

Learning To Minister From the Old Testament Part 2

**Growing Godly Families Series
Manual 19**

by
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Hebrews

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The “Growing Godly Families Series” is the result of weekly topics which were prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders; to give them Biblical principles for the development of additional godly spiritual leaders. Because they give Biblical principles for growth in spiritual leadership, they are also helpful for Christians that want to grow and become godly spiritual leaders.

Mark 10:43-45 says, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” In these verses, Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God-given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world, people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Success produces rewards until we die, but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, “So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.’” 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The Growing Godly Families Series is designed to make your life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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Understanding Why the Old Testament Priesthood Was Like a Shadow

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why Christ is our Great High Priest. We saw that Christ only had to offer Himself once as a sacrifice because He was without sin. In this topic we will see that the Old Testament tabernacle and priests are compared to a shadow. If we hold an object in front of a light in a dark room, we can see the shadow on the wall. The shadow is not the real object but just a shadow of the object. In the same way the Old Testament priests were just a shadow of Christ who is the true High Priest.

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 God promised to make a new covenant with Israel and Judah. Those verses say, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” This new covenant with Israel and Judah is explained much more fully in chapters 8, 9 and 10 of Hebrews. As a result, we will have many references to the new covenant in these chapters.

Hebrews 8:1-2 says, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” In the previous chapters we have seen that Christ is greater than any high priest from the family of Aaron. Now we come to the main point. Here we see that Christ is a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavens. The high priests in the Old Testament only went into the Holy of Holies one day a year. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father at all times. There He is speaking to the Father for all believers including both Jews and Gentiles.

We see that Christ is the Minister of the sanctuary which is the true tabernacle. The Old Testament tabernacle was just like a shadow of the true tabernacle that is eternal in the heavens. In the Old Testament tabernacle God met the high priest at the mercy seat that was on the top of the Ark of the Covenant. Inside that ark were the Ten Commandments. On top of that ark was the mercy seat where the high priest put blood first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. On the morning of the resurrection Christ said to Mary in John 20:17, “Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'” The first thing Christ did after He talked to Mary was to go to the Father to present His own blood as the blood of the New Covenant to the Father as the eternal offering for sin. Later that day He appeared to His disciples.

Christ went to the true sanctuary to present His blood instead of the tabernacle that was just a shadow of the true tabernacle. God told Moses in Exodus 25:9, “According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.” Since the Old Testament tabernacle, sacrifices and priests were all a shadow of the true sanctuary, Moses was to make them according to the pattern that God told him so that they could be a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. As a result, Christ went to the Father to present

His blood.

Hebrews 8:3-5 goes on to say, "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" Here we see that throughout the Old Testament the high priests offered both gifts and sacrifices. As a result, it was necessary for Christ to also have something to offer. Instead of offering the blood of animal sacrifices as the priests in the Old Testament did, Christ offered His own blood to the Father.

If Christ would have tried to offer His own blood in the temple in Jerusalem, He did not qualify as a priest under the Old Covenant. The priests that offered their sacrifices in the tabernacle and later in the temple had to be from the family of Aaron. They had to offer those sacrifices according to the instructions of the Old Testament law. Christ was not from the family of Aaron and as we have seen that was why He had to be a greater priest than Aaron. He had to be after the order of Melchizedek instead. Instead of offering His blood in the tabernacle on earth, Christ had to offer His blood in the true tabernacle.

The Old Testament tabernacle had to be built according to the pattern that God had shown Moses on the mountain. Exodus 25:40 says, "And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." Then Exodus 39:42-43 says, "According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did all the work. Then Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moses blessed them." The priests also had to offer their sacrifices and gifts according to the law. The book of Leviticus gave very exact instructions about the way to offer the various sacrifices.

In spite of the fact that the Old Testament priests had to offer the sacrifices exactly as God had said, Hebrews 9:9-10 says, "It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience--concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation." Those gifts and sacrifices could never make the priest who offered them perfect. That was due to the fact that those were only imposed until the time of reformation. As a result, the Old Testament gifts and sacrifices only pointed forward to the time when Christ would come and take away sin.

That is why the priests who offered gifts and sacrifices under the Old Testament law were actually giving a copy and shadow of the heavenly sacrifice that Christ presented to the Father when He presented His sacrifice once for all after His resurrection. Those sacrifices never made people perfect and so they could never give a person true liberty. Galatians 5:1 says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Christ is the One who gives that true liberty because His payment took away sin and did not just cover sin. We will see in our next topic that when the Jews recognize the new covenant that Christ provided that they will also experience that liberty.

That is why Hebrews 8:6 says, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." Christ has a much better ministry than any of the Old Testament priests. The word translated "more excellent" means something that differs and surpasses the ministry of the Old Testament priests. Hebrews 1:4 says, "Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." In this verse, the word is used to point out that the

ministry of Christ differed from and surpassed the ministry of angels. As a result, Christ has a much greater ministry than any person or created being because of the fact that He is the Creator.

We also see that Christ is the Mediator of a better covenant. Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." We see that the offering Christ offered made it possible for us to stand before the Father because we stand in the righteousness of Christ instead of our own righteousness. 1 John 2:1-2 says, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." When Satan accuses us as Christians of sin, Christ as our Advocate says, "I paid for (insert your own name) sins and (insert your own name) accepted that payment by repenting of his or her sin of unbelief and placing his faith in the fact that my blood paid for his sin." The Father responds by saying, "I am satisfied with the payment. Case dismissed." Here we see that salvation is based only on what Christ did and the fact that the Father is satisfied.

The final thing that we see is that the new covenant is based on better promises. The Old Covenant could only produce death because it showed that all people are guilty of sin and the blood of animals could never take away that sin. In contrast, the New Covenant provides eternal life to all who believe because the Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ made to take away our sins. The Old Covenant was given through Moses and showed that all people are guilty. In contrast, we see that John 1:17 says, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Here we see that Christ provided a New Covenant based on grace and truth. As we help our physical and spiritual children understand the New Covenant, it will help them to realize and be able to explain to others the greatness of the New Covenant. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain to others why the Old Testament priesthood is like a shadow but that Christ is our Great High Priest.

Understanding the New Covenant

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the fact that the Old Testament priesthood was only a shadow because the Old Testament priests could never take away sin. We saw that Christ is able to be our Great High Priest because He offered His own blood to take away our sin. As a result, Christ is now sitting at the right hand of the Father where He is interceding for us. Today, we are going to see that the New Covenant does much more for both the Jews who place their faith in Christ and also the Gentiles who come to Christ by faith.

In Hebrews 8:7-9 we read, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord." Here we see that the first covenant was not faultless. The first covenant only showed that every person is guilty of sin. As a result, this meant that there had to be a new covenant. That new covenant is given in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and is quoted here in verses eight through twelve.

One of the first things that we notice about the new covenant is that the new covenant was originally made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. In Jeremiah 30 God led Jeremiah to write about the time called the time of Jacob's trouble. Jeremiah 30:6-7 says, "Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." Here we see that Jeremiah described the time known as the time of Jacob's trouble. That time is still future and will happen immediately after the church is taken to heaven. Then following that time of Jacob's trouble the nation of Israel will experience the time of the new covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 31 and quoted here in Hebrews.

However, there are some Jews who are already beginning to enjoy the blessings of the new covenant because they have turned to Christ for salvation. Romans 11:4-5 says, "But what does the divine response say to him?" I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace." In the time of Elijah God said that there was a remnant or small group of the Jews who followed Him. In the same way there continues to be a remnant of the Jews who have turned to Christ. That remnant is already enjoying the blessings of salvation.

The old covenant showed that all mankind is guilty before God. The new covenant shows that those who turn to Christ for salvation enjoy the blessings of God. The time will come after the time of Jacob's trouble when the Jews as a whole will turn to Christ. Then Romans 11:26-27 says, "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."" The day will come when both the Jews and Gentiles will enjoy the blessings of God. Romans 11:30-32 says, "For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all." As Christians we are already enjoying the blessing of salvation promised in the new covenant whether we are Jews or Gentiles.

Since the new covenant was originally promised to Israel and Judah, we need to understand the promises that God gave to the nation of Israel in Jeremiah. God said that the new covenant was not like the covenant that He made with Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. Throughout the Old Testament we see that most of the Jews failed to obey God because they did not come to Him by faith. God led the nation out of Egypt but most of them worshipped other things even in the wilderness.

As a result, in Hebrews 8:10-12 we go on to read about the promises that will one day be fulfilled in the future for Israel when they turn to Christ and come to God by faith after the time of Jacob's trouble. These verses say, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." The old covenant was the law written on pieces of stone. Here we see that God promises to write the new covenant in the hearts of the Jews.

In fact, that part of the blessing is also enjoyed by all Gentiles when we come to Christ. Romans 10:9-10 says, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." When we as Gentiles believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Christ from the death, we receive the blessings of salvation. That is why Romans 10:12-13 says, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." God says that there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles that come to Christ by faith. God shows the riches of His mercy to every person that calls on the name of the Lord whether that person is a Jew or Gentile.

However, the promise that is given in verse eleven is a special promise to the Jews. God says that the day will come when the entire nation of Israel will turn to Christ. As a result, at that time still future there will not be a need for the Jews to teach one another about the promise of salvation through Christ because all of the Jews will turn to Christ in that day. No Jew will need to teach his neighbor about salvation. No Jew will need to teach his brother about salvation. At that time all of the Jews will turn to the Lord for salvation. Instead of just reading the law that was originally written on pieces of stone, all the Jews will believe in their hearts and place their faith in Christ and recognize Him as the Messiah that they rejected at His first coming.

Verse twelve tells us about one of the blessings that all Christians already enjoy and which the Jews as a whole will begin to enjoy in that day when they turn to Christ. God promises that He will be merciful to the unrighteousness of the Jews. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The Father says that when we accept the payment that Christ made for our sin when our sins were placed on Christ as He hung on the cross means that He places the righteousness of Christ on each person who comes to Christ. That is true for both the Jews and the Gentiles that come to Christ by faith. As a result, all who place their faith in Christ stand before the Father in the righteousness of Christ.

God promises each person that comes to Christ by faith that He will remember our lawless deeds no more. Here we see one of the great things about the new covenant. God says that He chooses not to remember our past and hold it against us. This is a very important thing for every Christian to understand. The world will often remember our sinful deeds from the past

and remind us of them. In contrast, God says that He chooses not to remember our sins and He will never remind us of them in the future. God told Israel in Isaiah 44:22 that when they turn to Him, "I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you." Then Acts 3:19 promises all who become Christians, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." God blotted out our sins at the moment of salvation and they will never be held against us in the future.

Today, many Christians have never understood this part of the new covenant and continue to live with guilt for past sins that they have confessed many times to Christ. We need to remind such Christians of 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 which reads, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." We can enjoy the blessings of that liberty as we are being transformed and are becoming more like Christ.

