

The Talmid



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDED NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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The Incarnation of the Triune God

The Christmas Story

I invite you to open your Bible and turn to [Philippians, chapter 2, verses 6](#) through [11](#). And I want to take as the text of our Christmas message [Philippians 2:6-11](#). Now, before we read the text and specifically present what the Spirit of God has said, let me just set our thoughts in context. At Christmas, we are confronted again, and I'm sure you're aware of it, with the sometimes very difficult task of separating the reality of Christmas from the clutter that surrounds that reality. There is so much confusion that sometimes you feel like the real Christmas story is like a diamond lost in

a haystack. It just seems impossible to find. Christmas has really become a hopeless muddle of confusion.

The humility and the poverty of the stable are somehow confused with the wealth and indulgence and selfishness of gift-giving. The quietness of Bethlehem is mingled with the endless amount of shopping malls and freeway traffic. The soberness of the incarnation is somehow mixed with the drunkenness of this season. Blinking colored lights somehow have some connection to the star of Bethlehem. The room in the inn, so obscure, so dirty, with such meager fare, somehow embraces the thought of a warm house, a fireplace, and opulent feasting. Cheap plastic toys for little kids with which to play out their follies are mixed with the true value of the gifts given by wise men. Salesmen somehow get mixed up with shepherds. Angels are confused with flying reindeer, one of which even has a red nose.

The pain of childbirth is mixed with the parties. The filth of the stable is confounded with the whiteness of fresh snow. And then there's Mary, Joseph, Perry Como, and Bing Crosby. And so it goes. The great reality of Christmas, which is the glory of the Lord being revealed, is obscured by so much tinsel, and activity, and commercialism; and I think it's true that Santa Claus really has become the focus of Christmas for most people. And I've noted in the years that I've been ministering, that more and more each year, Santa Claus takes a dominant place. In fact, it's amazing,

but I think some people have trouble confusing Santa Claus with Jesus – if you can imagine that.

One of the most incredible and blasphemous confusions of Christmas I ever read appeared in a recent issue of the Episcopal News: The Diocese of Los Angeles, written by a rector of St. Mark's Church, in Upland, California. He wrote this article. I think it might point up to you something of the confusion of Christmas. Listen. "There are few causes to which I am more passionately committed than that of Santa Claus. Santa Claus deserves not just any place in the church, but the highest place of honor, where he should be enthroned as the long-bearded, ancient of days, the divine and holy one whom we call God.

"Santa Claus is God the Son. 'You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why, Santa Claus is coming to town' simply refers to God the Son slipping into the secrets of the heart as easily as he slips down the chimney of the house. Santa Claus is God the Father, the creator of heaven and earth, in whose hand is a pack bursting at its seams with the gifts of His creation. Santa Claus is God the Holy Spirit, who comes with the sound of gentle laughter, with a shape like a bowl full of jelly, to sow in the night the seeds of good humor. Santa Claus indeed deserves the exalted and enthroned place in the church, for he is God, Son, Father and Holy Spirit. So there he is: God the Son, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit. I've seen him in the toy store. I've seen him in his car on the freeway. And when I saw him with his crazy beard and his baggy red suit, I saw more than the seasonal merchant of cheap plastic toys. I saw no less than the triune God," end quote.

Unbelievable! Santa Claus is the incarnation? What confusion; and from the clergy, no less. How far can you miss the real Christmas, huh? So far that you believe Santa Claus is the incarnation of the triune God? What confusion. Now, as we face the reality of Christmas, I want us to see the true story, and this time not from the perspective of Bethlehem, or Joseph, or Mary, or shepherds, or innkeepers, or wise men, or Herod, or Old Testament prophets.

But I want us to see the Christmas story from the

viewpoint of the Holy Spirit of God, as revealed to the apostle Paul. And I believe it gives us the real Christmas story. The scenery isn't there. Bethlehem isn't the issue. Shepherds, and wise men, and Joseph, and Mary, and mangers, and oxen, they don't appear in this perspective. But what is here is the reality of the incarnation. This is one of the greatest texts in the entire Bible. It is, perhaps, the most profound statement of the Christmas story anywhere in the Word of God. **Paul Rees** said, "The passage is oceanic, for the fathoms are countless, and the tides are measureless. In it, we enter the depths." **F.B. Meyer** said, "It is almost unapproachable in its unexampled majesty."

And, believe me, it's a greater challenge than I can handle to deal with its fullness, but if I can just scratch its surface, that should be infinitely satisfying for the time. Look with me at [verses 6 through 11](#). And in these verses, we will see five steps in the Christmas story, five features as God enters the world, five great aspects to the incarnation.

Philippians 2:6-11 (NASB)

⁶ **who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,**

⁷ **but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.**

⁸ **Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

⁹ **For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,**

¹⁰ **so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

¹¹ **and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

First of all, number one, the Lord Jesus Christ abandoned a sovereign position. He abandoned a sovereign position. [Verse 6-7](#), let's begin: "⁶**who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,** ⁷**but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.**" Now, we'll stop right there.

We find in [verse 6](#) particularly, and then just at the

beginning of [verse 7](#), that the Lord when He came into the world abandoned a sovereign position. Now, first of all, the Holy Spirit establishes that sovereign position. Look at [verse 6](#). It begins with the relative pronoun “**who**,” and that refers back to Christ Jesus in [verse 5](#). “**Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God.**” Christ Jesus, then, is the theme of this passage, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what does it say about Him? The first phrase: “**being [existed] in the form of God.**” Now listen to me – this is without question the heart and soul of the Christian faith. The affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ is the sine qua non of all that we believe. That is why it is always under attack. Christ is in the form of God. It is the deity of Jesus Christ that is the substantive affirmation of the Christian faith.

Now, let’s see what this phrase means. The word “**being**” [existed] is very important. The word “**being**” denotes that which a person is in his very essence – that which a person is in his nature. In other words, that which is true of a person that cannot be altered, it cannot be changed. That which someone possesses inalienably and unchangeably that cannot be removed. It refers to the **innate, changeless, unalterable character and nature** of a person. For example, men may look different, but they’re all men – that’s their nature. They all have the basic same elements of humanness, the functioning of breathing, and the heart, organs, mind, will, thought, emotion. These are the elements of humanness.

