

CHAPTER 12
The Epistle to the Hebrews
THE WILL OF GOD (Hebrews 10:1-25)
by G. H. Lang

Chapter 10:1-25

1. For the law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, they can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh.
2. Else would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more conscience of sins?
3. But in those *sacrifices* there is a remembrance made of sins year by year.
4. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.
5. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me;
6. in whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hadst no pleasure:
7. then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.
8. Saying above, Sacrifice and offerings and whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein (the which are offered according to the law);
9. then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that lie may establish the second.
10. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
11. And every priest indeed standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, the which can never take away sins:
12. but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;
13. from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet.
14. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.
15. And the Holy Spirit also beareth witness to us: for after he hath said,
16. This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws on their heart, and upon their mind also will I write them; *then he saith,*
17. And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.
18. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.
19. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place [Gr. places] by the blood of Jesus;
20. by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;
21. and *having* a great priest over the house of God;
22. let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water:

23. let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised:
24. and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works;
25. not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.

RECAPITULATION (vers. 1-4).

Our Writer seems to have understood what a powerful writer meant when he said that repetition is the only figure of speech worth anything, and why a successful advocate said that the secret of winning a case was to go over your main points as many times as there are jurymen to be convinced.

Again he enforces the vital matter of the inefficiency and therefore inferiority of the law and its ceremonial.

It seems that the Holy Spirit, with His insight into human nature and His foresight into human ways, dealt in advance with man's persistent tendency to maintain a religion with fixed rules, external accompaniments, routine prayers, with priests and sacrifices, a religion of a legal type. Is it not plain that since such a religion, having God Himself as its author and having been tested for fourteen centuries, failed to achieve the end needed, every human imitation of it must needs fail yet more dismally?

It is no wonder at all that Churches by law established are a perpetual hindrance to the progress of the truth and an injury to souls. Whatever true spiritual life is found within them has to be developed and maintained *in spite* of the system and against its downward, oppressing influence. This is true in measure of every sacerdotal, liturgical, ritualistic religion even outside of State churches.

Arguments are now repeated.

- i. The law was a shadow, not a full and exact representation of things heavenly and future. The shadow of a man may give a fair idea of his form, but it cannot be the "very image" of his features and complexion, or reproduce the light of his eye. In the British Museum there is a replica of a wooden statue of an ancient Egyptian. The original is in the Cairo Museum. It is so perfect an image of a man that it requires but slight imagination to see him striding towards one, with resolute step and haughty mien. The very eye flashes pride, though but carved in wood. Incidentally it tells the evolutionist that man has not evolved higher in artistic skill, not at least in woodcarving, during four thousands of years.

Such an image of things heavenly the law was not and could not be; it was only a shadow.

ii. Its services and sacrifices, though repeated annually and without intermission, made no one perfect, not even the most diligent and sincere worshipper. If they had done so, if those who sought God through them had attained the bliss of freedom from the consciousness of sin and so of reverent boldness with God, then there would have been no need for them to be superseded by a new covenant and new scheme of communion with God.

iii. What those annual sacrifices did was to produce an annual remembrance that sin still stood between God and man, that sin had not been put away effectually; the reason for this being that the life-blood of a beast has not the moral worth of the life-blood of a man, man being of so much higher dignity as made in the likeness of God. In consequence man, as soon as he thinks seriously, feels and knows that neither a beast, nor money, nor any other of his possessions, can satisfy the demand of the law for his life forfeited by sin. "All that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4), for he values his life above all that he hath.

2. *The Will of God* (vers. 5-10).

i. The argument now reaches its height and conclusion with a quotation from Ps. 40:6-8, which the Writer makes to read as follows:

Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not,
But a body didst thou prepare for me;
In whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices*
for sin thou hadst no pleasure:
Then said I, Lo, I am come
(In the roll of the book it is written of me)
To do thy will, O God.

In the Psalm the first sentence reads, "Sacrifice and offering thou hast no delight in," which is here, following the Greek translation of the Old Testament, intensified into the positive "thou wouldest not."

The second sentence reads in Hebrew "Ears hast thou digged (or pierced) for me" (R.V. marg.), which is rendered in English, "Mine ears hast thou opened." This the Writer widens to "a body hast thou prepared for me," following again the Greek Old Testament.