Hebrews 8:13 goes on to say, "In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." The first covenant had served as a way to cover sin until the time that Christ came to take away sin. Once Christ came to take away sin by shedding His blood as the blood of the new covenant, there was no longer any need for the old covenant to continue to exist. As a result, God allowed the temple where the sacrifices of the old covenant were offered to be destroyed just a few years later. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand and be able to explain the fact that the old covenant was no longer needed because it had been replaced by a superior covenant. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the new covenant.

Understanding the Purpose of the Old Testament Priesthood

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand and be able to explain the new covenant. We saw that the new covenant is far superior to the old covenant because it takes away sin instead of just covering it. As a result, there is no longer a need for the old covenant. In this topic we are going to see that the writer of the book of Hebrews explained the purpose of the Old Testament priesthood. We will see that the Old Testament priesthood was important because it showed that there was a need for a new priesthood.

Hebrews 9:1-5 says, “Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.” Since Christ had not yet come to pay the penalty for sin, Moses was given very detailed instructions about the building of the tabernacle and the ordinances that were to be carried out by the priests.

God also gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Hebrews 10:1 says, “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” The law could only show sin but it could not give blessing. As a result, we see that the law, the tabernacle, the sacrifices and the ordinances were only a shadow of the good things to come. The sacrifices never made those who offered them perfect. Here in Hebrews 9 we have that tabernacle described. The tabernacle contained two parts. The first part was called the Holy Place. In it were three pieces of furniture; the lampstand, the table which had twelve loaves of bread placed on it to represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the altar of incense. A priest went into the Holy Place every morning and every evening to add oil to the lamps on the lampstand and to burn incense on the altar of incense.

The second part of the tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies and the high priest could only go behind the veil and enter the Holy of Holies one day during the year, the Day of Atonement. The Holy of Holies only contained one piece of furniture which was the Ark of the Covenant. On the way into the Holy of Holies the priest would take a golden censer with live coals and take some incense from the altar of incense. Then Leviticus 16:12-13 says, “Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die.” The High Priest had to burn incense on the mercy seat so that he would not die when he went into the Holy of Holies.

The Ark of the Covenant was overlaid with gold. Inside the Ark of the Covenant were three things; a golden pot that contained manna that the Lord provided as food for the forty years that Israel was in the wilderness, the rod of Aaron that budded when some of the people rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, and the tablets of the covenant (pieces of stone) that had the Ten Commandments written on them. On the cover of the Ark was the mercy seat with two cherubim (angelic beings made of gold), one on each end of the mercy seat overshadowing the mercy seat. This was the place where the High Priest would meet with God that one day

each year.

Hebrews 9:6-8 says, "Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing." Every morning and every evening the priests would go into the Holy Place to put oil in the lamps and incense on the altar. Once a week they would also place twelve new loaves of bread on the table of showbread, one loaf for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

On the Day of Atonement the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies by himself. There he would place blood on the mercy seat first as a covering for his sins and then as a covering for the sins of the people. This blood was an offering that the High Priest offering for the sins of ignorance that he and the people had committed during the previous year. The word translated "sins of ignorance" means a sin that they did not know or a sin committed without understanding. As Christ hung on the cross He said in Luke 23:34, "Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots." All those involved in the crucifixion of Christ had no understanding of what they were really doing. None of the people including the chief priests, the Sanhedrin, Pilate or the soldiers understood that Christ was shedding His blood and dying to pay for their sins and for the sins of all people.

Even though the High Priest placed blood on the Mercy Seat each year, that action did not bring him close to God. In fact as he placed blood on the Mercy Seat the High Priest was filled with fear. Since Leviticus 16:13 says, "And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die." The High Priest knew that if he did anything wrong while in the Holy of Holies that he would die. As a result, throughout the Old Testament the people did not feel that they could come close to God.

In contrast Hebrews 9:12 says, "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." Christ entered into the presence of the Father with His own blood and with it obtained eternal redemption for all who come to Christ by faith. That is why Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." It is only through Christ that we can come boldly to the Father.

That is why Hebrew 9:8 says, "The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing." The Old Testament tabernacle and priesthood were only a shadow because they gave a picture of what Christ would do when He presented His own blood to the Father in heaven after his death and resurrection. Christ told Mary in John 20:17, "Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" That evening Christ told the disciples in Luke 24:39, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." Between the time that Christ appeared to Mary in the morning and the disciples later in the day He presented His blood to the Father in heaven. The Old Testament High Priest was a shadow when he put blood on the Mercy Seat of what Christ would do when He presented His own blood to the Father.

Hebrews 9:9-10 goes on to say, "It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience--concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation." The Old Testament ministry of the High Priest as he placed the blood on the Mercy Seat was a parable or a symbol of what Christ did when Christ paid the penalty for sin once for all.

The Old Testament sacrifices were never designed to give a person a clear conscience because they never took away sin. Those sacrifices only provided a covering for sin until the time when Christ would come to take away sin. That is why John the Baptist introduced Christ in John 1:29 by saying, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John the Baptist pointed out the fact that Christ was the One for whom the Jews had waited throughout the Old Testament. They had patiently waited for the One that could take away sin and give them boldness to come to the Father.

The Old Testament priests presented both gifts and sacrifices to God. Even though they presented those sacrifices for their own sins as well as the sins of the people, we see that they could never have a clear conscience. They could never feel free to come close to God. However, they did have a very important ministry. The Old Testament priests could show their faith by the outward sacrifices but they offered. However, God told Samuel that He is the One who looks on the heart and He knew throughout the Old Testament those priests that had true faith. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the Old Testament priests did have an important ministry even though they did not have a clear conscience. We also want to help our children understand that they will have a clear conscience as they confess their sins. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand this great privilege.

Understanding the Sufficiency of the Blood of Christ

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the purpose of the Old Testament priesthood. We want them to realize that the Old Testament priests provided a shadow of what Christ would one day do when He presented His own blood to the Father to take away our sin. In our topic today, we are going to see that we want to help our children understand the sufficiency of the blood that Christ shed for their sins.

In Hebrews 9:11-12 we read, “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” The Old Testament priests could only bring blood as a covering for the sins that were past. In contrast, Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come. By His death Christ made certain all of the promises of the New Covenant. That includes such things as our salvation, the fact that Christ is presently interceding for us before the Father and our eternal life.

The tabernacle where the priests offered their sacrifices was a tabernacle that had been built by human hands. In contrast, Christ offered His sacrifice to the Father in the greater and more perfect tabernacle that was not built by human hands. That is the heavenly tabernacle where Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father. It was not a part of the creation of this world.

The Old Testament priests offered the blood of animals that they killed at the tabernacle. This was done continually. In contrast, Christ presented His own blood to the Father when He entered the Most Holy Place (the presence of the Father). This was done once and provided eternal redemption for all who place their faith in Christ. Redemption means to buy back. Christ bought us back from sin with His own blood. Isaiah 53:11 says, “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.” The Father showed His satisfaction with that payment by raising Christ from the death.

Hebrews 9:13-15 goes on to say, “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” Since only one bull and one goat were sacrificed each year on the Day of Atonement, these verses show that those animals had to be offered many times to cover the sins of the people. The ashes of a red heifer were offered for cleansing.

In contrast, Christ offered Himself and His blood as a perfect sacrifice to God. Christ only had to do this once because He was the perfect sacrifice. The sacrifice of Christ was sufficient to cleanse our conscience from our dead works before salvation. Those works were useless because we were spiritually dead and those works had no value. Paul told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Now we are able to serve the Lord with works that have eternal value. This gives our lives great meaning and purpose.

By His death, Christ also became the Mediator of the new covenant. He paid the penalty for our sins that were revealed through the first covenant (the law). As a result, all of those who believed by faith throughout the Old Testament were redeemed (bought back) from sin and its consequences. As a result, all Old Testament saints also received eternal life as their inheritance just as we do in this present day.

Hebrews 9:16-17 says, "For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives." The word "testament and covenant" are the same word in the Greek language. That will or testament does not go into effect until the person that wrote it dies. Here we see that the blood covenants in the Bible are like the last will and testament of a person. In Genesis 8 Noah offered sacrifices of all of the clean animals when he came off the ark. God then made a covenant that He would never again destroy the entire earth with a flood. God had Abraham sacrifice five animals or birds when God made a covenant with him.

Here in Hebrews we see that when there is a last will and testament that the testator (the one who makes the will) must die before that testament or covenant goes into effect. That is why Christ said that His blood was the blood of a new covenant. He had to die in order for us to be redeemed from our sin. That is why verse 22 says, "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." The word translated "remission" means forgiveness or pardon and speaks of the removal of the penalty. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." In this verse, the word is translated forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:18-22 says, "Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Since death is required for a testament (covenant) to go into effect, we see that was true even with the covenant that God made with Moses.

We see that the covenant that God made with Moses and the people of Israel was dedicated with the offering of sacrifices. Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on the mountain in Exodus 20. In Exodus 24 Moses came and told the people all that God had said and offered sacrifices. Exodus 24:6-8 then says, "And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.'" Here we see that the covenant of the law was confirmed by shedding the blood of animals. Moses sprinkled with blood both the book that contained the law and the people who received the law.

Just as the old covenant was confirmed with blood, Christ said in Luke 22:19-20, "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you." The old covenant was not sufficient by itself because it only condemned the people and showed that they were guilty before God. In his sermon in Acts 3:19 Peter said, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The new covenant provided by the blood of Christ is sufficient because our sins are now blotted out and God has promised that He will remember them no more.

Moses was also given instructions about the building of the tabernacle while he was on the mountain receiving the law. After the tabernacle was built and set up, we see that it was also dedicated with the shedding of blood. Exodus 40:28-29 says, “He hung up the screen at the door of the tabernacle. And he put the altar of burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered upon it the burnt offering and the grain offering, as the Lord had commanded Moses.” After the blood had been offered, Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle. Exodus 40:33-34 says, “And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” God showed that even the old covenant brought glory to Him by causing the glory of the Lord to fill the tabernacle.

God told Moses in Leviticus 17:11, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” However, that blood could never take away sin. That is why Christ said in Matthew 26:28, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” The blood of Christ did what the blood of animals could never do. The blood of Christ made it possible for the Father to forgive our sins. Isaiah 53:11 says, “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.” The Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ made with His blood. As a result, each person that comes to Christ by faith is justified (declared righteous) in the sight of God. We want to help our physical and spiritual children clearly understand this so that they can explain it to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to grow in their understanding of the sufficiency of the blood of Christ.

Understanding Why Christ Offered His Blood Only Once

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the sufficiency of the blood of Christ. We saw that the Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ made. He showed that satisfaction by raising Christ from the dead. In this topic, we are going to see why it was necessary for Christ to offer His blood only once.

We have seen that the high priests of Israel carried out their ministry in the earthly tabernacle. In contrast, Christ is carrying out His ministry in the heavenly tabernacle. That is why Hebrews 9:23 says, "Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." The word translated "copies" means an example, a copy, or an imitation of the genuine thing." It is the word Christ used when He said in John 13:15, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Christ gave us an example to follow. Here, in this verse, the ministry of the Old Testament priests was an imitation of what Christ would one day do in His ministry as He intercedes for us. The priests had a good ministry but Christ has a much greater ministry.