You can change his clothes. You can do things to the physical form. But you never change the humanness. That is the being of man. And that is the meaning of this term. And it says of Christ that He is in the being of God. He is, then, unalterably and unchangeably, God in His essence, in His essential being. In fact, in [John 8:58](#), Jesus said, “**Before Abraham was, I am.**” And He used the “**I am**” because He lives as an eternally present God. He is eternally in the “**I am**” mode, in the present mode. He is always and will always be. He isn’t was and will be, He is simply “**I am.**” That is the basis of our faith. “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word**” – what – “**was God.**”

[Hebrews 1:1](#), “**He has spoken in these last days by His Son, who is the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person.**” [First Timothy 3:16](#), “**Great is the mystery of godliness**” – what is it – “**that God was manifest in the flesh.**” That is the substance of our faith: that Jesus Christ is God. [Colossians 1:15](#), “**He is the image of the invisible God.**” So the word being, then, has to do with His essential nature. Jesus Christ, then, has His being – now mark it again – in the form of God. Now what do we mean by “**form?**” The English can’t really help us with this Greek word. We have to go back and talk about the Greek term for a moment.

It is not “**form**” in the sense that we think of a material shape or a resemblance. It is completely different than that. The word in the Greek is the word **morphē**, and **morphē** has to do with a deep, inner, essential, abiding nature of something. It is not the external. That is the word **schēma**. **Schēma** means the outward, the passing, the changing, the fleeting, the external. And by the way, look at [verse 8](#); **schēma** is used in [verse 8](#). “**He was found in fashion as a man.**” We’ll talk about that in a moment. But “**fashion**” is the external, the changing. “**Form**” is **morphē**, the unchanging, the internal.

For example, if you traced the use of the term **morphē** in its various forms, you will find that that is exactly where the emphasis lies. There are places where they seem to be used in an overlapping sense, but the specific uses of **morphē** in very important texts of the New Testament lead us to conclude that it means the inner nature. For example, in [Romans 8:29](#), “**Whom He foreknew, them He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son.**” And it’s **morphē**. It is a new nature, an inner change. The inside of man is conformed to the image of His Son. It’s talking about our nature. [Second Corinthians 3:18](#), it says, “**As we look on the glory of the Lord we are transformed into His image.**”

Again, it’s **morphē**. We are changed on the inside, an abiding change that affects our inner nature. [Galatians 4:19](#), Paul says, “**My little children, I have birth pains until Christ be morphē in you,**” until, literally, He be formed in you. He isn’t talking about trap-pings. He’s not talking about externals, but that the image of Christ would be manifest in the inner nature of man. In [Philippians 3:10](#), he uses it again; he says,

“That I may gain Christ and become conformed unto His death.” So he’s talking about a deep inner representation of the image of God.

On the other hand, the word **schēma**, from which we get scheme, is something to do with a passing, fleeting external. For example, **First Corinthians 7:31** uses **schēma** this way: **“The fashion of the world passes away.”** **Second Corinthians 11:14:** **“Satan fashions himself as an angel of light.”** He isn’t really, but he puts on that facade. **First Peter 1:14** says, **“As a Christian, do not fashion yourselves according to your former lust.”** In other words, you have a new nature, you are a new creation, don’t put on the garments of the old life. You find both of these words brought together in **Romans 12:2:** **“Stop being fashioned according to this world, but be transformed in your inner man through the renewing of your mind.”**

So one is deeply related to the internal, and one is to the external. And the one of the internal is used here. It is being in the **morphē** of God. That is, being substantively and essentially, in His deepest inner man and nature, in the form of God. He is God. Don’t let anyone deny that. That is the basic affirmation of the Christian faith. Consequently, look at the end of **verse 6:** **“He did not think it was something to be grasped to be equal with God.”** Now what does that mean? Listen to this. Satan was a created angel. Satan was created by God, he was inferior to God, he was less than God. But in **Isaiah 14**, he said, **“I will, I will, I will, I will, I will,”** five times, and the substance of what he was saying was **“I will be like”** – whom – **“God.”**

Satan thought it something to be grasped at to be equal with God. He thought it something to seize, something to grasp at. Jesus didn’t. Why? He was already equal to God. There was nothing for Him to seek. There was nothing for Him to grasp. He is in contradistinction to Satan. Second way to approach it, the verb that is used there means to clutch, or to snatch, or to grasp tightly. And it can also be interpreted this way: **“He thought it not something to cling to”** – not so much that He didn’t have it and He snatched it, but that He had it and He might lose it, so He clutched it. But Jesus didn’t hang onto this thing fearing He would lose it. Why? Because He

was essentially God, and could never cease being God.

So it wasn’t something He had to snatch to get, and it wasn’t something He had to hang onto to keep, you see? It is a classic statement affirming that Jesus is God in His inner nature; so much so that He didn’t seek it, and so much so that He never feared He’d lose it. **He’s God.** That is the great heart and soul of the Lord Jesus Christ. But then this, **verse 7:** **“But He”** – the Authorized said – **“made Himself of no reputation.”** The Greek says this: **“He emptied Himself,” kenoō**, from which we get the theological term **“the kenosis,”** the self-emptying. He emptied Himself. The verb means to pour out everything, until it’s all gone. He poured out Himself. He emptied Himself. He divested Himself. He rendered up.

Now, what is this saying? Well, what I pointed out in the very first statement I made, as you begin to move through the steps of the incarnation, first of all, the Lord Jesus Christ abandoned a sovereign position. The sovereign position is affirmed in **verse 6**, and the abandoning of it is in **verse 7**. Now, notice that I did not say He abandoned His deity. He did not give up His deity. He did not give up His divine attributes. He abandoned the position. He could never give those things up; they were His essential being, and if He ceased being God, He would be no one. And God could not cease anyway, for He’s eternal. Now, what, then, did He give up? What did He pour out? What did He empty out?

Some people have tried to say He emptied out His deity. That’s ludicrous, because then He would cease to exist. That’s who He was; He could never lose that. Some writers put it, I think, this way: He stripped Himself of His privilege. He gave up the insignias of His majesty, and so forth. But let me put it to you very simply. I can tell you in the New Testament what He gave up, because the New Testament tells us exactly what He gave up.

First of all, He gave up His glory. He gave up the manifestation of His glory. He gave up the radiance of His eternal effulgence and brightness, the full manifestation of all of His attributes in glory. That’s why in **John 17:5** He says, **“And now, Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.”** Give Me back the glory which I once had, which means at that point He didn’t have it. He veiled His glory in human flesh. He

set aside the full expression of His glory.

Secondly, He gave up His honor. He gave up His honor. [Isaiah 53](#) says He was despised, He was rejected. The New Testament tells us He was hated, He was mocked, He was spit on. His beard was plucked. He was defamed. He was dishonored. He was discredited. He was accused. He was murdered. He gave up His honor, clearly. And the prophet Isaiah said in His despising and rejecting, there was no beauty in Him that men should desire Him.