The third sentence reads in the Psalm, "Burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required," which again is changed to the positive and stronger assertion that in these "thou hast no pleasure."

These changes serve to strengthen the Writer's argument that the sacrifices of the old covenant were obsolete; or rather, that a thousand years before Christ, when David wrote, and after only 400 years since they were instituted, they had been already positively reprobated by God, being things He did not want and in which He had no delight. This being the case it is implied that it could be only a question of time and they would be abolished. Enlightened minds should therefore entertain no thought of returning to those antiquated elementary arrangements. If they did so they could but find the light that was in them becoming darkness.

ii. *The Quotation* (10:5-7).

Before developing the argument it will be profitable to note some deeply interesting if secondary questions involved.

(1) "When He [the Son of God] cometh into the world He saith." This shows that the control of the prophets by the Spirit was so complete that one could be so directed in speech that his words should be taken up by Messiah a thousand years later as His own. Thus there was fulness of meaning far exceeding what the prophet could appreciate. There could be an immediate sense applicable to the prophet in his day and circumstances, but also, and far more important, a remoter sense foreknown by the Spirit of truth, and into the force of which the prophet might have to search (1 Pet. 1:10-12). But of statements which a man cannot fully comprehend he cannot have been the originator. The inspiring Spirit was this.

(2) This operation upon the mind of a prophet, which makes the Spirit of God to be the primary Author of the utterance, justifies a change which a later inspired prophet may make. For every Author is entitled to vary his own words should he wish to quote them and give a fresh thought or emphasis.

Thus our Writer departs from both the Hebrew and the Greek and makes the last sentence read simply "[I come] to do thy will, O God," instead of "I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart"; because he wished to put emphasis upon the will of God itself not upon Messiah's delight in doing it or the fact that it was cherished in His heart.

(3) Here is a precious insight into the intercourse of the Son with the Father, at the time of and about the fact of His becoming flesh; and it is most noteworthy that, as man, the Son employs the words of His Father's Book in which to speak to the Father. It is an example for all the children of the Father.

(4) For Christ it was vitally important and amply sufficient that something was prescribed for Him in the Scripture; "In the roll of the book it is written of me." The Book had Him as its theme; His work was to carry out all and everything written therein about Him. To the last hour of His life this governed His actions: "The Scriptures must be fulfilled"; and therefore in the very hour of death "Jesus knowing that all things are now finished, that the scripture might be accomplished, saith, I thirst" (John 19:28).

iii. 10:9. But to return. The priest in Israel might attend with the utmost diligence and most scrupulous care to the God-directed duties of his sacred office, but he could not secure the one all-important result, the doing of the will of God. All the sacrifices he might offer during the thirty years of his service failed to attain that end. The will of God was too high and holy, too exacting and inclusive, for such ceremonial observances to assure fulfillment of its demands. And these ceremonies and sacrifices left the worshipper too weak inwardly to render perfect obedience.

Yet the one true end of our existence, which is also the one essential secret of true happiness, is the doing of the will of God, perfectly and always. This the sinner cannot do and the law cannot help him to do it. What then is to be done? The Son of God gives the answer.

"Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." I will do what no one else can do. And thus He takes away the first, even that whole system of things which was indeed the best that could be devised apart from Him, that He may establish the second and eternal arrangements of the new covenant. By means of this, God's will shall be done on earth even as it is done by the holy angels in heaven, and so shall earth and heaven become at last one perfect kingdom of God, because ruled everywhere and wholly by the one will of God.

iv. (10:10). *Sanctification*. And the first and most immediate item in that will and purpose of God, for which the Son became man, is that He shall sanctify them that believe on Him through the offering of His own holy body once for all, and thus shall be attained this necessary end which the law and its services could never effect.

This sanctification embodies two distinct yet indissoluble elements. First, that a person or thing is withdrawn from common use and dedicated wholly to the possession and use of God; and then, that with a view to this use to the glory of God, the person or thing must be made actually suitable, by being clean and beautiful and efficient.