The Old Testament priests had to purify the earthly temple and the pieces of furniture that were in the tabernacle. Leviticus 16:15-16 says, "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness." Because of the sins of the people of Israel, the tabernacle and everything in it had to be purified.

In contrast, Christ presented His sacrifice to the Father. The New Covenant is a much better covenant than the Old Covenant. Because Christ was without sin, His sacrifice was better than any of the sacrifices that were offered in the tabernacle. His sacrifice presented to the Father in the heavenly tabernacle is a much greater sacrifice than any of the Old Testament sacrifices. Hebrews 10:12-14 says, "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." Here we see that the sacrifice that Christ made perfects all those who believe forever.

That is why Hebrews 9:24-26 goes on to say, "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another--He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Christ did not enter an earthly temple to offer His blood. The earthly tabernacle and later the temple were only copies or types of heaven. Christ entered into heaven itself once to present His blood to the Father. The word translated "presence" is usually translated face. Christ came face to face with the Father to present His blood.

The high priest had to enter the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle every year. Each year the high priest came with the blood of a different animal as he offered the sacrifice. That was due to the fact that the blood of animals could never take away sin. In contrast, Christ came with His own blood to the Father and not the blood of another. Animal sacrifices were offered

repeatedly throughout the Old Testament beginning with the early chapters of Genesis. Genesis 4:4 says, "Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering." Sacrifices were still being offered at the time of Christ.

In contrast, we see that Christ only had to offer Himself once. We see that Christ did this at the end of the ages. The word translated "end" means the completion or end. The disciples used this word when they asked Christ in Matthew 24:3, "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" Here we see that the disciples want to know when the end of the age would be. Christ also used this word in Matthew 28:19-20 when He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." Here we are reminded that Christ will be with us until the end.

Christ did not suffer over and over. Instead He suffered only once and that ministry is at the end of the ages. The word translated "ages" speaks of the time that lasts through all eternity. This word is used twice in Revelation 20:10 which says, "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Here it speaks of the eternal judgment of Satan. Then Revelation 22:5 also uses the word twice when that verse says, "There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever." Here we see that all believers will reign with Christ forever and ever.

Christ permanently put away the sins of all who have true faith by the sacrifice of Himself. This includes all those who have true faith from the foundation (creation) of the world to eternity future. This eternal payment for sin is described in Titus 2:11-14 where we read, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." When Christ offered His blood He delivered us from the penalty of sin. Today, as Christ intercedes for us He delivers us from the power of sin. When eternity comes we will be delivered from the presence of sin and there will be no more sin forever.

Hebrews 9:27-28 goes on to say, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." All who are born on this earth die once with the exception of individuals like Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament and those taken at the Rapture in the New Testament. In the same way Christ was our sacrifice just once when He bore our sins.

We also see that all people will experience judgment after death. In 2 Corinthians 5:10 we read, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Those who have had true faith will have their good judged to see what works are eternal and can be rewarded. Those who do not have true faith will be judged according to their sinful works.

The judgment of those who do not repent of sin is described in Revelation 20:11-15 where we read, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book

of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Here we see that the judgment of non-believers is eternal.

We see the judgment for Christians for their works in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 where we read, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” Here we see that the works of Christians will be tested by fire.

Some of our works are eternal and are compared to gold, silver and precious stones. Some of our works are just for this earth and they are compared to wood, hay and stubble. 2 Peter 3:10 says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” Here we see that the works that are for this earth will not last and only the works that have eternal value will be rewarded. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to do works that have eternal value. Then they can look forward to great rewards because of the blood that Christ shed for us. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to continually practice the works that have eternal value.

Understanding the Superiority of the Blood of Christ

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why it was only necessary for Christ to shed His blood once. It was only necessary for Christ to suffer once because His blood was sufficient to blot out our sins for all eternity. In our topic today, we are going to see why the blood of Christ was far superior to the blood of animal sacrifices.

In Hebrews 10:1-4 we read, "For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." Here we are reminded again that the law was a shadow of the good things to come and not the image. The word translated "shadow" speaks of a shadow that appears on the wall of a dark room when the light shines on your hand or some other object. In contrast, the word translated "image" speaks the exact image of an object or person. Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Here we see that Christ is the exact image of the Father.

The law could never make it possible for us to enter into the very presence of God with boldness because it was only a shadow. That was made clear by the fact that the high priest could only go into the Most Holy Place once a year. He had to take blood first as a covering for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. Even though the high priest was coming into the presence of God, he knew that did not make him perfect (provide him with salvation and forgiveness of sin) because he had to do the same thing the next year. If an offering could have provided salvation and forgiveness then it would only have been offered once and the need for it would have ceased.

The fact that the high priest had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins every year made it very clear that the sacrifice did not take away sin. That was due to the fact that the blood of animals could never take away sin. In contrast, when John the Baptist introduced Christ we read in John 1:29, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Christ could take away sin which the blood of bulls and goats could never do.

That is why the writer of Hebrews quoted the Old Testament when he wrote in Hebrews 10:5-7, "Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come--in the volume of the book it is written of Me--to do Your will, O God.'" This statement is quoted from Psalm 40:6-8.

As we look at these verses from Psalm 40, we are reminded that many of the Jews offered sacrifices to the Lord even when they were not following the Lord. In fact God used Isaiah to rebuke the Jews when they offered sacrifices while their heart was far from God. Isaiah 1:11-15 says, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies--I cannot endure iniquity and

the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.” God did not want sacrifices that did not come from the heart.

In contrast to those Jews who offered meaningless sacrifices, we see that Christ came to do the will of the Father. Christ told His disciples early in His ministry in John 4:34, “Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” Christ also showed His desire to do the will of the Father as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion. Luke 22:42 says, “Saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”” Christ was focused on doing the will of the Father.

Hebrews 10:8-10 gives some additional quotes from Psalm 40:6-8 when those verses say, “Previously saying, “Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the law), then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.” He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Even for those who offered sacrifices from a heart that had genuine faith, those sacrifices could not take away sin. God could not be well pleased with those sacrifices because they could never take away sin. In contrast, the Father said of Christ in Matthew 17:5, “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”” The Father also showed that He was pleased with the sacrifice that Christ offered by raising Him from the dead.

As a result, when Christ came to this earth He came to fulfill the law and take away the sacrifices that were offered according to the law. Philippians 2:7-8 says, “But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Christ was willing to die the most horrible form of death that the Romans could devise to be obedient to the Father and to pay the penalty for our sin. The Father showed that He was satisfied with the payment that Christ made by raising Him from the dead.

When Christ carried out the will of the Father, His obedience made it possible for the Father to sanctify us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” The Father made Christ sin for us by placing our sin on Christ as He hung on the cross. That has now made it possible for the Father to place the righteousness of Christ on us so that we are set apart to God. God sees us as righteous (without sin) because we stand in the righteousness of Christ. The offering that Christ made for our sins was complete so He only had to pay that penalty once for it to be sufficient for all people and for all eternity.

Hebrews 10:11-14 says, “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” The Old Testament priests were at the tabernacle and later the temple offering sacrifices every day as a covering for sin. However we are reminded that those sacrifices could never take away sin. They only covered the sins of the people until Christ came to pay for sin by His offering of Himself.

In contrast, we see that Christ offered Himself as one sacrifice for sins that was sufficient

forever. The priests stood as they offered their sacrifices because they had to continue to offer sacrifices. In contrast, once Christ offered Himself as the payment for our sin, He sat down at the right hand of the Father. Hebrews 1:3 says, “Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Christ had completed His payment for our sins and so He sat down at the right hand of the Father.

The payment that Christ made and the Father accepted was so complete that it had both present and eternal benefits. Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” Here we see that one present benefit is that we can have a clear conscience because our sins have been removed. In the future we can look forward to eternal life.

Christ sits in peace because He knows that the day will come when all enemies will be placed under His footstool. Philippians 2:10-11 says, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Even Satan will one day be forced to recognize that Christ is Lord. However, that recognition will come too late to save him and those who follow him from eternal judgment in the lake of fire and brimstone.

In contrast, each person that has placed his or her faith in Christ can rejoice in the fact that the sacrifice of Christ has made us perfect in the sight of the Father forever because we stand in the righteousness of Christ. Every person that has been set apart to God has been perfected forever. As we help our physical and spiritual children understand the superiority of the blood of Christ, they can enjoy the peace that comes from knowing that we have been perfected forever by the blood of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the superiority of the blood of Christ because it has produced both present and eternal benefits for us.

Understanding the Boldness That We Have as Christians

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the superiority of the blood of Christ to the blood of every other sacrifice that was ever offered. All of the Old Testament sacrifices had to continue to be offered but Christ offered Himself only once because that was all that was needed to pay for our sins and give us eternal life. As a result, we as Christians can have great boldness. That will be the focus of our topic today.

As we come to Hebrews 10:15-18 we read, "But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin." Here the writer of Hebrews reminds us of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to all Christians whether we are Jews or Gentiles. He again quotes what Jeremiah said about the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

We see that the Holy Spirit witnesses to us. Romans 8:16-17 says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Because our sins are no longer remembered, we have the witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives that we are the children of God.

God says that He will put His laws into our hearts and into our minds. Matthew 22:37-40 summarizes the laws of the whole Old Testament when those verses say, "Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'" Then Christ summarized the whole New Testament when He said in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.'" Here we see that as Christians we are now under the law of love.

That is why Romans 5:5 promises us, "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Here we see that God has placed His Holy Spirit within our hearts as the evidence that we have placed our faith in Christ. As we grow in Christ, that same thinking begins to control our minds. Hebrews 4:14-16 reminds us, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Here we see that even when we do sin that we can come with boldness to the Father through Christ because He paid for our sins and the Father has accepted the payment.

We go on to read in Hebrews 10:19-22, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." In the Old Testament the Jewish high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies one day each year and that was with great fear. In contrast, as

Christians the Jewish believers could enter into the Holiest at any time by the blood of Christ. The same is true for each of us.

We can come with boldness because Christ has created a new and living way to enter the presence of the Father. In the Old Testament tabernacle the high priest would pass through the veil as he went into the Holy of Holies. In contrast, Christ provided a new and living way. That new and living way is through His flesh. Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Romans 8:34 says, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." We enter the presence of the Father through the blood of Christ and Christ is speaking to the Father for us.

The writer of Hebrews told the Jews that they were now able to draw near to the Father with a true heart in full assurance of faith. In Psalm 83:28 we read, "But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works." The Old Testament high priest entered the presence of God with fear because he knew that if he did something wrong that he would die. In contrast, the Jews were told that they could now personally draw near to God by believing in their hearts because the Father had shown His full acceptance of the payment that Christ made by raising Christ from the dead. Today, each person can come to the Father with that same faith.