Thirdly, He gave up His riches. [Second Corinthians 8:9](#) says, “**He who was rich for our sakes became**” – what – “**poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich.**”

Fourthly, He gave up His favorable relation to the Father. And He did that only in a moment of time, when He died on the cross and said, “**My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?**” But He lived with the anxiety of coming to that point through all His life.

He also gave up His independent exercise of authority. He said, “**I will do only that which the Father shows Me. My meat is to do the Father’s will. What the Father says I will do. What I see the Father I will do.**” In other words, He gave up His independent exercise of divine authority. He gave up His very special relationship to God. He gave up His riches. He gave up His honor. He gave up His glory. He emptied all of those things out, and yet He continued to be God. It wasn’t that He lost any of His divine attributes, it is that He chose not to use them; that He gave up the prerogative, or the privilege, of using them. Was He still God? Yes, that’s who He was.

It’s a deep mystery, people, by the way, and I can’t fathom it all. **John Milton** wrote, “That glorious form, that light insufferable, He laid aside, and here with us to be, forsook the courts of everlasting day, and chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.” He was God, but He gave up all His privileges. Boy, does that say volumes about His character? Does that say volumes about His love? A reporter was interviewing a successful job placement counselor who had put people in positions and they

had succeeded so well. He had such a high rate of success that the reporter said, “What’s your secret? How do you evaluate people? How can you really find out what a person is like?”

He said this: “If you want to know what a person is like, don’t give him responsibilities. Give him privileges. You give him responsibilities and most everyone will fulfill responsibilities if you intimidate them enough or pay them enough. But if you want to find out the real character of a person, give him a privilege. A person with real character, and real selflessness, and real leadership will use his privileges to help others and to build the organization. A lesser man will use his privileges only to promote himself.” Jesus had all the privileges of glory, and He had no obligation to us. He was equal with God. And yet it says so much about His character that He chose to use His privileges to build the Father’s Kingdom and to reach lost sinners. So like a king who takes off his robes of majesty and puts on the garment of a beggar, the Son of God abandoned a sovereign position.

Second point: He accepted a servant’s place. He accepted a servant’s place. Back to [verse 7](#): “**He took upon Him the form of a servant.**” When He became a man, He didn’t become a king as a man, or a great ruler, or great leader, or great master, He became a servant. The moment that He divested Himself of His robes of majesty, He donned the servant’s apron. This is exactly as the Old Testament prophet had said, [Isaiah 52:13](#), said He would be a servant. [Hebrews 10](#), “**I’m come to do Thy will, O Father.**” And notice again in [verse 7](#) that He wasn’t just acting like a servant. He wasn’t just pretending to be a servant. He wasn’t just playing the part of a servant. He really became a servant.

Verse 7, “And being” – look at this – **in the form**” or “**having taken upon Him the form**” – and there’s the word **morphē** – “**He took on Him the inner essential nature of a servant.**” He became a real servant, a true servant, a genuine servant. [Luke 22:27](#): “**I am in the midst of you as one who serves,**” He said. [Mark 10:45](#): “**The Son of Man is come not to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom.**” [John 13](#), the disciples had dirty feet, and He put on a towel and He washed their feet. And then He said the servant is not greater than His lord. We see Him in service all the time. And the ultimate act of service is when He died

on a cross to save sinners. He served His Father. His Father invited Him to come into the world as a servant to work out the plan of redemption, and He willingly became that servant. So truly, He abandoned the sovereign position and accepted a servant's place.

Thirdly, He approached a sinful people. He approached a sinful people. In His perfection, He was willing to be a servant to the Father. In His perfect harmony with the Father, He was willing to be a servant. That service meant that He had to approach a sinful people. He had to enter this sin-cursed planet. He had to render His service here on this earth. He couldn't do it from outer space. He couldn't do it from the edge of heaven. He had to come into this world, and He had to touch sinful man at his own level, so that abandoning a sovereign position and adopting or accepting a servant's place meant approaching a sinful people. Look again at [verse 7](#). **"He was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man."** That was the only way it could be done. He had to become a man.

By the way, it says in the Authorized, **"was made in the likeness of men."** The word **"was made"** is probably not the best translation. It is a participle of the verb **ginomai, genomenos**, which means **"becoming."** He was becoming in the likeness of men. And the idea there is not that He was created then, but that He always was God, but He became a man. He preexisted as eternally as God is eternal. He wasn't made then. He was then becoming a man. He had always been in existence. So the proper use of that verb indicates a change, becoming something, and it is saying that Jesus, who always was in the form of God, was becoming in the likeness of men. And it was a process; He was born, and He grew in wisdom and stature. He was becoming in the likeness of men.

By the way, the word **"likeness"** is so important. The first part of the word is the word **homo**, which means **"the same,"** homogeneous, something that is the same. And what its saying is He was becoming the same as men. He was in every sense in the sameness as men. He was a genuine man. He had the essential attributes of humanness. He wasn't just God in a shell; He was fully

man, in all parts and dimensions, a genuine man with real humanity. He had everything that all men have except for one thing – what was it? Sin. But that doesn't mean He wasn't a man. Adam was a man before he was a sinner. And you and I will be glorified men throughout all eternity when our sin is put behind us. And there are times in our lives when we're not sinning.

So to be a man does not necessarily mean you must sin. And Christ did not. The Bible is clear: He was without sin, but He was no less a man. In fact, if I may be so bold to suggest, He was all that a man could be that we could never know a man to be because of His sinlessness. So He was a genuine man. He was fully man in the essence of His humanity, at the deepest point. He was man. But go to [verse 8](#). He also was found in the fashion of a man. Not only was He a genuine man, and deeply and truly in His nature all that a man is, but He also took on the outward form of a man. And here's the word **schēma**, the fashion of man. He didn't come into the first century with a twentieth century outfit talking a twentieth century language. He didn't drop like some visitor from outer space.

He was born of a Jewish mother. He lived in a little village of Nazareth. He ate the way they ate. He talked the language they talked. He transported Himself the way they did. He wore the clothes they wore, took care of Himself the way they took care of themselves. He ate what they ate. He drank what they drank. In other words, He took on the scheme of their life, the customs of their culture. So by personal experience, He adapted to the outer manifestation of the time in which He lived. He was man at the deepest part of His nature. And He adapted to man in that climate, and that culture, and that time, and experienced all of their experiences, fully God, fully man, the mystery of the incarnation, and sinless all the while.