In the former sense they who turn to God through Christ are regarded by God as set apart unto Him by virtue of the complete dedication to God of their Representative, their Substitute, their Surety. When He gave Himself up wholly to the will of God they were regarded as involved in this act, seeing that He acted on their behalf. And this being so, it remains for them to carry into daily practical effect this dedication to God in

their Surety by each learning and doing the will of God in daily life. Both aspects are in 1 Cor. 1:2, "Sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," and so in 1 Cor. 5:7, "Purge out the old leaven, even as ye are unleavened." Christ on their behalf presented His body unto God a sacrifice in death; therefore let them, each for himself, present his body unto God a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1, 2).

v. *The Seated Priest* (10: 11, 14). The incompleteness of the Aaronic ministry was indicated by the fact that those priests never sat down during the period of their daily service. No provision was made for them to sit. There were altar and laver without, table, lamp, and incense altar within, but no seat. Their work was never done. But the heavenly Priest, by one sacrifice, obtained a redemption that is eternal; *therefore*, that sacrifice requires no repetition, indeed admits of none, for its virtue abides for ever; *therefore*, those being sanctified unto God by it are perfected for ever; *therefore*, this Priest's service, as regards the offering of sacrifice, is finished; *therefore*, He has sat down, the sign of the perfectness of that portion of His priestly ministry.

Of course, this does not mean that in fact the Son never moves from His seat on high. A few months after His ascension He was seen by Stephen standing (Acts 7:56); but sitting is His normal position, in contrast to the standing service of Israel's priests. Let one who is not yet assured of his sanctified relation to God, turn his eye away from his own imperfect state and ponder what it means for himself personally that his Surety is seated at the right hand of God. Let him take to himself the words that lifted Bunyan out of the Slough of Despond: "Sinner, thou thinkest that, because of thy sins and infirmities, I cannot save thy soul; but My Son is by Me, and on Him I look, and not on thee, and shall deal with thee according as I am pleased with Him" (*Grace Abounding*, par. 258).

This position the Priest will retain until He shall arise as King to subdue His enemies.

vi. *The Witness of the Spirit* (ver. 15, 17). There is a witness of the Spirit within the child of God assuring him that this is what he is, a child of God (Rom. 8:16). But the witness here in view is one given from without through Scripture. The Writer quotes again the prophecy of Jeremiah and stresses the point noted above (ch. 10. 6, iii), that it is *after* the announcement that the law of God will be written in the heart and on the mind that the Spirit gives to believers the guarantee from God that "their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

From this guarantee he draws the just conclusion that there can be no further need for an offering in respect of sins already and actually remitted. There can be no further question of providing for the payment of debts already paid. This concludes and clinches the proof of the abrogation of the old covenant, for the machinery by which the

law provides for the payment of debts, and enforces payment, has no further reason for existing when there are no debts left to be paid.

3. *Exhortations* (10:19-25).

i. *Let us draw near*. The lengthy argument concerning priesthood and sacrifice being completed, the exhortation in chapter 4:14-16 is resumed: we are to draw near to the throne of grace, we are to exercise our right and use our privileges.

(1) *Present Boldness* (ver. 19). Both there and here is emphasized the *present possession* of this right. Both exhortations begin with the present participle "having." Seeing that we do now actually hold the right to draw near let us do so. And let us do so with *boldness*. To approach God timidly, as if fearing the consequences, implies a feeble appreciation of the worth of our Priest and of the value of His atoning blood; it is a slight upon Him and His atoning, justifying; sanctifying work.

(2) *The Open Way* (ver. 20). Of old the way was not open. Even the most devout worshipper was debarred access to all the holy places on penalty of death. Now, in virtue of the blood of Jesus, the veils have been torn down and the way thrown open for faith to pass through those holy realms into direct contact with God. Of this freedom the rending of the inner veil at the death of Christ was the visible sign; it was rent by God, as was plain by the fact that the tear commenced at the top; which stood higher than man could reach even had man dared the act (Matt. 27:51).

(3) *Dedication* (ver. 20). As a landowner at his own expense may cut a road over his private property and dedicate it to the use of the public for ever, and thus deny to all, *even himself*, the right ever to close it, so did Jesus dedicate this way of approach to God. It can never again be shut, not even by God, for He cannot and will not make void the act and deed of His Son.