The reason such faith is possible is due to the fact that our hearts have been cleansed from an evil conscience. Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Many of the Jews were depending on their own efforts to please God. However, such works could never produce a clear conscience. In contrast, the blood of Christ takes away our sin at the moment any person, Jew or Gentile, places his or her faith in Christ. At the moment of salvation we were given a new nature and Titus 3:5 tells us, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." That new nature changes both Jews and Gentiles so that our hearts are transformed and we have a desire to please God.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13 we read, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Faith, hope and love are also mentioned in this passage. Verse 22 talks about faith. Then Hebrews 9:23 goes on to say, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." Two key things that give Christians hope are the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Then Titus 2:13 adds, "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." We can look forward to the return of Christ with eagerness because Christ is faithful and will keep His promise to come and take us to be with the Father for all eternity.

As Christians the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts. Romans 5:5 says, "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." God showed His love to us by sending Christ to pay the penalty for our sins. Christ showed His love by paying the penalty for our sins and then sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Christ also told the disciples in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." We are told to show that the love of God is in our hearts by our ministry to one another.

That is why Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” The word translated “let us consider” means to understand or to fix one’s eyes or mind upon. Here we see that the writer to the Hebrews urged them to pay close attention to and understand the needs of one another as Christians. We see that as Christians we are to stir up love and good works in one another. Love is to be the attitude that controls our heart and good works are the actions that love produces.

We see that there are two things that the Lord uses to stir up this love and good works in our lives. First, we are to get together with other Christians. This is important because our fellowship is to be both with the Lord and with one another. 1 John 1:1-4 says, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” Here we see that fellowship that includes both the Lord and other Christians will produce a full joy in our lives.

Second we are to exhort one another. The word translated “exhorting” means to encourage, to strengthen, to teach or to comfort. Here we see what we are to do as Christians when we get together. We are to encourage and strengthen one another and not criticize or judge one another. We are to help each other grow spiritually and to comfort one another. Here we see that each time that we get together with other Christians that we are to seek ways to build them up in their spiritual life. This is a key that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand and apply. We will help them learn best by our own example as we make it our goal to strengthen, encourage, teach and comfort them day by day. Our children will learn what to do as they see what we do as we spend time with them and share with them the things that the Lord is teaching us in our lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to practice the boldness that we have as Christians by ministering to others.

Understanding the Warning to Those Who Reject the Sacrifice of Christ

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the boldness that we have in Christ. We saw that we can have this boldness because Christ created a new and living way to come to the Father. Christ made that way through His blood and He now sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. In our topic today, we are going to see that the writer of Hebrews gave a warning to those who reject the sacrifice of Christ that paid for our sins.

The writer of Hebrews knew that many of the Jews living at that time had seen Christ, had heard Him teach and knew what He taught and still chose to reject Christ. As a result, Hebrews 10:26-29 says, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" The Jews who had seen and heard Christ had direct knowledge of the teachings of Christ. However, we see that some chose to reject that knowledge and continue to live in their sins.

The writer of Hebrews pointed out the fact that those who rejected the sacrifice that Christ had made for their sins did not have any other sacrifice that could take away their sins. John 6:68-71 illustrates this thought clearly. Those verses say, "But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve." Peter, Judas and the other disciples all received the same knowledge about Christ. They all walked with Him and heard Him teach. Peter and the others heard Christ and believed. Judas received the same knowledge and chose to reject.

For Judas and all others who choose to reject they are in bondage because of the fear of judgment. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Those who reject are promised fiery indignation. Revelation 20:15 says, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." This fiery indignation is eternal judgment.

In the Old Testament those who rejected the law of Moses were judged and no mercy was shown. Deuteronomy 17:2-6 says, "If there is found among you, within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you, a man or a woman who has been wicked in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing His covenant, who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded, and it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones. Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony

of one witness.” There was no mercy shown to those who chose to break the commandment of God and serve idols instead.

The Jews all knew what was taught in the book of Deuteronomy. As a result, the writer of Hebrews warned that those who trample the Son of God under foot deserved an even greater judgment. Such individuals treat the blood of Christ like His blood was just ordinary blood. Such rejection was an insult to the Spirit of grace. That is why Hebrews 10:30-31 goes on to say, “For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” God promises that He will repay all those who reject the blood of Christ as the payment for their sin. Just as God gave instructions to judge those who rejected in the Old Testament, God will judge those Jews who choose to reject the blood of Christ as the payment for their sins. In fact that judgment will come to both the Jews and the Gentiles who reject the payment that Christ made for our sins.

This is why the writer of Hebrews gave the warning that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God poured out His anger against sin when He placed our sins on Christ as Christ hung on the cross. Matthew 27:46 says, “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"” Christ was forsaken by the Father because all of the sins of every person in the world were placed on Him. There is no other payment for those who reject the payment that Christ made. Those who reject the payment that Christ made are choosing to have God pour out His judgment of sin on them throughout eternity. This is why the fear of death is such a fearful thing.

After warning those Jews that were choosing to reject the payment that Christ made, the writer of Hebrews began to speak to weak Jewish Christians to encourage them in their faith. Hebrews 10:32-35 says, “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.” The writer of Hebrews reminded the Jewish Christians of the way that they had served the Lord in the past.

The word that is translated “after you were illuminated” means to give light or to make the message of salvation clear. The Jewish believers had received that light and had experienced much suffering for their faith from those who rejected Christ. Acts 8:1 says, “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” The early Jewish Christians had been scattered by persecution. Acts 8:4 tells what they did as they were scattered when that verse says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” The persecution only caused the message of Christ to spread.

First, the apostles suffered persecution. Then all of the Jewish Christians began to suffer persecution. Later the Gentile Christians were included in that persecution. As a result, the Christians experienced sufferings, reproaches and tribulations in their lives. They also saw others who were experiencing the same things. In spite of what they were suffering, the Jewish Christians took time to show compassion to the writer of Hebrews even when he was in chains for proclaiming Christ. The Jewish Christians even suffered joyfully when their possessions were taken by those who were persecuting them.

The Jewish Christians had experienced these things in the past and the writer now reminded

them of the fact that they had a greater and an eternal possession waiting for them in heaven. Christ had said in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The writer of Hebrews wanted to remind the Christians that they could look forward to this eternal reward.

The writer did not want them to cast away their confidence. The word translated "confidence" means freedom or boldness in speaking. The writer reminded them that this boldness to speak for Christ will result in great eternal rewards. As a result, he did not want to see the Jewish Christians become so discouraged that they would lose their boldness to share the Gospel.

As a result, Hebrews 10:36-39 says, "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." Here we see that the writer of Hebrews urged the Jewish Christians to have endurance even in the middle of suffering. He urged them to continue to carry out the will of God. He wanted them to know that they would receive the promised reward.

He reminded these Christians of the promises given in Habakkuk 2:3-4 that the Lord is coming and the just shall live by faith. It is those who do not show faith but draw back that showed that they never had true faith but were only professing Christians. The writer reminded the Christians enduring affliction that they were not those who were drawing back but that they were among those who believe. As a result, they could look forward to the saving of the soul. In the same way we want to encourage our physical and spiritual children when they go through times of rejection or suffering. We want them to remember that they can look forward to great reward. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand this warning to those who reject the sacrifice of Christ.

Understanding the Importance of Faith

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the fact why there were many Jews that rejected the sacrifice of Christ even though they had seen His miracles and heard His teaching. We also saw that the writer of Hebrews gave encouragement to those who were suffering for their faith and boldness in speaking for Christ. The writer now builds on that instruction to remind the Jewish Christians about the faith that was shown by many individuals in the Old Testament.

To help the Jewish Christians understand that faith, the writer began by giving a definition and illustration of the meaning of faith. Hebrews 11:1-3 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” The word translated “substance” means confidence, firm trust or assurance. Hebrews 3:14 uses this word when it says, “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.” The writer wanted the Jewish Christians to have a full assurance of their salvation.

This verse also gives a second definition of faith when it says that faith is the evidence of things not seen. The word translated “evidence” means a proof or conviction. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in 2 Timothy 3:16 where we read, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Here it is translated by the word reproof because all Scripture is profitable to convict or convince people of their sin. Faith is that inward proof or assurance that God has given us salvation and eternal life even though we have not yet seen that eternal life.

Throughout the Old Testament many people had given clear evidence of that confident assurance that God would give the eternal life that He had promised. The word that is translated “elders” is used frequently of older men or the leaders of the people. In 1 Timothy 5:2 it is used to speak of the older women. In this verse, it is used to speak of the faith of the Old Testament saints including both men and women as we see in the chapter. The Old Testament clearly spoke of the faith of the people mentioned in this chapter.

In addition to the faith of the Old Testament saints we are also reminded that it is through faith that we have understanding about the way that the creation came into existence. It is through faith that we can understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God. John 1:1-3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” We believe by faith that the Father willed the creation, the Son spoke the worlds into existence by the Word of His mouth and the Spirit moved on the face of the waters.

True believers accept by faith the fact that God the Son created the world with things that are not seen. Hebrews 1:3 says, “Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Here we see that Christ now holds all things together by the word of His power. Mankind cannot see the power of God but only the results of that power and the creation is one of the results of that power. However, mankind must accept that fact by faith. That is why we should expect that those without faith will try to explain the creation in some other way.

We are given two illustrations of faith that happened before the flood. Hebrews 11:4-5 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God." God could not talk about the faith of Adam and Eve because they had seen and talked with God. However, their faith is shown by the fact that of their first two sons, one chose to show faith and the other did not have faith.

God had shown Adam and Eve that blood had to be shed to provide a covering for their sins. Genesis 3:21 says, "Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." The fig leaf coverings that Adam and Eve had made for themselves did not work. As a result, God chose to kill one or more animals to provide an animal skin as a covering for them. We do not know exactly what Adam and Eve taught their first two sons. However, we do know that when those two sons offered a sacrifice that Abel offered an animal sacrifice by faith as a covering for his sin. In contrast, Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering to God. That offering of fruit actually provides us with the first example of idol worship. Cain offered the result of his own efforts as a tiller of the ground as a sacrifice instead of a blood sacrifice as a covering for his sin. As a result, God did not accept the offering of Cain. God accepted the blood sacrifice of Abel and declared him righteous. His faith still speaks today.

Enoch is the second illustration of faith before the flood. Genesis 5:24 says, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Enoch was the first person to be taken off this earth without dying. Later in the Old Testament a similar thing happened to Elijah. However, here in Hebrews we have a fuller explanation of what happened to Enoch. We see that God took away Enoch so that he did not experience death. His body was never found because he never died. We see that the reason God took Enoch without death was due to the fact that he pleased God. A few verses earlier in Hebrews 10:38 we read, "Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." The fact that Enoch walked with God showed that he lived a life of faith. The fact that Enoch pleased God was the result of the fact that he lived by faith.

Hebrews 11:6-7 goes on to say, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." When faith is lacking, it is impossible to please God. God could have pleasure because Enoch walked by faith and lived a life of faith.

In order for a person to come to God, we see that a person must believe that He is. In Exodus 3:13-14 God answered the question of Moses. Those verses say, "Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?' And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Both Enoch and Moses had to choose to come to God because they chose to believe that God is the true God. In the New Testament Christ made it clear that the only way to come to the Father is through Christ. John 14:6 says, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

We also see that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. God told the people of Israel through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:13, "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." The Lord offers a wonderful reward to all those who will search for Him with their hearts. Paul told Agrippa in Acts 26:18 that the Lord had sent him to

the Gentiles “To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” In this one verse we see that God rewards us in five ways. He opens our eyes. He turns us from darkness to light. He turns us from the power of Satan. He turns us to the power of God. He forgives our sins. He gives us an eternal inheritance. These five things all happen as a result of true faith.