Don't think of Jesus as less than fully human. He was fully human. Did people come into this world through the natural process of birth, through the womb of a mother? So did He. Had others been wrapped in swaddling clothes? So was He. Had others grown up? So did He. Did others have brothers and sisters? He did. Did others learn a trade and work? So did He. Were other men at times hungry, and thirsty, and weary, and asleep? So was He. Were others grieved and angry? So was He. Did others weep? So

did He. Did others rejoice? So did He. Were others destined to die? So did He. Did others suffer pain? So did He. Were others loved and hated? So was He. He was a man, in the form and the fashion.

I think it's the Christmas carol "**Away in a Manger**" that says, "**The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.**" You mean to tell me, that because He was God, He didn't cry? All babies cry. It isn't necessarily a sign of sin. He cried when He was a man, why can't He cry when He's a baby? "**Hast thou been hungry, child of mine? I, too, have needed bread. For forty days I tasted not, till by the angels fed. Hast thou been thirsty? On the cross I suffered thirst for thee. I've promised to supply thy need, my child, come to Me. When thou art sad and tears fall fast, My heart goes out to thee, for I wept o'er Jerusalem, the place so dear to Me. And when I came to Lazarus' tomb, I wept. My heart was sore. I'll comfort thee when thou dost weep, till sorrows are all o'er.**" Sure He wept. He was human, in all the fullness of humanness.

So He abandoned the sovereign position. He took a servant's place. He approached a sinful people. He became one of us. Paul Harvey tells a very beautiful story that illustrates this truth. It was Christmas Eve in the Midwest. There was a man, who had been in a family where his wife and his children were Christians, but he was not, and he rejected it. He sat home that Christmas Eve in front of the fire. It was cold out and the snow was blowing. His wife and the little children had gone to the chapel in the nearby village for a Christmas Eve service to honor the Christ they loved. He sat by the fire reading the paper. All of a sudden, he heard a loud and repeated thumping.

He thought someone was banging on the door. He went to the door and opened it, but found no one was there. By the time he got settled back into his chair, he heard it again, and again. And he was bewildered as to what was causing it, until he realized that something seemed to be smashing against the window. And so he went to the drapes and he pulled the drapes aside, and to his amazement, a flock of birds was flying into the window. A snowstorm, you see, had blown in, and the

birds had been caught away from their shelter, and they couldn't find their way back. They couldn't fight the wind. They saw the lighted window, and the warmth of the light had attracted them, and they were literally flying into the glass, trying to get to the light to get warm. They would freeze to death, you see, if they didn't find some shelter.

Well, the man who had refused to go with his family to the Christmas Eve service because he had no interest in the Christ of Christmas was all of a sudden very compassionate for these poor birds. And so he wondered how he could help them, and so he opened the door, and went out in the cold, and tried to chase them away, so that they wouldn't kill themselves against the window. And then he ran to the barn, and he threw the doors open, and he whistled, and he shooed them, and did everything he could to get them to fly to the barn – they wouldn't do it. He even went so far as to take some corn and some bread, and make a big trail from the window to the barn, and they wouldn't follow it.

In frustration, he said to himself, "If I could just communicate with them. If I could just tell them that I don't want to hurt them, that there's warmth, and there's shelter, and that they need to stop beating themselves to death against the glass. But I'm a man and they're birds, and we don't speak the same language. Oh, if I could just become a bird, I think I could tell them." And then it hit him. And in that moment, said Paul Harvey, the whole meaning of Christmas dawned on that man. Mankind had been beating itself to death against the barrier that kept him from the warmth of God's love, until somebody became a man and told us the way. That's the Christmas story. He who was fully God did not cling to His privileges, but laid them aside, became a servant, and approached a sinful people.

Fourthly, having abandoned the sovereign position, having accepted a servant's place, having approached a sinful people, He then adopted a selfless posture – **He adopted a selfless posture. Verse 8: "He humbled Himself."** Oh, people, what a statement – what a statement. Do you ever think about the humility of Christ? I mean I see Him, and there He is as a little boy or a young man, and He's helping Joseph make a yoke in the carpenter shop, to put on some oxen that He had created. I mean He's washing the feet of twelve disciples, and He it was who designed their brains. He's hungry, and it was He who created the universe. The place of

humility; He adopted a selfless posture – utterly selfless.

For us He did this, people. Humility is the theme of Christmas – humility. A Filthy stable! A long time ago I was in the bottom of a barn, ankle deep in the mire and the filth, where never the light of day or the sun shone, foul stench that nauseated you, almost gagged you – humiliation. **St. Augustine** wrote so beautifully of His humility, so beautifully. “The word of the Father,” he said, “by whom all time was created, was made flesh and born in time for us. He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one of those days for His human birth. In the bosom of His Father, He existed before all the cycles of the ages. Born of an earthly mother, He entered on the course of the years on that very day.”

The maker of man became man, that He, ruler of the stars, might be nourished at the breast, that He, the bread, might be hungry, that He, the fountain, might thirst, that He, the light, might sleep, that He, the way, might be wearied in the journey, that He, the truth, might be accused by false witnesses, that He, the judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge, that He, justice itself, might be condemned by the unjust, that He, discipline personified, might be scourged with a whip, that He, the foundation, might be suspended on a cross, that He, courage incarnate, might be weak, and He, security itself, might be wounded, and He, life itself, might die.”

Humility! And how humble? Look back at [verse 8](#). **“He humbled Himself.”** How far did it go? Well, certainly He became mortal, but it went beyond that. He also became obedient unto death. You see, it was an act of obedience. He learned obedience, [Hebrews 5:8](#) and [9](#), by death. The greatest act of obedience to the Father was in dying; that was God’s will. And even in the garden when He said, **“O Father, let this cup pass from Me,”** the humanness was crying out against dying, the deity was crying out against sin-bearing and yet He said, **“Not My will, but Thine be done.”** He was obedient to death. He didn’t just become mortal, He died. That’s the worst that man could ever, ever endure – all the way to the grave. And He didn’t just die, either. Look at the

end of [verse 8](#), **“Even the death of the cross.”**

It’s one thing to die; it’s infinitely beyond that to die the death of the cross. The ancient writers used to say that to die on a cross is to die a thousand times before you take your last breath. The pain is excruciating, unimaginable. The suffocation of the organs when the body is suspended by four great wounds is more than you can believe. The pain, the fiery pain, pulsing through the body is more than we can conceive. It was a painful death, and it was a shameful death. It was reserved for the vilest and most wicked of criminals. And you hung suspended in space, naked before the gaping, gazing, mocking throng. It was a cursed death. God Himself had said, “He that hangs on a tree is cursed.” It was a lonely death. There was no companionship; even God was gone.