(4) *New and Living* (ver. 20). This way the Writer describes as *new*, for it had been opened only lately when he was writing. And it is a way which only the spiritually *living* can tread, and which leads to *life* in fullness, not to death, as unwarranted entrance into the ancient tent would have done.

(5) *The Veil, His Flesh* (ver. 20). Having, in grace and love, undertaken to bear in His body our sins, the Redeemer had no other way open by which He might return to God than that His holy body should be rent in death. The death-torn body of our Saviour was the rending asunder of all that hindered our access to God, even as it became His own right of access. Through Him we who are justified by faith "have had our access into this state of favour wherein we stand" before God in His holy place (Rom. 5: 1, 2).

(6) *The Priest over God's house* (ver. 21). The thought returns to chapter 3:1-6. God has a "house" and a "household"—a sphere where He dwells and a family and servants. Over this immense establishment Christ is the ruler, as Aaron was the ruler of that earthly and typical establishment in Israel. When the Son makes a slave free, emancipates him, he is free indeed (John 8:35-36), his status is wholly changed. Since the Father then adopts him as a son he shall abide in the house for ever, with reverent, happy intercourse with the Father and the Son.

(7) *Let US draw near* (ver. 22). All these arrangements for access to God being completed let us avail ourselves of them. Let us pray. Let us give ourselves to prayer. Let us cultivate the holy art of intercourse with God.

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence doth avail to make.
We kneel how weak, we rise how full of power.
Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overborne with care,
That we should ever weak and heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?
(Trench)

(8) *Conditions of Drawing Near* (ver. 22).

(a) *A true heart*. As the hearts of a husband and wife must be true to each other, inwardly, utterly true, if sweet, intimate fellowship is to be enjoyed, so must our heart be true to God. His heart is true to us, as it is next said: "He is faithful that promised": we must be true to Him. Paul compared his converts to a virgin espoused to Christ, and feared lest Satan should corrupt their thoughts, as a virgin's thoughts may be corrupted by doting upon some other than her lover (2 Cor. 2:2, 3). In such case she will not be happy to meet him. Thus may we destroy our joy in God.

(b) *Fullness of Faith* (ver. 22). This will be explained and enforced in chapter 2.

(c) *A Sprinkled heart* (ver. 22). This has been considered at chapter 9:13, 14. The Holy Spirit brings home to the believer the virtue of the blood of Christ as meeting the claims of God, and this relieves the conscience of the burden of evil committed.

(d) *The Body washed* (ver. 22). Many would give this a literal, material sense by applying it to the rite of baptism in water. The construction does not allow this: "having our hearts sprinkled . . . and having our body washed" (*rerantismeno . . . kai lelousmenoi*). If the washing of the body is material (the material body washed with

material water) then the sprinkling of the heart must be material (the material heart with the material blood), which cannot be. As the sprinkling is figurative so must be the washing. The one refers to the inner life of the conscience being cleansed, the other to the outer life of practice being cleansed.

As everywhere in this Epistle reference to the types is assumed, by which the meaning is established. The leper returning to fellowship with God had to be sprinkled with blood and had to wash his body in water (Lev. 13). At consecration the priest had to be bathed in water and sprinkled with blood (Lev. 8). In his daily service as priest there was the sprinkling of blood for himself and the frequent washing of hands and feet at the laver (Exod. 30).

But if he was to have *heart* fellowship with God, and not only external relations, then must the leper and the priest know by faith a heart experience corresponding to the sprinkling and attain a practical freedom from sinful ways answering to the washing of the outer man, the body. The sprinkling is faith appropriating Christ on the cross; the washing is faith gaining holiness of daily life by obedience to the word and by consequent present grace of the Holy Spirit. At the Supper the Lord spoke to the apostles of the blood of the covenant and He also washed their feet. The same explanation rules Eph. 5:25, 26 and Titus 3:5. Baptism teaches the same truth, but is not the water or laver of these passages.

It is deeply important to ponder that a holy walk is indispensable to fellowship with the Holy God in His holy place. It lies at the basis of the solemn warnings of this Epistle and all Scripture.

ii. *Let us hold fast.* It is blessed to know that God has said: "I Jehovah thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee" (Isa. 41:13). This is God's side. Ours is, "let us hold fast."