We see that Noah also demonstrated true faith when God warned him about the coming flood. Genesis 6:8 says, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Then Genesis 6:17-18 says, “And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark--you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.” Noah received grace because he had true faith. As a result, he and his family were preserved while the rest of the people of the earth were destroyed by the flood.

Noah showed his faith by his obedience as he built the ark. In fact Noah also warned others about their need for faith. 2 Peter 2:5 says, “And did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.” As a result of faith, Noah became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. Each of these examples of faith from the early chapters of Genesis provides an opportunity to teach our physical and spiritual children about faith and help them learn to explain to others the importance of having true faith. We read that Noah became an heir of righteousness because of faith. Christ also places His righteousness on each of us at the moment of salvation. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to explain the importance of faith.

Understanding the Faith of Abraham

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the meaning of faith from the lives of several individuals in the first few chapters of Genesis. However, those are not the only individuals in Genesis that give us examples of true faith. In our topic today, we are going to see how to help our children learn how to explain faith to others from the life of Abraham.

In Hebrews 11:8-10 we read, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham demonstrated his faith in many different ways.

In the first three verses of Genesis 12 God told Abraham to leave his family and go to a land that God would show him. Then Genesis 12:4 says, “So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” Abraham did not know where God was taking him but he demonstrated his faith by obeying God and going.

When he reached the land that God had promised him, he lived in that land as a person would live in a foreign country. For the next 110 years Abraham lived in tents instead of building himself a house. In fact his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob also lived in tents because they received the same promise. Here we see the reason why Abraham and his family chose to live in tents as foreigners or strangers. We see that Abraham was waiting for a city which had foundations whose builder and maker is God. Here we see that Abraham was not looking for a permanent home on this earth. Instead he was looking forward to the eternal inheritance that God had promised to him.

In Hebrews 13:13-14 the writer of Hebrews encouraged the Hebrew Christians to follow the example of Abraham. Those verses say, “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” In the same way, as Christians we need to be reminded daily that this earth is not our permanent home. Peter reminded us as Christians in 1 Peter 2:11, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Here we see that we want to live a godly life and teach our children to do the same because of the fact that we are just like sojourners and pilgrims during this short period of time that we have on this earth. Our true home is with the Lord forever.

Hebrews 11:11-12 goes on to talk about the faith of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Those verses say, “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude--innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.” Sarah showed her faith when God promised that she would have a child when she was too old to bear children. Genesis 18:10-12 says, “And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I

have pleasure, my lord being old also?" We read that Sarah expected God to be faithful and do exactly as He had promised.

The Lord greatly blessed the faith of Abraham and Sarah. We see that their descendants cannot be numbered. They are compared to the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. God had promised Abraham in Genesis 15:5, "Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." God reminded Abraham of that promise immediately after he placed his son Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice. Genesis 22:16-18 says, "And said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son--blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." God promised Abraham that the whole earth would be blessed through his descendants because he had demonstrated his faith by his obedience.

Hebrews 11:13-16 goes on to say, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all received these promises. Although they had not seen these promises fulfilled they had the assurance in their hearts that God would fulfill them. In fact they were so confident of these promises that they freely spoke of the fact that they were like foreigners on this earth. They looked forward to their eternal home with the Lord.

That eternal home was the home that they were really seeking. Abraham had come from the land of Ur because God had called him to leave that country and go to a country that God would show him. Abraham had no desire to return to the country of his birth. Although Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived in Canaan and God had promised that land would belong to their descendants, these men were actually looking forward to their heavenly home where they would be with the Lord. Their real desire was that future heavenly country that God has promised to those who have their faith in Him.

God was very happy to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That was the name that He used when He called Moses at the burning bush. Christ used that same name when He answered the Sadducees as they tried to deny the resurrection. In Matthew 22:32 Christ said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." These uses showed the pleasure that God had in the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Christ made it very clear to the Sadducees that there is a resurrection and that these men were living at that very moment. Truly God is blessed by such faith.

We also see that God has prepared a city for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as for all others that have true faith. The writer of Hebrews gives a further description of that city in the next chapter. Hebrews 12:22-24 says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." Here we see that this eternal city is called the heavenly Jerusalem. This city has been prepared for all those whose names are registered in heaven. Christ said in John 14:2-3, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a

place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” We can show the same faith as Abraham showed as we look forward to that heavenly city.

One of the greatest ways that Abraham showed his faith is described in Hebrew 11:17-19 where we read, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” God chose to show the faith of Abraham to all generations by asking Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. God asked Abraham to do this even though God had told Abraham that Isaac would be the one that God was going to bless.

Abraham acted in faith and offered his son as a sacrifice. Genesis 22:8-10 says, “And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” At that point the angel of the Lord spoke and told Abraham in Genesis 22:12, “And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then God revealed a ram that He had prepared to be the sacrifice instead.

Abraham was obedient to God because he had faith that God could even raise Isaac from the dead. As a result, the faith of Abraham is an example for us to help our physical and spiritual children understand the meaning of faith. His faith makes it clear that Abraham knew that God is able to raise the dead. It is that faith in the fact that God raises the dead that makes it possible for our children to be bold in sharing the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the faith of Abraham.

Understanding the Faith of the Early Jewish Leaders

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand the faith of Abraham. We saw that the greatest example of the faith of Abraham was the fact that he knew that God is able to raise the dead. That same faith will give our children boldness as they share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ because they have the confident assurance that God raises the dead. Today we are going to read about other early leaders of the Jews that had that same faith.

First we see the faith of individuals from the three generations that followed Abraham. Hebrews 11:20-22 says, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones." Isaac spoke about the future as he blessed Jacob and Esau. Isaac told Jacob in Genesis 27:28-29, "Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!" Here we see that Isaac expected those nations that blessed his descendants to be blessed.

The blessing to Esau was a little different. Genesis 27:39-40 says, "Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: 'Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.'" Here we see that Isaac promised Esau that one day in the future that he would be able to break the yoke and no longer serve his brother.

Jacob later showed his faith in the promises of God by the blessing that he gave to each of the sons of Joseph as it came close to the time for him to die. In Genesis 48:16 Jacob said, "The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." Earlier Jacob had recognized that the Lord had spoken to him. Genesis 28:13-17 said, "And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.' Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'" When Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph he recognized that God would carry on the blessing that God had given to him through the lives of the sons of Joseph.

Joseph showed his faith in the promises of God by the words that he spoke before he died. Those words are recorded in Genesis 50:24-25 where we read, "And Joseph said to his brethren, 'I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'" Here we see that Joseph had faith in the promise that God had given about the future of the nation of

Israel.

The next example of faith mentioned from the Old Testament is the faith of Moses. Hebrews 10:23-26 where we read, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." We see that the first illustration of the faith of Moses was the faith that was shown by his parents at the time of his birth. The parents showed their faith in the promises of God by not fearing the commandments of the king.

Moses showed faith when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Acts 7:20-22 says, "At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds." Moses had the best education that was available in the land of Egypt at that time. However, he chose to help his people. Acts 7:23-25 says, "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand." Moses wanted to help his people but tried to do it his way instead of asking God what to do.

As a result, Pharaoh tried to kill him and he was forced to flee. After forty years of learning to depend on God in the wilderness, Moses showed his faith by being obedient to God. Acts 7:35 says, "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush." Exodus 5:1-2 says, "Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.' "And Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.'" The people of Israel even turned against Moses. Exodus 5:21-22 says, "And they said to them, "Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?" Still Moses was faithful and chose to suffer with the people of Israel because he looked for the reward of the Lord instead of enjoying the pleasures of sin that were only temporary. Moses was willing to suffer for God because he knew that the reward of God was greater than the riches of Egypt.

Hebrews 11:27-30 goes on to say, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days." Instead of acting out of fear of the king of Egypt, Moses chose to trust the Lord.

We see that Moses endured because his faith was in Him who is invisible. This faith was shown as he prepared to lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. The word translated "endured" means to be strong or to be steadfast. Moses saw the burning bush but he did not see God. Exodus 3:4-6 says, "So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is

holy ground." Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God." Moses heard the voice but he did not see God. However, Moses had his faith in the One that is invisible.

Moses continued to show his faith by putting blood on the top and sides of the door and keeping the Passover. Exodus 12:23 says, "For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you." In contrast, the Egyptians did not put blood on the top and sides of their doors. Exodus 12:29 says, "And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock." God honored the faith of Moses and the obedience of Israel by sparing their oldest while the death angel judged the firstborn of Egypt throughout the entire land.

Moses and the people of Israel then passed through the Red Sea. Exodus 14:22 says, "So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left." In contrast the Egyptians were destroyed. Exodus 14:28-29 says, "Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left." God judged the Egyptians because they lacked faith and protected the people of Israel because they showed faith by their obedience. In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that as Christians they are now able to show their faith by their obedience to the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the faith of the early Jewish leaders.

Understanding the Faith of Others in the Old Testament

In our last topic, we saw some of the things that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand about the faith of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, the parents of Moses and Moses. We saw that Moses chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. In this topic we are going to be reminded of the faith of many others in the Old Testament.

In Hebrews 11:31-32 we read, "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets." Rahab is an example of the faith shown by one who was not a Jew and also one who had a sinful past. Rahab showed her faith in God by hiding the spies because she recognized that God is the creator of all things. Joshua 2:11-13 says, "And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death." Here we see the faith of Rahab as she recognized that the Lord God of the Jews was the creator of all things.

Rahab also showed her faith by asking the spies to spare her family when Israel conquered the city of Jericho. The rest of her family also had to show their faith by being obedient to the instructions of the spies. Joshua 2:17-19 says, "So the men said to her: "We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home. So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him." Rahab showed her faith in another way when she hung the bright red cord in the window. Her family showed their faith by remaining in the house of Rahab.

We also are given as examples of faith four men from the book of Judges who showed their faith and two men from the books of 1 and 2 Samuel who showed their faith. Then we have the faith of the prophets mentioned. These people showed their faith in many different ways. Hebrews 11:33-34 tells us, "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Throughout the book of Judges we see that the various people whose faith is mentioned trusted the Lord to give Israel victory over their enemies.

One of the ways that Samuel showed his faith was by calling the people of Israel to repent of their idol worship. 1 Samuel 7:3-5 says, "Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines." So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." Samuel prayed and the Lord gave Israel a great victory over the Philistines.

One of the ways that David showed his faith was by trusting the Lord to judge Saul two different times when David had the opportunity to kill him. 1 Samuel 26:9-12 says, "And David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" David said furthermore, "As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go." So David took the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head, and they got away; and no man saw it or knew it or awoke. For they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them." David knew he could trust God to deal with Saul for Saul's sin.

