

THE UNFOLDING PATTERN

by Ray C. Stedman

Hebrews is the book that distinguishes clearly between the shell of Christianity and the real meat of it. It helps us to see the difference between shadow and substance, the picture and reality. A man would be a fool who would prefer reading a cookbook to eating a good meal when he is hungry. Not that there is anything wrong with reading a cookbook -- it can be very enlightening -- but it is not very nourishing. Yet many a Christian concerns himself with the externals of Christian faith and misses completely the dynamic, radical, revolutionary concepts of it. Jesus did not say, "You shall know the rules and be bound by them." What he said was, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free," {cf, John 8:32 RSV}.

The author of Hebrews declares that Christianity is not a mere set of rules. Christianity is not something you do for your country, your city, your home, yourself, or your God. Christianity is what God does in you and for you. Hebrews contrasts the new arrangement for living with the old basis of trying to keep the rules.

We lean very strongly toward rule-keeping. Someone has likened humanity to a man who fell down a well. When he cried out for help a passer-by, hearing his cries, leaned over the well and asked him what he wanted. The man said he wanted to get out. The fellow thought for a moment, and finally took out a piece of paper, and wrote something on it, and dropped it down into the well. When the man picked it up he read, "Ten Rules On How to Keep Out of Wells." It has been suggested that this is what the Law has been to us; a set of rules on how to keep out of wells after we have fallen in.

In many ways this is accurate. But the real problem is that man does not know that he has fallen down a well. He thinks he was made to live in wells, and therefore he cannot understand why he is so unhappy in the well. The coming of the Law, the Ten Commandments, has made him realize his plight but it still cannot help him out. This is what the author of Hebrews is telling us. He is saying that Jesus Christ is a rope dropped into the well -- and more than that, he is a winch to pull man out, and a guide to keep him from falling in any more wells after he gets out.

In some wonderful way, the tabernacle in the wilderness, with its regulations and sacrifices, was a very marvelous picture of the work of Jesus Christ, and the new arrangement for living which would be available to men in Christ. But only up to a point. It was both a comparison and a contrast, both like it and unlike it, as any picture always must be.

I carry a picture of my wife in my wallet and when I am away from home I find it comforting to look at it, but it is very inadequate, it is not my wife. I can look at the picture, but I cannot have a conversation with it, I cannot laugh together with it, I cannot kiss it, or, if I did, it is not very satisfying, and I cannot persuade it to cook any meals. Though it is an accurate representation of the real thing, it is a far cry from it.

That is what Hebrews stresses. In the section before us the author concludes his explanation of the new arrangement for living in Jesus Christ, by listing for us the advantages in contrast to the picture of the tabernacle.

For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. {Heb 9:24-28 RSV}

The old system, with its regulations, rituals and sacrifices, was limited to one particular place, the tabernacle, including the sanctuary made by hands, i.e., the Holy of Holies. But, the writer says, in Christ a new arrangement has come in which is beyond space. It is not limited to space, it is heaven. We have already suggested in this series that heaven is the realm of the spirit. It is a new dimension of life. It is the inner man.

Some have been troubled by this and have wondered if I no longer believe that heaven is a place. Yes, heaven is a place, for spirit can be related to a place. Our spirits dwell in bodies and by such they are limited constantly to place. But the idea of heaven in the Scriptures is not primarily that of place. We distort it when we limit it to place, as in the concept, "Heaven is off in space somewhere and we die and go to heaven by being transported across the reaches of space." But Scripture reveals here that when Jesus Christ makes the spirit alive within, he thus brings heaven into the soul, into the heart. There is an old hymn we sing which catches the idea exactly.

Since Christ my soul from sin set free,
This world has been a heaven to me;
And mid earth's sorrows and its woes,
'Tis heaven my Jesus here to know.

This new dimension of living is heaven here on earth. It is this that makes it possible for the Apostle Paul to write to the Ephesians and say, "Ye are now seated with Christ in the heavenlies," {cf, Eph 2:6 KJV}. Heaven is in our heart because Christ is there. It is God who makes heaven "heaven." Heaven is the new dimension of life in the spirit. When I die and "go to heaven" I simply enter into this relationship in a new and greater way than I have experienced in the body. It will certainly involve the concept of place, for since we will have resurrection bodies, there must be some place for them to operate and wherever that place is, is heaven.

