the most beautiful and powerful in all of Scripture. There is great doctrine reaffirmed here, and great passion expressed for the equipping of every believer. And it all seems to revolve around the theme of “peace” – both the GOD OF PEACE and the PEACE OF GOD. Here it is again:

Hebrews 13:20-21 *Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

1. The God of peace (20a)

Ephesians 2:14-15 *For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.*

Colossians 1:19-20 *It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

“The God of peace” is not indicating that God is a peaceful creature. Nor is it indicating that God is a God who always brings absence of conflict or strife. (In fact, the contrary is often the case).

Rather, when we read “God of peace,” peace = reconciliation. God is a God of reconciling Himself to the world of His creation, including mankind. God is about restoring what was lost through the fall and bridging the chasm between His holiness and our lack of holiness.

And this God of reconciliation brought about this peace of relationship through the blood of the cross. You and I had no chance of ever relating to God apart from His intervention and His Son sent to be our agent of reconciliation.

The God of peace is the God of reaching out to mankind. The God of peace is the God who will ultimately release all creation from the bondage of sin (Romans 8:19-22). The God of peace is the God who has given us the ministry of reconciling others to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The God of peace is the God of restored relationship.

2. The Shepherd of peace (20b) – “the great Shepherd of the sheep”

Psalms 100 *Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

Psalm 23 *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

John 10:11, 14 [Jesus:] *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me.*

The man-God Jesus is the agent of our peace (reconciliation). He as the great Shepherd is gathering his flock – the elect of God – to become one flock with one shepherd.

John 10:16 [Jesus:] *I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*

Here He is speaking to His disciples about you and me! – and about every other believer that has come to Him since then. Christ has not yet returned because not all of His flock has been reconciled by faith. But the day is getting closer and closer when the flock will be completed in restoration. Our great Shepherd, Jesus, is thus the Shepherd of Peace, or agent of God's peace to mankind.

3. The Gospel of peace (20c) - "through the blood", "brought up from the dead"

Notice that on both sides of the reference to the great Shepherd, we have reference to both the death (after) and resurrection (before) of Jesus. This agent of peace both died (blood) and rose from the grave (brought up from the grave) in order to reconcile us to God. That is the gospel – God did it all. There is nothing here about our works of obedience, but only about His work of death and resurrection. It is the death and resurrection of Jesus that accomplished our peace = reconciliation.

The greatest peace we can know is not freedom from conflict, pain, sorrow, strife or tragedy. The greatest peace is freedom from sin and subsequent relationship with the God of the universe – God for us, with us, and in us. And then as a "frosting on the cake" bonus, we get to be freed from conflict, pain, sorrow, strife and tragedy in heaven!

4. The Covenant of peace (20d) – eternal covenant by blood; "Jesus our Lord"

Now "covenant" means "contract" between God and man. Yes, there is an "Old Covenant" and a "New Covenant" but really there is only one covenant – the "eternal covenant" referred to here, meaning with no beginning or ending.

I know that there are a number of "dispensations." A disposition is generally defined as a system of order, and specifically in a Biblical setting it is a system of God dealing with mankind. Theologians usually name seven dispensations:

1. **Innocence** – in the garden with Adam and Eve
2. **Conscience** - From the fall until the flood
3. **Human government** – from the flood to Abraham
4. **Promise** – from Abraham until the Law
5. **Law** – the giving of the Law until Jesus' death
6. **Grace** – from Jesus until the rapture of the Church
7. **Millennial Kingdom** – rule of Christ on earth

But they are all fulfilled in THE eternal covenant which was God's intention and design all along - the covenant of peace (read "reconciliation"). The covenant of God with man is eternal in the sense that He established it from ages past and will fulfill and keep it forever. It is a covenant of grace, not works. It is a covenant enacted on the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God, not upon the blood of bulls and goats. It is a covenant enacted by receiving Jesus as Lord, not by obedience of Law. It is a covenant realized by a life given as a living sacrifice to God, not by a life of efforts to appease Him.

This covenant is enacted upon my sincere profession of Jesus the Christ as my Lord, and upon my sincere faith in His resurrection from the dead for me. (Romans 10:9). It is a covenant of my eternal peace = reconciliation = relationship with God.

5. The Peace of God working in us (21)

Verses 20, the first half of the benediction, speaks of “The God of Peace.” Verse 21, the second half, speaks of “The Peace of God” – or how God enacts this peace in the life of every believer.

Note the 3-fold “working in you”:

- (a) equipped for good
- (b) to do His will
- (c) to please Him in all

Ephesians 2:10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

This verse from Ephesians makes it clear that God’s purpose in creating us was to represent God in the world – through good (God) works. We are most at “peace” when we are doing exactly what we were created to do – represent God in the world, in both word and deed. Thus the true “peace of God” is my faithfully representing the “God of peace.”

When we do this, the benediction prayer of Hebrews 13 comes to pass. I am equipped for doing good and thus do the will of God, pleasing Him in all my words and actions.

And note that this “equipping” for good is accomplished through the church and its leaders. God has designed it this way:

Ephesians 4:11-13 *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

THIS is the ultimate PEACE OF GOD – God working through us in unity, in full knowledge of who Jesus is, mature in faith and filled with Christ by the Holy Spirit.

What a benediction, or wish for each of us. But it is not “wishful thinking” for it is exactly what God is working in each who has been reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Is that you?

And as the author goes on to say in verse 22:

Hebrews 13:22 *But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation.*

Let it be – let it happen – claim it as your benediction of peace. Amen indeed!