Other men of faith in the Old Testament showed their faith in other ways. Daniel saw God close the mouths of lions. The three friends of Daniel were protected in the fiery furnace. Many were protected when others tried to kill them. Hezekiah was about to die and prayed to the Lord to heal him. In addition to giving Hezekiah fifteen additional years to live, Isaiah 38:8 says, "Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward." So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down." God performed a miracle to confirm His word to Hezekiah.

Hebrews 11:35-36 says, "Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment." God honored the faith of two women by using Elijah and Elisha to raise their dead sons. 1 Kings 17:22-23 says, "Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!"" God honored the faith of another woman by using Elisha to raise her son back to physical life.

Many others showed their faith by experiencing suffering and death because of their faith. Some were tortured and killed because of their faith. They were willing to die for their faith because they looked forward to the future resurrection. Jeremiah nearly died in the dungeon when he was let down into the mire at the bottom of the dungeon. Jeremiah 38:6 says, "So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire." In the case of Jeremiah God spared his life but many of the faithful people of the Old Testament died for their faith.

Hebrews 11:37-40 says, "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented--of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." Throughout the Old Testament many people showed their faith in the resurrection by the fact that they were willing to suffer and die for their faith.

Christ warned the lawyers of his day of their coming judgment because they were committing the same sins that their fathers had committed when their fathers killed the prophets. In Luke 11:49-51 Christ said, "Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation." This statement about the death of Zechariah is recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 where we read, "Then the Spirit of God came upon

Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God: 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you.' " So they conspired against him, and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord." Here we see that Zechariah was killed right in the temple court for his obedience to the command of the Lord.

The suffering and death of many people of faith in the Old Testament showed that they trusted the Lord and looked forward to the resurrection. Job gave one of the best summaries of the faith of Old Testament saints when he said in Job 19:25-27 says, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" Job and the other Old Testament saints looked forward to the future resurrection because of their faith in the promises of God.

These Old Testament saints looked forward to the promises of God by faith. However, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that those who lived after the death and resurrection of Christ have something even better because Hebrews 11:13 says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." As a result, we are now able to look backward to the death and resurrection of Christ and by faith we can know that Christ has provided eternal life for us. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the great blessing that we have to look back in faith to what Christ did for us through His death and resurrection. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the faith of the Old Testament saints.

Understanding the Importance of Discipline

In the last several topics we have seen that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the faith of the Old Testament saints. As we come to Hebrews 12 we see that these Old Testament saints are called a great cloud of witnesses. We are going to see how to help our children understand and imitate that faith as God helps them grow and mature in their spiritual lives. This is important because God allows discipline to happen in our lives in order to help us learn to walk in faith. That is why it is important to understand the purpose of the discipline that God allows in our lives.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Here we see that the writer of Hebrews compares the Christian life to a long distance race. To effectively run in a marathon or other long distance race, the runners make the choice to do certain things and avoid other things. The same thing is true in our Christian lives.

In Hebrews 10:38 the writer of Hebrews told the Jews, “Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” We saw that some of the Jewish Christians were wavering in their faith. In chapter six we saw that there were Jews who had heard the teachings about Christ and had rejected the truth and never come to Christ for salvation. Those who had rejected were now causing others to waver. That is why the writer wanted the Jews to understand all of the examples of true faith from the Old Testament. As a result, the writer now encouraged these Jews to set aside every weight. We have seen that the Old Testament laws, feasts ceremonies and ordinances were only a shadow and not the real thing. Instead they were given to point forward to the fact that Christ would pay for sin once for all by His death and resurrection. As a result, the Jews are here encouraged to lay aside the Levitical system because it was like a weight that would hinder them in their spiritual development.

Second, the writer pointed out to the Jews the needed to lay aside the sins which so easily beset us because these sins hinder spiritual growth. That is also true in our lives. 1 John 1:8-9 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Here we see the importance of regular confession so that we can experience moment by moment cleansing from sin.

The Jews were encouraged to set aside the Levitical law and their daily sins so that they could run with endurance the race that was set before them. We need to do the same thing as we run the race that Christ has set before us. The word translated “endurance” means the deliberate purpose in our hearts to keep going regardless of how many times we are tempted to give up or even slow down. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” The thing that makes it possible for us to run our race on this earth is to keep our eyes focused on Christ. He is the one who gave us faith and will bring that faith to maturity as we keep our eyes on Him. He also gave us a perfect example to follow as He endured the cross and gave no thought to the shame that was involved as he hung on the cross. As a result, Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father where He makes intercession for us.

Hebrews 12:3-6 goes on to say, "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." The reason why we can look to Jesus as our model to follow is due to the fact that He was obedient to the Father and endured the verbal mocking, the physical suffering and most of all the separation from the Father in order to pay for our sins. As we are continually reminded of the example of Christ, that example will give us strength so that we do not become weary or discouraged in our souls. The Hebrews to whom this was originally written had not suffered to the point where they had been killed as they fought against sin, even though others had suffered that way.

Then the writer quoted from Proverbs 3:11-12 which says, "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights." The word translated "chastening" is only used in Ephesians 6:4, 2 Timothy 3:16 and four times in these verses. The word means the whole training of a child including the discipline. In Ephesians 6:4 it is translated training. In 2 Timothy 3:16 it is translated instruction. In these verses, it is translated chastening four times. In these verses, it is focused on the discipline or correction part of training. We are reminded here that the Lord corrects us because of His love for us. The purpose of discipline is to correct so that a person can grow strong and mature. We discipline a young tree by placing stakes beside the tree and tying the tree to the stakes so that the tree will grow straight until it grows strong enough to continue to grow straight by itself. That is the goal of the Lord to help us grow strong so that we can stand firm.

That is why Hebrews 12:7-11 goes on to say, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Like the Jewish Christians, when we as Gentile Christians experience the discipline of God in our lives, God is dealing with us as sons and daughters that He wants to help grow strong and mature in our spiritual lives.

In contrast, if a person does not experience discipline from the Lord, it means that the person does not yet belong to the Lord. Ephesians 2:1 says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins." A lack of spiritual discipline means a lack of spiritual life. The word translated "illegitimate" means one who is not born in lawful wedlock and usually referred to one that was born to a concubine or female slave. The Jews would understand this word because of the fact that Ishmael was the child of Abraham through Hagar, the servant of Sarah. A study of the life of Ishmael in the book of Genesis does not show that he ever placed his faith in the promises of God. Galatians 4:29-30 says, "But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Although Ishmael was a physical son of Abraham, from Galatians we see that he was never born according to the Spirit.

We read that we also had human fathers who disciplined us to correct us. As a result of that correction we learned to respect our human fathers. At this point it might be important to

explain the difference between discipline and punishment. Discipline is given to a child in love to correct the child and help the child to develop respect. When human parents give punishment to take out their own anger and without love, the child becomes resentful instead of developing respect. Many human parents punish instead of giving discipline in love to correct the child.

When human parents discipline their children, those parents are trying to do what they think is best for those children. Sometimes human parents do not know how best to discipline a child because of our limited human knowledge. That is why Christian fathers are told in Ephesians 6:4, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” We will provoke to wrath if we punish in anger instead of discipline in love. In contrast, God knows what is best for us and so He disciplines us with love. He wants to make our spiritual lives profitable.

Even when corrective discipline is done in love, it can also be painful. As a result, as Christians we may not be experiencing the joy of the Lord in our lives during times of discipline. However, the purpose of that discipline from the Lord is to lead us to confess our sins so that we can experience the results of forgiveness and cleansing in our lives. When David confessed his sin to the Lord in Psalm 51, he said in Psalm 51:12, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.” We want to help our children understand the importance of confession of sins.

We also see the results of the discipline of the Lord as we see that it “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the purpose of godly discipline is to help our lives become conformed to the image of Christ. That fruit of righteousness is the good works that the Lord makes it possible for us to carry out as we yield our lives to Him and allow Him to work in our lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the purpose of godly discipline.

Understanding the Danger of a Root of Bitterness

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the purpose of godly discipline. We saw that God disciplines true Christians to help our lives become conformed to the life of Christ and to make it possible for us to do good works. In order to do good works we must yield to the Lord and allow Him to work in our lives and through our lives. In our topic today, we are going to see the importance of warning our children about the danger of a root of bitterness.

In our previous topic we saw that the Christian life is compared to a long distance race. In such a race people can get discouraged when they go through times of testing, especially if they do not understand the purpose of that testing. We saw in the previous topic that God allows discipline to happen in our lives in order to help us become like Christ. That is why Hebrews 12:12-13 goes on to say, "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed." In a long distance race we need the strength of the Lord to complete the race that the Lord has given to us.

Isaiah used a similar thought to encourage the Jews during his time. Isaiah spoke about the time when Christ would one day come to rule on the earth. However, Isaiah spoke at a time when enemies were coming against the nation of Judah. As a result, Isaiah said in Isaiah 35:3-4, "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you." The people of Israel were fearful in the time of Isaiah. Some of the Christians to whom the writer of Hebrews wrote were also fearful as they experienced suffering and opposition from other Jews. They needed to be encouraged in the race that the Lord had given them. As a result, the writer of Hebrews used the thought of Isaiah to encourage them.

The Jewish Christians who were wavering and discouraged were encouraged to strengthen their hands which hung down and their feeble knees. They needed to set aside the weights that were discouraging them so that they could run with endurance the race that the Lord had given to them. Just as Isaiah encouraged the fearful people of his day to be strong and do not fear because the Lord will come and save, the writer of Hebrews encouraged the Jewish Christians to be strong. We need to encourage our children in the same way when they get discouraged during times of testing. Isaiah said in Isaiah 40:31, "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." We also want to encourage our children to let the Lord renew their strength.

Whether Jewish Christians in the time of the New Testament or for all Christians today, we want to help them learn to make straight paths for their feet. Galatians 5:16 says, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." As we show our children how to walk in the Spirit we are showing them how to make straight paths. In our spiritual lives we want to help our children learn to experience the healing of the Lord from sin so that they can be encouraged.

Hebrews 12:14-16 goes on to say, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any

fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.” The writer of Hebrews reminded the Hebrew Christians as well as all Christians that we are to pursue peace with all people. As Christians we can have peace with other Christians as we walk in fellowship with the Lord and with one another. 1 John 1:3-4 says, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” Then 1 John 1:7 adds, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” We will experience peace with one another as Christians as we walk in the light.

Those who are not Christians will only experience peace and holiness in their lives when they come to Christ in repentance and faith. With those who are not Christians, 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” Here we see that we are to plead with those who are not Christians to be reconciled to God. Isaiah 57:19-21 says, “I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near,” says the Lord, “And I will heal him.” But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.” True peace only comes to people when they repent of their sin of unbelief and place their faith in Christ.

Many Hebrews did not yet have that peace. They were still falling short of the grace of God. As a result the writer of Hebrews encouraged the people to look carefully and examine their lives to see if they had true faith. That same warning is needed by many professing Christians today. When there is not true faith we see that it is easy for a root of bitterness to spring up. Moses warned Israel in Deut. 29:18 to examine their own lives when he said, “So that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood.” Those who turn away from God often become like a root bearing bitterness. We see here in Hebrews that such a root will always cause trouble.