If you grasp this concept you will see that the writer is indicating here that Christ's work for me is never hindered because of where I am, for he is within me. Therefore, he appears before the presence of God on my behalf within me. That work is going on all the time, unceasingly, unendingly for me, within me, therefore wherever I am it is available to me. This is the point he is making.

I know not where God's islands lift
Their fronded palms in air.
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.

Then, he points out that the old system required endless repetition of sacrifice. The effect of these sacrifices never lasted very long. A man had to bring a fresh sacrifice every time he sinned, and once a year the whole nation had to offer the same sacrifice, year after year. The old arrangement required repetition. But the new arrangement is beyond time, as well as beyond space. The cross of Christ is a contemporary sacrifice, it was offered at one point in history, but the effect of it, the results and blessings of it, are available at any time, forward or backward from that point of history. Thus the Old Testament saints could have as much of Christ as we can, for all that he was in his sacrifice was as fully available to them by faith as it is to us by faith, who live on this side of the cross. This means the cross works as well in this 20th century as it did in the 1st century, and that it judges my pride and evil as relentlessly after I have been a Christian for thirty years as it does when I first come to Christ. It is a contemporary event and therefore no penance or remorse on my part can ever add anything to it. It is always effective for it is timeless. What a great advantage this is over the old system!

Then, third, the new arrangement is beyond judgment as well as beyond time and space. In the tabernacle the high priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year, bearing with him the blood of a lamb. Before he entered, on that day only, he stripped off his garments of beauty and glory and clothed himself in a simple white robe. He took the blood of a lamb in a basin and went into the Holy of Holies while the people waited with trepidation and fear outside, wondering if the sacrifice would be acceptable before God. If it was not, the whole nation would be wiped out for when the high priest went in he was facing the judgment of God.

By this eloquent way, God was saying to those people that judgment awaits a man when he dies. As the writer points out here, "it is appointed once for men to die, and after that comes judgment." But when the high priest

came out again, he did not appear in his white robe. Before he came again to the people he dressed himself in his robes of beauty and glory once again, and came out to meet with rejoicing and thanksgiving on the part of the people. That was a picture, the writer says, of what is true in the reality that Christ represents. Christ has entered by death into the realm of our spirit, into the human heart, into the inner life of man, and therefore he is now invisible to the world -- they do not see him. But when he appears visibly again it will not be to judge the world -- the cross has already done that -- but it will be to establish a time of peace and of glory upon the earth, which we call "the Golden Age," the Millennium. But for the Christian, this judgment is already past, and, in the spirit, he lives already in the age of peace. The judgment that a man must face when he dies has already been faced when we died in Christ. The judgment has been poured out upon him.

I was born on the wind-swept plains of North Dakota. I remember as a boy sometimes seeing at night the flames of a prairie fire lighting the horizon, sweeping across the grass of those prairies. Such prairie fires were terrible threats to the pioneers who crossed the plains in their covered wagons. Oftentimes these fires would burn for miles and miles, threatening everything in their path. When they would see such a fire coming toward them, driven before the wind, they had a device they would use to protect themselves. They would simply light another fire and the wind would catch it up and drive it on beyond them, and then they would get in the burned-over place, and when the fire coming toward them reached it, it found nothing to burn and went out.

God is saying, most plainly, that the cross of Jesus Christ is such a burned-over place. Those who trust in it, and rest in the judgment that has already been visited upon it, have no other judgment to face. That is why Paul can write with such triumph in Romans eight, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," {Rom 8:1 KJV}. In the realm of the spirit we have already entered into triumph and glory, we have already been forgiven everything. We need now only to acknowledge wrong, confess it, and, the moment we do, forgiveness is already ours. We need only to say, "Thank you" for it, and take it.

Have you found this? What a release from the nagging pressure and distress that is caused by a guilty conscience.

Now the question comes, "Has this kind of life been demonstrated?" The next section sets before us the demonstration of this new arrangement in Christ. It can be seen both in shadowy outline in the tabernacle, and in the reality of Jesus Christ himself. In the tabernacle you can see the divine design.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshippers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. {Heb 10:1-4 RSV}

There is limitation evident all through. There is much these things could not portray because they are not reality, they are merely pictures, shadows of reality. The blood of bulls and goats is not the blood of Christ, therefore it cannot take away sin. But through this limitation there is one unchanging message being pounded out. Every sacrifice of old declared it, every offering told the same story, it was burned in blood and smoke into every listening heart. That message was that the essential quality in a God-approved life is that one be willing to lay that life down. Every sacrifice was a life laid down, and by it God is saying, this is the quality of life that pleases him, a life laid down, self-giving, not self-loving.