And I wonder so often as I hear the words **“Still, O soul, the sign of wonder of all the ages see; Christ thy God, the Lord of glory is on the cross for thee.”** Incomprehensible humility! But what’s so marvelous is that even in His dying, even in His dying, even in such abject depth of human suffering, He still wielded the power of God to redeem the human race. In His dying He could do that. There was a battle fought long ago. The story came back to the king of one soldier who had a sword, who had single-handedly destroyed the enemy. And the king said to one of his soldiers, “Bring me that sword. I want to see such a sword that can do such damage.”

The soldier got the sword and brought it in. Gave it to his majesty and he looked it over and he said, “Take it back. This is but an ordinary sword.” The soldier said, “Your majesty, you should see the arm that wields it.” You look at Jesus Christ and you see His humanness. You say, “But how could a man redeem the human race?” “This is but an ordinary sword.” “Ah – but what you should see is the arm of deity that wielded that humanness; that even in death, he redeemed the human race; great, great truth. So what do we see then?”

What is the Christmas story? The Lord Jesus Christ abandoned a sovereign position, accepted a servant’s place, approached a sinful people, adopted a selfless posture. That’s the Christmas story. But there’s one more thought.

Fifthly, He ascended a supreme prince – He as-

cended a supreme prince. What was God's reaction to this? And what should be ours? God's reaction, first, in **verse 9**: **"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name" – or a title, or a position, or a rank – "that is above every other name" – or title, position, or rank.**" God lifted Him up; and, people, listen to me: that is a great classical spiritual truth. Jesus said it Himself, in **Luke 14:11**, **"He that humbleth himself shall be"** – what – **"exalted."** And that is the spiritual truth that we must learn. When we humble ourselves, God will lift us up and exalt us. And that's exactly what happened. He humbled Himself and He was exalted. He then becomes the supreme illustration of this Kingdom principle: you sink to the depths of selfless, sacrificial humiliation, and God will lift you to the heights of glory.

We see that in the Beatitudes. We see that all throughout the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Humility, then exaltation. Humility, then exaltation. Jesus in His baptism is humbled. He's baptized by John. And in humility, He identifies with the sins of His nation. But in exaltation, the voice of God bursts out of heaven, **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** We see Him in the temptation. He's humbled, 40 days without eating. He's being buffeted by Satan. He's fasting in repentance, again identifying the sins of the nation. In humility, He trusts the Father to take care of Him, and never uses His power to meet His own needs. And then in glorious exaltation, when the time is done, the Father dispatches the angels, who come and feed Him.

In humility, He publicly proclaimed to His disciples that He was going to die. And a moment later He's on a mountain with them, and He pulls His flesh back and they see His glory. We see Him on the cross in humility, and then He bursts from the grave in exaltation. That's the pattern. Humility, then glorification. God exalted Him. That was God's reaction. God exalted Him, and God gave Him a name above every name. Why? **Verse 10**: in order **"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow"** – every knee – now we come to us, and to all the other creatures. Every knee to bow. Every knee in heaven – who would that be? That would be the holy angels, and the redeemed saints who have already gone to heav-

en. Everyone in earth – that would be all the living. And under the earth – the demons, and Satan, and all that host.

All the creatures in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, all of them are to bow to that exalted name. **"He is,"** says **Ephesians 1**, **"far above all principalities and powers, far above all other names"** – given a supreme place, the prince of God. Notice that He's given a name above every name. You say, "What is that name?" Very clear, in **verse 10**: the name of Jesus, all that is embodied in that name, all that is embodied in who He is, He is unequalled, the Savior and the Lord of the world and the universe. And at that name every knee should bow. And you know something? Every knee will bow. That's right. Every knee will bow. If not in adoration, in judgment, right? If not in worship, in condemnation. Every knee will bow – even Satan who will be cast into the pit forever. He'll bow the knee to the authority of Christ.

But look at **verse 11**, and bring it to personal response. **Verse 10** encompasses the broad picture: **"every knee should bow."** **Verse 11** comes down to the individual: **"every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** Every living thing, every living creature in this world will confess Jesus Christ as Lord. The demons and the damned, the redeemed, the holy angels, all will bow, all will confess, sooner or later. The issue is when. If you wait until the judgment, it's too late. But if now you confess Jesus as Lord, you enter into His Kingdom, His salvation. **Romans 10:9** and **10** says, **"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, believe in thine heart God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be"** – what – **"saved."** This is the message of the gospel.

Jesus Christ is Lord. That's what we're saying. He is God. He is in the form of God. He is God of very God, with all the attributes of God, come into the world with all the fullness of humanness. He became the servant. He humbled Himself. He died, even dying on a cross; and in the midst of that death, purchasing our salvation. God approved, and God lifted Him back up and exalted Him, and then God calls to the entire created universe, and says, **"Bow the knee and confess His Lordship."** And if you won't now, you will someday – but then it will be in judgment and condemnation. Now or later – the choice is yours. You can bow the knee

now in adoration and love. You can confess Him as Lord now, and enter into the joy of salvation forever.

Or you can resist and say “no,” and someday you’ll bow the knee because you’ll be forced and you have no choice, and you’ll be condemned. Our prayer is that you’ll confess Jesus as Lord. What greater Christmas gift than that? And to receive eternal life. Why be a fool? What kind of fool would reject that? Incomprehensible! But is there a message for Christians here? Most of us are Christians. Is there a message for us? For sure. You want to know something? This passage was written for Christians. That’s right. The passage was not written for unbelievers. It was written for Christians. How do you know that? Because this whole passage is just an illustration of another principle. Go back to [verse 5](#). The whole passage simply illustrates another principle.

And what is the principle? [Verse 3](#): **“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Don’t look on your own things, but on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being”** – and then you go into the passage. What is Paul saying? Be humble. Be selfless. Be lowly. And if you need an illustration, then let this mind be in you which was in Christ, who was something, and became nothing that God might make Him something again. He is a living illustration to the believer. If you will humble yourself, God will exalt you.

You know, people often ask around Christmas time, I guess, “What is the Lord trying to tell me? What is the point of Christmas?” I think the point of Christmas is right here. Christmas, there’s no better time in the year than to teach us the illustration of the lesson of humility. The character of Christ, He was unselfish. He was humble. He was condescending. And Paul is challenging the church to that perspective; an attitude of a willingness to suffer, to be humiliated, to be selfless, and to be sacrificing, so that God can lift us up. And the thing we need to learn, people, is not to always be asserting ourselves, defending ourselves, pushing ourselves up, but to be humble and selfless. That is the message of Christmas to us.