There are four roots mentioned in the New Testament, two positive and two negative. In Colossians 2:6-7 we are told to take root in Christ. In Ephesians 3:17-19 Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be rooted in the love of Christ. In 1 Timothy 6:10 we see that a root of the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. Here we see that a root of bitterness can spring up and defile not just the bitter person but many others. The word translated “bitterness” means extreme wickedness. In Acts 8:23 Philip spoke to Simon the sorcerer and said, “For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” Simon professed to be a Christian but showed his heart was still full of bitterness. In Ephesians 4:31-32 all Christians are told, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” We see that bitterness is a very destructive root because the root always determines the fruit. A bitter person will cause many others to be defiled and cause that person to fall short of the grace of God.

We also have a warning against being a fornicator or profane person. Fornication includes any form of sexual immorality. The word translated “profane” means ungodly. 2 Timothy 2:16 says, “But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.” Esau is an example of a person who knew about God but became a bitter and godless person. In the time of Esau the birthright meant that the person had the spiritual leadership in the family. Genesis 25:34 says, “And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.” Esau was willing to sell his birthright for a bowl of stew because spiritual leadership meant nothing to him.

In Hebrews 12:17 we read, “For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Later Esau wanted the blessing because that would have given him a double inheritance but he was rejected. He wanted the material blessings of the world but he did not want the spiritual leadership because he had become bitter, a fornicator and a profane person.

The writer of Hebrews was pointing out that Esau was an example of those Jews who professed to be Christians but who lacked true faith. Such individuals were contrasted with those who had true faith in Hebrews 10:38-39. Those verses say, “Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” The word translated “draw back” means to withdraw because of fear. Here we see that there were some Hebrews who had learned about Christ but had drawn back because of their fear of other Jews and never became Christians. We see that they drew back to perdition. The word translated “perdition” means eternal judgment. Like Esau these Jews had learned about the importance of faith but they had chosen to draw back from faith and continue to depend on their own works to try and earn their way to heaven.

Today, we have many people who are like Esau and these Hebrews who drew back from true faith. They have heard about Christ but they choose to remain in their bitterness, their fornication or their profane lifestyles even though they profess to be Christians. Such professing Christians who lack true faith face the same eternal consequences that Esau faced. They will experience eternal judgment. Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to warn such individuals in love so that such individuals can understand the eternity that they face if they continue to choose to follow sin. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand and explain the danger of a root of bitterness.

Understanding Why We Come to Jesus Our Mediator

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that there are people who profess to be Christians but have drawn back from true faith. The writer of Hebrews warned that there are many who have made that choice because they lack true faith. Such individuals have chosen to continue in their bitterness, their immorality or their godless lifestyles. In our topic today, we are going to see how to help our children learn to explain to such individuals the need to come to Jesus who is our mediator of a new covenant.

In Hebrews 12:18-21 we read, “For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")” Here we see that the writer of Hebrews again reminded the Jews of the contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was the law given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

In Deuteronomy Moses reminded the people of the way that God had spoken to them at Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy 4:11-12 says, “Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice.” The people had heard the voice of God but they had not seen Him. They had seen the thick darkness but they had not even seen the form of God.

That day is described in Exodus 19:16 where we read, “Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.” The people were filled with fear when they saw the way that God had come to speak to them. We see what they told Moses after God had spoken the Ten Commandments to the people from the mountain. Exodus 20:18-19 says, “Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."” The people became so fearful that they were afraid that they were going to die. As a result, they told Moses to let God speak to him and then he could come and tell them what God had said. They did not want to be in the presence of God.

God also told them not to touch the mountain or they would be judged by the Lord. If an animal touched the mountain that animal was to be stoned or shot with an arrow. The Old Covenant reminded the people that the Law separated them from God because of their sin. Even Moses said filled with fear as he heard the words of God after the people had made the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain. As Moses remembered that time he said in Deuteronomy 9:19, “For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also.” His fear caused him to pray that the Lord would spare the people of Israel.

In contrast to the fear produced by the Old Covenant, the New Covenant gives us life and hope. Hebrews 12:22-24 says, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God,

the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” The writer of Hebrews told the Jews that in Christ they came to Mount Zion which is the city of God because it is the heavenly Jerusalem. The blood offered throughout the Old Testament was the blood of animals offered as a covering for sin. Even the blood that Abel offered was still only the blood of an animal even though it showed his faith.

In contrast, Christ took His own blood and presented it to the Father in heaven. When we come to God through Christ, Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Here we see that we are now able to come with boldness to the Father because the Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sins and He can deal with us in mercy.

As Christians, we are the church of the firstborn. Our names have been written in heaven. The word that is translated “firstborn” speaks of Christ. Colossians 1:18 says, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Here we see that Christ is called the firstborn from the dead because of the fact that He was the first to conquer death. The just men made perfect are the Old Testament saints because they could not enter into the presence of the Father until their sins were paid for by Christ. Both we and the Old Testament saints can rejoice because of the fact that Christ is the Mediator of a New Covenant. He is the One who has made it possible for each of us to enter into the presence of the Father with boldness.

Hebrews 12:25-27 goes on to say, “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.” The writer of the book of Hebrews reminded the Jews not to refuse Him who speaks. Some Jews were tempted to draw back. The writer warned those Jews not to refuse Him who speaks. These Jews were trying to decide whether to place their faith in Christ or to depend on their own efforts to try and keep the law.

The writer reminded the Jews that those Jews who had refused to listen to God when He spoke to Israel in the wilderness did not escape judgment. At the time that God spoke from heaven to the Jews in the wilderness His voice shook the earth. The writer reminded the Jews who were still wavering that they would certainly not escape judgment if they refused to listen to Christ who now speaks from heaven. He also reminded them that the Lord will shake both the earth and the heavens one more time. 2 Peter 3:10 says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” At the time that God cleanses the heavens and the earth with fire the whole universe will be shaken. At that time the things that remain will not be shaken but the heavens and the earth will both be shaken.

The things that remain will be the things that are eternal. That is why Hebrews 12:28-29 says, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” Peter went on to write about the things that are eternal. 2 Peter 3:13 says, “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which

righteousness dwells.” Here we see that we are going to receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Since we can look forward to this eternal kingdom, we are given the power to serve the Lord acceptably on this earth with reverence and godly fear. The word translated “acceptably” means in a manner that is well pleasing to God. Here we see that because Jesus is our Mediator that we are able to serve Him in a way that is well pleasing to Him. Hebrews 13:15-16 says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Here we see that the Lord has said that we are able to serve Him in a way that is pleasing to Him. This service includes both our words and our actions. We offer a sacrifice of praise as we give thanks to Him for what He has done. We are also able to offer sacrifices by our works as we learn to do good to others and as we learn to share with others. The Lord is pleased by both types of sacrifices.

As we serve the Lord we are able to serve Him with both reverence and godly fear. The word translated “reverence” means a sense of respect or with reverence. The word that is translated “godly fear” means with reverence toward God. Here we see the reason why we want to serve the Lord. We want to show our reverence to God. The people at Mount Sinai did not show reverence to God but made a golden calf to worship while Moses was on the mountain. As a result, they experienced the judgment of God. In contrast, we are able to show our physical and spiritual children how to serve the Lord in a way that is well pleasing to Him and with an attitude of reverence toward God. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to bring glory to God by their words and works.

Understanding the Fact That Christ Is Unchanging

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that Christ is our Mediator. We saw that because He is our Mediator that we are able to serve the Lord in a way that is well pleasing to Him. In fact we are even able to bring glory to God by our good works. In our topic today, we are going to see some of the good works that we can show by our actions. We are also going to see that Christ is the One who is unchanging.

In Hebrews 13:1-4 we read, “Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them--those who are mistreated--since you yourselves are in the body also. Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” In our last topic, we saw that we are able to bring glory to God by both our words and our works. Here in Hebrews 13 we see some specific ways that we can bring glory to God.

We bring glory to God by brotherly love. The word that is translated “brotherly love” is the Greek word philadelphia so the city of Philadelphia means the city of brotherly love. In 1 Thessalonians 4:9 we read, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” Here we see that God is the One who teaches us to love each other with brotherly love. Romans 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” Here we see one way to show that love is by giving preference to one another. Then 1 Peter 1:22 adds, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” This verse reminds us that this kind of love will be powerful if it comes from a pure heart.

Another way that we bring glory to God and show our good works is by entertaining strangers. The word translated “entertaining strangers” means to love strangers or to show hospitality. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is Romans 12:13 where we read, “Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” Here we see that we are to be given to hospitality. Hospitality means to make people feel at home when they visit you. We see that some in the Old Testament had shown such kindness and later realized that they had entertained angels.

We also bring glory to God by remembering the prisoners. A majority of the places where this word is used in the New Testament refer to Paul when he was in prison. The word speaks about those who are in chains or bondage. Here we see that we are to remember them as if we were chained to them. In the time of the New Testament prisoners were often beaten and mistreated by the Roman government. Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.” We are to especially remember those who are prisoners because of their faithful service for the Lord. This is common in many countries of the world today.

We are also to bring glory to God in our marriage. The word translated “honorable” is usually translated precious and means highly valued or especially dear. The word is used in 1 Peter 1:18-19 where we read, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Our salvation was purchased with the precious blood of Christ. Here we see that God considers marriage very

precious. He is the one who performed the first marriage in Genesis 2:18-25.

We see that sexual activity in a marriage is honored by God but sexual activity outside of marriage is promised judgment. God will judge sexual activity outside of marriage because it destroys the very foundation of family life. God said in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Here we see that husband and wife are to become one. In fact God told husbands in Ephesians 5:25-27, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." We see that the Lord used the love of a husband to picture His love for the church. As a result, marriage is very precious in the sight of God.

Hebrews 13:5-6 goes on to say, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Here we see that the next way that we are to bring glory to God is by the way that we act. The word translated "conduct" means character or manner of life. Here we see that our character is to be without covetousness. The word translated "without covetousness" means not loving money. That is due to the fact that 1 Timothy 6:10 tells us, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Here we see that the love of money causes some to stray from the faith.

In contrast, 1 Timothy 6:6-7 says, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Here we see that godliness with contentment is the opposite of covetousness. The only other place the word translated contentment is used is in 2 Corinthians 9:8 where we read, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." In this verse, the word is translated sufficiency.

God supplies us with all that we need so that we are able to carry out every good work. That is why we can be content with the things that we have. The word translated "content" means to be satisfied or to be sufficient. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says, "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Here we see that the grace of the Lord is sufficient for us in any situation. The strength of the Lord is made perfect in our weakness. In that way our lives bring great glory to the Lord because He works in our lives and through our lives.

In addition, the Lord will never leave us or forsake us. The word translated "forsake" is the word that Christ spoke from the cross when he said in Mark 15:34, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is translated, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" Here we see that Christ was forsaken for us so that we would never be forsaken by the Father. That is why we can say boldly that we do not fear what people will do to us. The word translated "boldly" means to be courageous or bold. Two of the six times this word is used are in 2 Corinthians 5:6 and 5:8. Those verses say, "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." In these two verses the word is translated confident. As a result we can say with confidence that we do not need to fear what others will do to us.