J. J. Sims, the evangelist, as a small boy was unduly pressed at a Canadian camp meeting to confess that he had "got religion." An old saint said: "Hold on to it, John; hold on to it." After three weeks of wearisome endeavor the boy said to his mother: "I don't think I can hold on to it any longer." The wise woman answered: "I don't think you've anything to hold on to, John."

What Christians have to hold on to is "*the confession of our hope.*" The Israelite confessed that his hope was in Aaron as the priest to adjust his affairs with God. The Roman Catholic, the Greek Catholic, the Anglo-Catholic, each confesses that he has placed his hope on the priest of his church. The Christian confesses Christ to be his hope, and his only hope Godward. It is this confession of Christ the Christian has to make, to make continually, and to hold on steadfastly in making it.

By this confession it is that the Spirit of God leads others to faith in Christ. Therefore it is this confession that the Spirit of darkness studies to stifle. It is ours to watch against our confession *wavering*. This is the first stage towards ceasing to confess. The sure way to prevent our confession wavering is to confess. It is not enough to believe silently in the heart; it is “with the mouth that confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:8-10). He who ceases to confess will shortly lose confidence, strength, and joy. It is the constant precursor to backsliding.

Hope is faith applied to the future. For faith the future is covered by the promises of God. Faith, with Abraham, is confident that what God has promised, be it never so impossible, He is able also to perform. It holds that “He is faithful that promised” (ver. 23) and expects the promised benefit. This applies especially to the expectation that the Great Priest, who has gone into the heavenly sanctuary, will “appear a second time unto salvation.”

For two centuries or more this return of the Lord was the hope that animated His people; “they looked for Him.” Presently, as persecution ceased and a comfortable life on earth increased, the Christians began to waver as to this hope of the Lord’s return; they settled down in the world, accepted the subtle deceit that it was their business to associate with the world and “leaven” it, and for the more part of them abandoned the hope. They ceased to be pilgrims on earth and so their testimony was ruined. It was against this surrender of the *hope* of the gospel that Paul warned the Colossian believers, telling them that their highest future privilege, the being “presented” before God, was contingent upon not being “moved away from *the hope* of the gospel” (Col. 1:22, 23).

Let us at the end of the age learn from that failure at its commencement, and “hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not.”

iii. Let us consider one another (ver. 24).

(1) He who would fall let him be self-occupied; he who would stand let him consider others. He who would provoke another to love, let him love him; he who would incite to good works must do them.

This is no easy-going friendliness. “To consider” means to consider diligently and earnestly (*katanoomen*). “To provoke” is the English word *paroxysm*, an intense word. This demands an intensity of love which can set others on fire with love.

Thus the exhortation urges to increase of the three cardinal virtues of faith, hope, love. The combination of these in active exercise assures, yea, *is*, the true, full life in Christ.

(2) The fulfillment of this exhortation will of necessity require and secure constant contact with those one wishes to provoke. Such as cease to assemble together will be unable to help one another and will lose desire to do so. The isolated soldier is in imminent peril from the foe. He is already defeated who ceases to stand in the battle with his comrades.

(3) On the reverse side, soldiers in battle cheer one another by cries of encouragement and clarion calls to advance. Let us be ever exhorting and encouraging one another to stand firm, to hold fast, to confess, to suffer, to hope on Christ against all opposition, delay, danger.

(4) One secret of this steadfastness is that we "see the day drawing nigh." We are pilgrims toiling on through the night, helping the weary, exhorting the stragglers, cheering one another by word and song, and so much the more urgently that dawn glimmers on the dark horizon. The day is at hand, the pleasant land of our hope is not far ahead; "let us press on" (6:1).

Behind my back I fling,
Like an unwanted thing,
My former self and ways;
And reaching forward far
I seek the things that are
Beyond time's lagging days.

Oh! may I follow still,
Faith's pilgrimage fulfil,
With steps both sure and fleet:
The longed-for good I see,
Jesus waits there for me;
Haste! haste! my weary feet
J. N. Darby (?)

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