Listen to the words of **Paul Rees**: “For us Christians,” says Paul, “there is no place where the principle of effacing self in behalf of others appears as impressively as it does in Jesus Christ. He is God, giving Himself away yet remaining God. He is God, putting off a sovereign’s vesture for a beggar’s rags. He is God, rising from His bench where He sits as judge and going to the gallows for the criminal. He is God, impoverishing Himself, begging Himself, exposing Himself to evil, spite, and spittle, never sparing Himself, until He has made the rude cross on Jerusalem’s hill the sign and the sum of His utter self-giving.” Great statement!

And what is he saying to us? **“Let this mind be in you.”** That is the message. Be humble this Christmas. Be selfless. Reach out to somebody else in need. Jesus did. **Benjamin Warfield**, the great theologian, said this: “We see Him among the thousands of Galilee, anointed of God with the Holy Spirit and power, going about doing good, with no pride of birth, though He was a King; with no pride of intellect, though omniscience dwelt within Him; with no pride of power, though all power in heaven and earth was in His hand; no pride of station, though the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily; no pride of superior goodness, but in lowliness of mind, esteeming everyone better than Himself, He healed the sick.”

“He cast out the devils. He fed the hungry. And everywhere He broke to men the bread of life, though He Himself went without. We see Him everywhere offering to men His life for the salvation of their souls. And when at last the forces of evil gathered thick around Him, walking alike, without display and without dismay, the path of suffering appointed for Him, and giving His life at Calvary, that through His death the world might live.”

Selfless – selfless! That’s the message for us, the message of humility. Let’s pray. Teach us, Father, to be selfless. Wherever men suffer, may we be there to comfort. Wherever men struggle, may we be there to help. Wherever men fall, may we be there to lift them up. Wherever men succeed, may we be there to rejoice. Teach us that we cannot be self-consciously self-forgetful. We cannot be selfishly oriented. Teach us to walk humbly as Christ walked; to walk the path of self-sacrifice is to walk the path of glory. May we learn that; and oh, Father, too, may those who don’t know the Lord see in His humiliation the

abounding love and be drawn to Him. We praise You, Lord, for the gift of Your Son.

We echo the words of the poet who said, “Lo, in resurrection glory, Thou art throned in heaven above, where Thou dwellest in the fullness of the Father’s changeless love. Love bestowed on Thee unmeasured, ere the heavens were begun. Love of God the everlasting to His everlasting Son. Now to ages of the ages, crowned with honor Thou shalt be. All the heavenly hosts’ unceasing glory might ascribe to Thee. Fadeless this, Thy royal splendor, purchased by Thy precious blood, Thine the praise of every creature, holy Son and Christ of God.” Our praise we offer to You. Amen.

CORAM DEO **(Before the face of God)**

Matthew Henry writes, “Truth is a debt we owe to one another; and, if we love one another, we shall not deceive one another.” Christians must be known for their love of the truth and the trustworthiness of their speech. When we lie and gossip, we bear false witness to the God of truth who has transformed our hearts to love and serve Him. May we seek to tell the truth to friends, family, fellow church members, and coworkers. May we also repent when we fail to do so.

Every Sermon Needs a Strategy: What's Yours?

Peter Mead

Part of the preaching preparation process is the sermon strategy phase. After studying the passage, determining its main idea, prayerfully deciding on your goal for the sermon and the wording of the sermon’s main idea, then it is time to plot your strategy. Here are the big questions to be asking:

1. When do I reveal the main idea?

Do I reveal it early and repeat it often? Do I build

up to it and reveal it later? How does the text set up the communication of the main idea? How does my audience influence when the main idea should be given?

2. When can I demonstrate the relevance of this message?

How early can I form a connection between preacher/message/Bible and listeners? As well as the conclusion, can I show relevance in the introduction? How about in the wording of the main points or movements? What about in the transitions? Can I drop hints into the explanation of the text itself?

3. How can I do what the text does, as well as saying what the text says?

Since this passage is unique, how will it influence this sermon so that it too is genuinely unique? Since God inspired the author and God is a great communicator, how does genre choice influence the way this sermon is preached? Where can I replicate the force of the text—perhaps the tension of a narrative, the imagery of a poem, the forcefulness of a discourse or the provocation of a parable?

4. How can I reinforce the flow of the sermon with delivery details?

Can I reflect the energy or warmth of content in the manner of delivery? Perhaps I should rest on the pulpit for some, or be able to put my Bible down for a part, or have the freedom to step away from the furniture, or would a prop help, or ...? Am I spotting danger areas where I may feel rushed, or may become monotonous, or may lose momentum?

5. What is God’s heart in all of this?

Have I allowed my own strategic planning to become a private thought process instead of a prayerful dependence on God? Can I talk all this through prayerfully instead of privately so that I lean on God? Can I talk all this through with a team from my church so that I can benefit from their perspective before I preach it and enable them to pray more intelligently, too?





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Hebrews 9 – Overview

Part 4

We are continuing to look at the “Key Ideas” of [Hebrews 9](#).

Key Idea 4: Forgiveness demands blood (v18-22). [Hebrews 9:22](#) says,

²²And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

The idea within this verse primarily comes from [Leviticus 17:11](#) which says,

¹¹For 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.

If you remember from one of the previous studies, we saw that the word “**blood**” is the key word used in [Hebrews 9](#). The word “**blood**” is used seventeen times in all of Hebrews, and of those seventeen

times, ten of them are used in [Hebrews 9](#). In very simple terms, the word “**blood**” represents the cost involved in salvation. There is nothing about salvation or forgiveness that is free. It is not something that God can just “give” to someone because He “feels” like it. If there is any single idea that should be gleaned from this, it is that forgiveness has always had a very high cost associated with it. The shedding of innocent blood was always an integral part of God’s saving and atoning work. The issue for the American church is that we have so much materially that in that process it often removes our appreciation for what we actually have. Having things in abundance often creates a high degree of ungratefulness. It is almost as if the more that someone has the less grateful they become. The less that someone appreciates the personal cost involved in someone else’s sacrifice, the less they will appreciate the actual sacrifice. I had a great friend who lost his arm, his leg, and got hepatitis C from a blood transfusion in the Vietnam War. Eventually he died from the hepatitis C, but every time that I saw him, it made me realize the incredible cost that he paid for me to have my personal freedom.