There is a twisted form of Christianity abroad today that says, in effect,

"I believe that Jesus died on the cross in order that I might be free to live for myself; that he bore all the pain and suffering, therefore there is nothing like that for me to bear at all. If I am asked to endure pain or difficulty or heartache, something is wrong because Christ bore all that for me."

That is a distorted form of Christian faith. The truth is that Jesus died in order that I might be free to die with him, and he rose again in order that I might be privileged to rise with him. This is a timeless thing, it goes on all the time, we must forever be doing this. You will never know the rising without the dying -- that is the

secret of Christian faith. Unless we are willing to lay down our lives we can never have them back again. Is that not what Jesus said? "He that saveth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for my sake shall save it," {cf, Matt 10:39}. We can never save our life until we are willing to lay it down.

But the wonderful thing is, if we are continually dying with him, we shall also be continually rising with him. If, in our hearts, there is a readiness to give ourselves on his behalf in the service of others, we shall find, in that dying, that we are also rising, living again, life takes on new dimension. That is the great secret. The Old Testament sacrifices taught that there had to be a death, but that was the teaching of the shadow. Now see it in the living substance of the flesh of Christ himself. The Old Testament revealed the divine design, but in Christ we advance to see the divine desire.

**Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired,
but a body hast thou prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure.
Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,'
as it is written of me in the roll of the book."
When he said above, "Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Lo, I have come to do thy will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. {Heb 10:5-10 RSV}**

Here is what God really wanted. God never cared a snap of his fingers for all the rivers of blood that flowed on Jewish altars.

Not all the blood of beasts
on Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience rest
or wash away one stain.

He did not delight in these, he had no interest in them except as they taught something. Well then, what was he after? What these sacrifices pointed to: A human body in which there was a human will which continually chose to depend upon an indwelling God to obey a written word! That was what he was after, that was what God wanted. When Christ came he paused on the threshold of heaven, and said, "A body hast thou prepared for me." There in the womb of the virgin a human body was being formed, a body with nerve and muscle and sinew and hair and eyes and feet, growing through all the stages that the normal human embryo goes through. Within that body was a human soul with the capacity to reason, to feel and to choose -- a will, in other words.

That will, in that human body, never once acted on its own, never once took any step apart from dependence upon the Father who dwelt within. Jesus declared this over and over again, "The things that I do, I do not do of myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does them. The words that I speak are not my words, it is the Father who is speaking through me, he is saying them to you," {cf, John 14:10}. There was a will which continually chose to rely upon the Father to guide that life step by step in every experience, and to meet everything that came with the strength of an indwelling life. Now that is the principle that God has been after all along, that is what he wants.

He has no interest in ritual, in candles, in prayer books, in beads, in chanting, in any ceremony. Ceremonies mean nothing to God. What he wants is a heart that is his, a life that is his, and a body that is available to him. That is why Paul, in Romans 12, says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service [i.e., your expected task, what you were designed to do]," {cf, Rom 12:1 KJV}. When our Lord Jesus acted on that principle, he allowed the direction of his life to come from the Word of God. "Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God, as it is written of me in the book.'" Every temptation he entered into, every problem that came his way, he referred back to what God had said, "It is written," "It is written," "It is written..." That program took him to the cross, calling on him to lay down his life. And by means of that sacrifice, we are free now to join him on this program that is God's original intention for man. You see this in Verse 10: "And by

that will we [believers] have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

This word *sanctified* is widely misunderstood. It is usually looked upon as some kind of religious sheep-dip that people pass through, and they come out holier and purer on the other side. But it is not that. The word *sanctified* simply means "to put to the proper, intended use." That is all it means. You are sanctifying those chairs that you are seated on right now, and I am sure you are beginning to think it is about time to end that sanctification. I am sanctifying this pulpit. I am using it for what it was intended for. You sanctify your comb when you comb your hair. Sanctification simply means to put to the intended purpose. Now this verse is simply declaring that when we adopt the same outlook as Jesus Christ, when, in dependence on him, we are ready to obey the Word of God, and thus fulfill the will of God, we fulfill our humanity. We are being used in the way God intended us to be used.