Hebrews 13:7-8 goes on to say, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” The word translated “those who rule” means to lead, to be a leader or to consider. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 uses this word when that verse says, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” Here the word is translated esteem. We are to place a high value on those that the Lord has chosen to lead us in the church. That is why we are to remember them and keep them in our mind.

We see three things that godly leaders have done for us. In addition to leading us, they have spoken the Word of God to us. Here we see that they have explained Biblical principles to us so that we can know and understand the Word of God. Because of the leadership of Paul, we see that the Acts 17:11 says, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help people understand the Word of God.

Godly leaders have also given us an example of faith to follow. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” He also said in 1 Thessalonians 1:6, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” We want to make certain that our lives and teachings agree because we are of following Christ. Christ is the true example of one who never changes and always provides a perfect example. In fact we see that His example in the past, the present and the future will always be the same. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand that Christ is unchanging.

Understanding How We Can Be Effective in Ministry

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that Christ is unchanging. We also saw that the writer of Hebrews gave us several ways to bring glory to God. As we help our children learn to walk with the Lord, their lives will begin to bring more and more glory to the Lord. In this topic we are going to see how we can be effective in ministry as we serve the Lord.

In Hebrews 13:9 we read, “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.” The word translated “carried about” means to be driven or to carry here and there. The same word is used in a similar warning in Ephesians 4:14 where we read, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” In this verse, the word for children speaks of a child that is not old enough to speak clearly. This reminds us that Christians who are very immature in their spiritual lives will be driven or carried here and there by false teachings and false teachers.

The word translated “strange” usually talks about a person that is a stranger or a foreigner. As a result, in this context it is talking about teachings that are foreign to the Word of God or in disagreement with the Word of God. Paul warned the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20:29-31, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Then 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 says, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” We still have false teachers so we need to continue to warn weak Christians not to be deceived by false teachings.

Instead we need to help new Christians, weak Christians and struggling Christians learn to be established by grace. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” We are saved by grace and we are to grow in grace. 2 Peter 3:18 says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.” We help Christians grow in grace as we show them how to become mature both in their hearts and in their minds. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” We want to help weak, struggling or new Christians learn how to have their hearts and minds established in the peace of God.

The writer of Hebrews recognized that there were Jewish false teachers who were telling the Jews that they needed to depend on the Jewish ceremonial laws either to obtain salvation or to grow in their spiritual lives. The writer reminds the Jews that this focus on the ceremonial laws about foods had not helped them to experience spiritual growth. Then the writer went on to compare the Old Testament sacrifices with the sacrifice that Christ made when He was offered as the sacrifice for our sins.

Hebrews 13:10-14 says, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” The writer reminded the Jews that the bodies of the animals whose blood was placed on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant were not eaten. Instead the bodies of the animals whose blood was taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies were burned outside the camp of Israel. The writer then goes on to point out the fact that the burning of the bodies of those animals outside the camp was actually a picture of the payment of Christ.

When Christ was crucified, He was crucified on the cross outside the city of Jerusalem. John 19:16-17 says, “Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.” This place was outside the city wall of Jerusalem. As a result, Christ paid for the sins of all people outside the gates of the city. The animals whose blood provided a covering for sin in the Old Testament were burned outside the camp and later outside the city of Jerusalem. In the same way Christ also shed His blood outside the city wall as he paid the penalty to take away our sin.

As a result, the writer of Hebrews encouraged the Jews who had become Christians to be willing to go outside the Jewish religion that was centered in the animal sacrifices that were offered in the city of Jerusalem. Here we see that the writer of Hebrews encouraged the Jews to leave the Levitical system with its sacrifices and ceremonies and depend totally on the blood of Christ for their salvation even though it meant that they might be rejected by the other Jews. The Jewish Christians had placed their faith in Christ but Acts 21:20 says, “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.” Here we see that the Jewish Christians were still all zealous for the law. This included everything that was a part of the Levitical law. The writer of Hebrews recognized that this zealous attitude toward the Levitical law was hindering the spiritual growth of the Jewish Christians.

That is why the writer reminded the Jews that on this earth we have no continuing city. They were no longer to focus on the earthly Jerusalem but rather the heavenly Jerusalem. That is why Hebrews 12:22-24 says, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” The Jewish Christians would not mature by keeping the law and neither would the Gentiles. That is why we as Christians may experience reproach or rejection from those who want to continue to try and be made righteous by trying to keep the law. We are to focus on the city that is to come which is heaven.

As Christians we have already been made righteous by the blood of Christ. As a result, Hebrews 13:15-17 says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” As Christians we are now able to offer a different kind of sacrifice. We are able to offer this sacrifice continually and not just when we bring an animal to be sacrificed. We are able to offer a sacrifice of praise as we give thanks to the Lord. Ephesians 5:20 says, “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We offer a sacrifice of praise as we give thanks

to God for all He has done.

We also offer a sacrifice of praise and we do good and share with others. The word translated “good” means to do what is right or to act in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Our good works will be used by the Father to draw people to Christ. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Here we see that we are to notice the opportunities that God gives us to do good and to take those opportunities to minister to others. God is well pleased when we do good and share.

We also offer a sacrifice of praise as we are submissive to those who are placed in leadership by the Lord. The word translated “rule” means to lead or to be over. In Luke 22:25-26 Christ told the disciples at the last supper, “And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.’” In verse 26 this word is translated governs. Then Christ went on to point out His own example of the fact that He had led them by serving them. We want to have a submissive attitude toward godly leaders because the Lord calls them to be bondservant leaders who serve.

We want to remind our physical and spiritual children that godly leaders are watching out for their souls. One day they will give an account to the Lord for the way that they have served other Christians. We want to give them the opportunity to give that account with joy because of the fact that we chose to offer a sacrifice of praise by having a submissive attitude so that we could carry out the work of the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how we can be effective in ministry.

Understanding How Christ Matures Us

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to be effective in their ministry and service for the Lord. We saw that the Lord has called every Christian to offer a new kind of sacrifice. We are called to continually offer a sacrifice of praise by the words that we speak, the actions that we do and the submissive attitude that we show to godly Christian leaders. In our topic today, on the final verses of the book of Hebrews, we are going to see how Christ matures us.

In Hebrews 13:18-19 we read, “Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.” We see that the writer of Hebrews and those with him asked for other Christians to pray for them. Here we see that one thing that helps us to grow to spiritual maturity is learning to pray for others. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” In these verses, we see that Paul encouraged Timothy to pray for three groups. He was to pray for all people. He was to pray for those who were leaders of countries. He was to pray for any person that was in a position of leadership.

We also see that the writer of Hebrews tells the result of growing to maturity in his own spiritual life. We see that he said that he was confident that he had a good conscience before God. The word translated “good” means to be excellent in its nature and characteristics. The word translated “conscience” means that part of the spirit which distinguishes between what is morally good and what is evil and causes us to do what is good and avoid what is evil. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.” Here we see that result of learning to practice good doctrine is that we learn how to have a pure heart, a good conscience and a genuine faith. The writer of Hebrews wanted the Jewish Christians to pray for him so that he would continue to have a good conscience.

We see that the desire of the writer of Hebrews was to live honorably. The word translated “honorably” means to live in such a way that there would be nothing that would give others opportunity to accuse or blame. Here we see a goal that we want to have for our own lives as we provide an example for our children to follow. James 2:8-9 says, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Here the word is translated well. If we love our neighbor as we love ourselves we will be living honorably but if we show partiality we are committing sin which is not living honorably. We see that the writer also wanted the Jewish Christians to pray that he would be able to come and see them again quickly.

Hebrews 13:20-22 says, “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Here we see the prayer of the writer of Hebrews for the Jewish Christians to whom he was writing. He wanted to see God work through the lives of the Jewish Christians to bring them to maturity so that they were able to carry out the will of God.

We see that the writer described God as the God of peace. Philippians 4:9 says, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” Then 1 Thessalonians 5:23 adds, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In these two verses we see that God is with us and that He is the One who sanctifies us completely. He is also the One that raised Christ from the dead.

Christ is called that great Shepherd of the sheep. Ezekiel 34:15-16a describe several of the ministries of Christ as our Great Shepherd when those verses say, “I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick...” In addition, the most important ministry of Christ as our Shepherd was giving His life for the sheep. In John 10:11 Christ said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” His blood was for the New Covenant and was an everlasting covenant that gives us eternal life.

We also see that while we are here on this earth that Christ makes us complete so that we can carry out His will. In Luke 6:40 Christ said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” Paul showed by his example that we also can have a part in helping other Christians become complete as we pray for them. In 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10 we read, “For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?” We want to pray for our physical and spiritual children and then show them how to apply the Word of God in their daily lives. This will equip them to do good works and carry out the will of God.

God says that it is well pleasing to Him when Christians allow Christ to work in their lives so that the things that we do are well pleasing in the sight of God. We are only able to do this through the strength that Christ provides. Christ said in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Then Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” We can do nothing of eternal value in our own strength but Christ gives us the strength to do all things as we learn to yield to Him. That is why He is the One to whom all glory belongs forever and ever.

Hebrews 13:22-25 goes on to say, “And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. Amen.” In these last few verses we see that the writer appeals to the Jewish Christians to bear with this word of exhortation. The word translated “bear with” means to endure or to stand firm. This is an important appeal because 2 Timothy 4:3-4 says, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” The writer also wanted the Jews to accept the teachings in this book and not close their ears to the truth.

The phrase “word of exhortation” is only used two times in the New Testament. The other place this phrase is used is in Acts 13:15 where we read, “And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”” Here we see that Paul and Barnabas were invited to give a word of exhortation to the people in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. A word of exhortation is a call for people to carry out a certain action. In Acts 13 Paul concluded his sermon by saying in Acts 13:38-39, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through

this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Here we see that Paul concluded his word of exhortation by encouraging the people to come to Christ for the forgiveness of sins because the law given through Moses could never justify them.

Throughout the book of Hebrews we have seen that the writer encouraged the people to act. In Hebrews 3:13 the writer said, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” In this verse, we see that the writer wanted the Jewish Christians to encourage each other every day so that their hearts would not become hard because of the deceitfulness of sin. Then Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Here we see that the writer wanted them to stir up love and good works by getting together and then encouraging one another as they waited for the coming of the Lord.

The writer gave some final greetings as he concluded the book of Hebrews. First, he let them know that Timothy had been released from prison. The writer also told the Jewish Christians that he and Timothy would see them if Timothy came in the near future. This is one reason why some people think that Paul or one of his traveling companions may have been the one who wrote the book of Hebrews. Mention is also made of the saints in Italy. The writer also sent greetings to the leaders of the Jewish Christians as well as sending greetings to all of the Christians. Here we see that it important to send greetings to one another because that is one of the ways that we can encourage other Christians especially during times of suffering. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to be an encouragement to Christians that live in other areas. Our children will share this desire with us if we have helped them to grow and mature in their spiritual lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand how Christ matures us in our spiritual lives.