The word “**remission**” in v22 is a very important New Testament word. It means forgiveness, pardon, and deliverance for wrongs that have been committed against someone. It is a word that embraces the principle of being released from punishment for a wrongdoing. In fact, of the nine times that the word is used, it is followed by the phrase “**of sins**” on seven of the nine times – i.e., the “**remission of sins**”. If God did not provide remission, if there was no forgiveness, then we would have absolutely no hope whatsoever. All of our hope is based on the simple fact that God has provided a means of forgiveness that effectively deals with our sin. A sacrifice has been made that makes our salvation possible, and if we lose sight of the immeasurable magnitude of that sacrifice, then in essence we will just take this amazing salvation for granted and our Christian life will lack any meaningful substance whatsoever. However, what I want us to appreciate is that the primary emphasis of [Hebrews 9:22](#) is not “**remission**” or “**forgiveness**” – not at all. Those are great and fully essential within the work of salvation, but they are not the emphasis. The primary emphasis is on the “**blood**” and specifically “**the shedding of blood**”, or what we would call the “**cost**” of salvation. “**Remission**” and “**forgiveness**” are simply the consequence and result of Christ’s “**shedding of blood**”.

Maybe the most important word to help us understand this primary emphasis is the word **“without”**. It is the Greek word *“choris”* and it means “separately, apart from, or by itself”. Apart from this divine blood-shedding there is no forgiveness. The Moffat Translation puts it this way – **“No blood shed, no remission of sins”**. The emphasis of Hebrews is always on the Person making the sacrifice and on the magnitude of His sacrifice. As much as I have studied on the Incarnation and on the Atonement, I simply have not been able to come to grips with the actual cost. I somewhat understand what took place in the Incarnation and I know what took place on the cross, but it is not something that can actually be quantified. Whatever our idea of its magnitude, it is much, much greater. Unfortunately, our tendency is to often approach Scripture with the idea of what is the benefit or advantage in it for me, or what can the Christian life do for me. However, this unhealthy preoccupation with what Christianity can do for me is a very harmful aberration of Scripture and the doctrine of Christ.

The problem is that the more we subtly diminish and relegate the work of Christ to a less important position, the more we demean salvation and open ourselves up to all kinds of unusual teaching that can have far-reaching eternal results. Eventually what we want from salvation becomes the object and focus of our attention, and in that attitude and approach the person and work of Christ is severely minimized. Nothing could be more dangerous and detrimental to the true meaning of Christianity than to shrewdly diminish His Person and work. The most cultic religious organizations in the world are those that have blatantly belittled and devalued the person of Christ. From the Jehovah Witnesses to the Mormons to New Agers to Branch Davidians to Scientology to Heaven’s Gate to the Unification Church (Mooneyism) to the People’s Temple (Jim Jones) to The Children of God (David Berg) to the Twelve Tribes to the United Pentecostal Church (denies the Trinity and teaches that you must be baptized in the name of Christ only) - the list is endless. They are the extreme examples, but by becoming a man-centered Christianity rather than a God-centered Christianity, many leaders within the mainstream Christian church have nurtured, cultivated, and advanced a subtle attack on the person and work of Christ. They have de-emphasized Christ and His

work and emphasized man and his needs, and the result is that they have given birth to making God in their own image. Then you have the more subtle movements like the Latter Rain Movement and the International House of Prayer where the Word of God is being replaced with words from apostles and prophets. *“Give me a God that I like”* – that is the modern day mantra within many parts of the Christian church today. If we follow the over-riding result of that approach to the Christian life, we very easily may become like [Romans 1:25](#) which states,

²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

I know that those verses are specifically talking about lost people, but the truth is that an improper approach to the Word of God will create the same results. It is inevitable.

On the positive side, what we know from these verses and from [Hebrews 9](#) is that there is no cost to us personally. Relative to salvation, that should be a great comfort to every believer – that nothing regarding salvation depends on me. There is nothing that we had to pay, no sacrifice that we had to make, and no particular work that we had to perform in order to be saved. The Holy Spirit drew us to Christ, regenerated us, and then gave us the grace and the faith to believe. Nothing could be any more powerful than this remarkable work of the Holy Spirit. To the contrary, this thing we call salvation and the debt associated with it is something that has been completely paid for by someone else – and it is a cost and sacrifice that simply cannot be measured. That is the point, that is the emphasis, and that is what is important to both see and appreciate in [Hebrews 9:22](#) – **“without shedding of blood”**. [Hebrews 9](#) is all about the atoning work of Christ and not man, and the more that we see that and allow His Person and His work to impact our lives, the greater will be our personal maturing in the things of Christ.

Key Idea 5: Judgment demands a substitute. [Hebrews 9:27-28](#) states,

²⁷And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,²⁸so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who ea-

gerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

What is clearly understood from these verses is that there is a time of “**judgment**” which awaits every individual – “**it is appointed for men to die once**”. Unless the rapture occurs, everyone dies. There is no escape. The world’s mortality rate is 100% - and there are no exceptions. For the Christian, they will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ and the issue is rewards, not salvation. For the unbeliever, they will appear at the Great White Throne Judgment and the issue is their name not being written in the Lamb’s Book of Life and the result is their being cast into the Lake of Fire. The severity and bleakness of that event is more than overwhelming. One of those two events is inevitable for everyone who has ever lived. No one gets a vote as to whether or not they will or will not attend. To the contrary, God does not give people a choice after they die. The choice is one that has to be made on this side of eternity. It is a work of God that is fixed and no one escapes. Everyone lives forever. It is just a matter of where. [Revelation 20:11-15](#) has to be several of the most distressing verses that an unbeliever can hear or read.

¹¹Then 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. ¹²And 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. ¹³The 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. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

So, how does this relate to [Hebrews 9:28](#) which states that “**Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many**”? Well, it is the truth that judgment is inevitable, but that we do not have to face that horrific judgment because of the substitutionary work of Christ on our behalf. The idea that the author

wants to stress here is that Christ is our substitute – He was “**offered to bear the sins of many**”. A substitute is someone who takes the place of another, and in this case the Substitute Christ Jesus does something vital for the unbeliever that they could never accomplish on their own. Salvation is not something that the unbeliever can accomplish no matter how hard they try. Unfortunately, there are many people who believe that their personal ideas about salvation will prevail – which they will not. To the contrary, their personal whims about eternal life will place them in a place of eternal judgment from which there is no escape. People simply do not like the idea that they have no personal merit relative to salvation and that their silly little notions and philosophies about eternal life have utterly no value whatsoever. No one influences God. The only thing that matters relative to salvation is what God says and what God has accomplished. The work of salvation has been fully completed by a holy substitute – Jesus Christ, and His saving work is the only way that anyone can escape eternal judgment and damnation. The message of salvation is really very simple and very clear. In order to be saved, the sinner must freely accept Christ’s substitutionary work on their behalf. There is no other way to be saved. [Acts 4:12](#) reflects on this substitutionary work this way,

¹²Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

The word “**must**” carries the strongest imperative of any verb in the New Testament. It is as binding of a statement as can be made anywhere in Scripture. If an unbeliever is not willing to accept the substitutionary work of Christ on their behalf, then they can never be saved. It is a very humbling experience for most people, and one with which they seem to constantly wrestle – will they come to Christ on His terms or are they intent on thinking that they can somehow achieve salvation on their terms. Is the sinner willing to humble himself before God and freely accept the work that Christ accomplished on their behalf? That is the simple issue. Thinking that they can stand before God on their own merit is simple spiritual suicide.