There is one simple mark of that which is unmistakable, we become content to lay down our life in order that the will of God be done! I do not mean we rush out to die. Laying down a life does not always mean dying, it means giving of yourself, giving up for the moment something that you might desire to do. It means that we become content to lose standing, if necessary in the eyes of the world. We no longer regard that as important in our life. It means we give up material comfort or gain if this will advance the cause of Christ. We live in a simpler home in order that we might invest money in his enterprises. We are willing to be ignored, or slighted, or treated unfairly, if, in the doing of it, God's cause will get ahead. We are willing to feel inadequate in ourselves in order that we might always be adequate in him. Do you see what I am talking about?

That sounds hard and demanding, perhaps, but it is not. It is joyful, it is glorious. His yoke is easy and his burden is light.

We just finished a week of witnessing in Newport Beach. Ten men went down at their own expense, some of them taking their vacations, using time that they would otherwise like to have for themselves, working from six o'clock in the morning till midnight all through the week, in the most demanding type of work, exposing themselves in situations that oftentimes could have been highly embarrassing. And why? Because they were yielding their bodies unto God to advance his work. Without exception, every one of those men said that this was one of the greatest weeks of their lives, a most thrilling time. They learned one thing above all else; that this business of being available to God to use in any situation is what we used to call in the Navy "SOP" -- Standard Operating Procedure! There is nothing new about it, nothing unusual, it is the standard thing. This is what God wants, this is what he is after. Not great cathedrals and beautiful buildings and ornate ritual and ceremony, God does not care for these. God wants lives, bodies, hearts that are his, available to him to work in the shop and the office and the street and the schools and everywhere man is, that his life may be made visible in terms of that person, in that place. That is Christianity.

Notice, in the closing section, the new arrangement and its sufficiency:

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. {Heb 10:11-18 RSV}

One peculiarity of the old tabernacle was that it had no chairs. There was never a place for the priest to sit down for they had continually to be ministering. But when Christ offered himself as a single sacrifice he sat down, the writer says, "to wait until his enemies should be made his footstool." Why? Because the principle that he demonstrated is all that it takes to get the job done. It does not need anything more, he has done all that

is needed. Once this principle has begun in human history it will never stop until it wins what God is after, until all the enemies of Christ become his footstool and it is time to return again to establish his kingdom.

There is a power in this principle that is quiet and yet obstinate, relentless, irresistible. Where men and women are willing to lay down their lives, nothing can hinder them, nothing can arrest this principle, nothing can stop it. It is bound to win.

One of the men who went down with us last week was a prominent scientist-engineer. One day at a breakfast he stood up before some fifty or sixty men to speak to them about his faith in Christ, and he told in rather dramatic detail of the feeling he had when he pushed the plunger that detonated the first hydrogen bomb at Bikini Atoll. He knew he would release the awesome power of a bomb that would literally obliterate the island upon which the test occurred, and no man really knew for sure what else would happen. But he said, "I want you men to know that I am more scared right now than I was then." There was, of course, the fear of standing before a group of strangers to talk to them about faith, but he was also aware that he was now releasing a power that was far greater than the H-bomb. Through the channel of his life and testimony, he was being used as an instrument of God to release a power that would not destroy, blast, and ruin, but was the only power that man has ever known that restores and brings together, heals and makes life whole.

That is why Jesus sat down. What else was there to do? It is all finished, it is sufficient, it is adequate. It will win the prize, it will do the job.

When you have rested upon all Jesus Christ has done for you, you have entered into a place of provision of power. "I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds." You can know in any situation what God wants done, and expect him to do it through you. More than that, you enter into perfect peace of heart. There is no quarrel between you and God any longer, you are accepted in the Beloved. "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more."

Now, the writer says, when you come to this place, what more do you need? Where there is forgiveness for these, there is no more offering for sins needed. Of course not. Man has drawn near to God, the relationship is complete.

Prayer

Our Father, though it may take us many years of struggle and effort to learn this principle of ceasing from our own efforts and resting quietly upon your ability to work in us, nevertheless, Lord, when we learn it, what release, what relief there is, what a joy to stop our straining, fretful, petulant efforts to please you and do something for you and simply to rest upon your willingness to do everything in and through us. What grace, Lord, to make this known to us. We pray that we may learn to rest upon this new arrangement and thus be equipped to enter into every situation, face any circumstance or any problem with the adequacy which is yours, available to us. In Christ's name, Amen.

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