Key Idea 6: The earthly sanctuary vs. the heavenly sanctuary. It is not our intent to keep rehearsing things that we have already discussed to some degree, and we have done that relative to this Key Idea. At a very ele-

mentary level, it is important to appreciate that the earthly sanctuary is simply a picture of the heavenly sanctuary, and in the heavenly sanctuary Christ is performing a very special ministry on the believer's behalf. Without this high priestly ministry of Christ on the believer's behalf, they cannot lead a meaningful and purposeful Christian life. Whatever we may think the Christian life is and no matter how we think it actually functions, what we know is that it cannot be lived effectively apart from a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. At the throne of God and in what [Hebrews 9:12](#) calls "**the Most Holy Place**" is God the Father and Christ the Son. Christ is continually interceding on the believer's behalf. No one knows fully what that intercession involves or how it takes place, but what is known is that it is critical to the Christian life. [Hebrews 7:25](#) clearly states that "**He always lives to make intercession for them**". If you truly desire to have the courage, the strength, the endurance, and the will to live out the Christian life in a God-honoring way, then you must learn how to spiritually enter into the heavenly sanctuary. The veil in the earthly sanctuary has been "**torn in two**" signifying that the entrance into the heavenly sanctuary has been opened for every believer. In my feeble understanding, it comes through prayer, the study of the Scriptures, and a humble dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. So, if we by-pass any of those spiritual elements in our life, then the result will simply be a spiritual mediocrity and indifference that will characterize our walk with God. No one is exempt.

Any believer who attempts to live the Christian life in their own strength and without this meaningful relationship with Christ will only experience personal frustration and spiritual impotence. It is the inevitable result of a believer's casual spiritual neglect, and unfortunately many Christians appear more than satisfied with that regrettable scenario. I have mentioned this previously, but the success of the Christian life is built around those things that cannot be physically seen. The world that surrounds the believer is a supernatural world not embellished with all of our physical elements, so at times it seems difficult to keep "plowing" in a place that we cannot physically see or experience. We are so earthly minded that maintaining a heavenly mindset often seems very difficult to reach. There is nothing "mystical" about this subject because it is simply a

normal part of the Christian life. However, because we live in a physical world, we are consumed with that which is physical, but we must learn that "**the Most Holy Place**" is utterly central to every believer's walk with God. If for whatever reason we misjudge the importance of this aspect of the Christian life, then in essence we will miss the very thing that spiritually we need to most.

My encouragement to you is that you take the time to personally evaluate whether or not you are truly experiencing the supernatural presence of God in your life. We are not talking about having weird experiences, abnormal feelings and emotions, or about stepping outside the boundaries of Scripture. Rather, we are simply encouraging you to take an inventory as to whether or not you believe that you are personally experiencing a work of God in your inner being that is constantly helping you draw near to God in a meaningful and consistent way. This is something that happens through a normal learning process. It is a learning experience in which the believer discovers how to "**draw near to God**".

Key Idea 7: The old covenant vs. the new covenant. [Hebrews 9:15](#) speaks of the "**new covenant**" when it says,

¹⁵And 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.

[Hebrews 7-10](#) is the heart of the book of Hebrews, and of the sixteen times that the word "**covenant**" is used in Hebrews, fourteen of them occur in these four chapters. So, one of the key elements of this section is the idea of "**covenants**". God has always dealt with His people through "**covenants**", or what we call "**promises**". Even the articles within the tabernacle and the temple used the word "**covenant**". For instance, [Hebrews 9:4](#) speaking of that which was behind the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, says,

⁴which 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

So the ark itself was called “**the ark of the covenant**” and the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written were called “**the tablets of the covenant**”. In the very midst of the most sacred place on the earth, God wanted His people to appreciate that He had provided “**covenants**” upon which their corporate lives and their personal relationship to Him were to be developed. In the New Testament, which could also be called the New Covenant, Jesus established this “**new covenant**” at the Lord’s Supper that was to replace the old covenant, or what [Hebrews 9:15](#) called the “**first covenant**”. For instance, [Matthew 26:27-28](#), speaking of what transpired during the Lord’s Supper, states,

²⁷Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.” ²⁸For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

This was the first time that Jesus had mentioned this “**new covenant**”. [Mark 14](#) and [Luke 22](#) both speak of the same upper room event, but those three places are the only places in the gospels that the “**new covenant**” is actually mentioned. So, for the disciples, this was certainly something very new to them, and I am sure something that they did not fully understand at all. They were probably scratching their head in wondering what this “**new covenant**” and this partaking of His body and blood actually meant. The term is also mentioned once in [1 Corinthians 11:2](#), once in [2 Corinthians 3:6](#), and four times in [Hebrews 8:8, 8:13, 9:15, and 12:24](#). The point is that there is not much detail given relative to the meaning of “**new covenant**”. However, [Hebrews 10:16](#) gives some insight into what this covenant actually entails when it says,

¹⁶“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,” ¹⁷then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” ¹⁸Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

In the context of that verse which is an Old Testament quote, it is obvious that the initial application

was to the nation of Israel. However, the author of Hebrews is speaking directly to Hebrew Christians and therefore it had to have application to them. Now, without me pushing the practical application of this to our lives, suffice it to say that what has just been stated by the author has great weight and importance. The covenant that God has made for believers is that He has given us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our relationship to Him, and the Holy Spirit has placed God’s laws and God’s principles and God’s Word into our minds and our hearts. We know what is right. We know what is wrong. We know what is godly and what is ungodly. We know what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. We know these things. So in [Hebrews 10:29](#), he gives this incredibly strong warning to all of those who, for whatever reason, are not willing to take their Christian life seriously. Listen to this warning, and remember that it is a warning to Christians,

²⁹Of 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?

If we treat Christ lightly and indifferently, then in essence we are treating the “blood of the covenant” lightly. We are taking that which is utterly holy, treating it carelessly and indifferently, and in reality have insulted the Holy Spirit because we have profaned the most sacred covenant in eternity. From just this brief overview of [Hebrews 9](#), I hope that you can sense the gravity of its content and the incredible responsibility that it places before every Christian. It is without question one of the most important chapters in all of the Word of God and one that certainly demands our attention and our reverence.

Continued in next edition...

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