



GOD GAVE HIMSELF

Hebrews—Chapter 1

Study 2

Personal God

“God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The first verses of Hebrews are very significant. They direct us to the Creator God who is dying to talk to us—literally. God is all about relationships. He is a personal God who reveals His desire to connect with us in a personal way. In the Genesis story, God personally walked and talked with Adam and Eve everyday (see Genesis 3:8). After sin came into this world, God stood unchanged—available to walk and talk with Adam and Eve (see Malachi 3:6; James 1:17), but sin sought to separate us from God, to leave us hiding in fear at the sound of His voice (see Genesis 3:9). Recognizing that sin had distorted our perception of Him, God immediately promised to restore the relationship (see Genesis 3:15). First, He kept open the channels of communication as Hebrews says, in “various ways” at different times. Then He came to this earth in the person of the Son and literally died so that we could know that His love has not changed toward us. These first two verses set the stage for the rest of Hebrews. God has always and still does to this day long for a close and meaningful relationship with us. Sin has not changed God’s heart towards us. And so God will do all He can—remove every barrier and pursue all options to restore our relationship. God loves the human race!

A Better God

“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 on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3).

Paul leaps into the gospel by proclaiming a truth that he will continue to affirm—the solo, one-time act of God dying for our sins. One of the most difficult questions for any Christian apologist arguing in favor of a loving God is, “Why did God require death for our sin, like all those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament?” The answer in Hebrews is simple and clear—God did not require death or sacrifices, sin did. Animal sacrifices were never intended to somehow appease God.

Paul will later add that all those sacrifices were to direct our attention to the ultimate and infinite sacrifice of God Himself. God did not require animal sacrifices as some kind of payment for our sins. It was never God’s purpose to make some third party responsible to die for us, whether man or beast. With the creation of free will God foresaw the possibility of evil and knew of only one way to counteract it—self-sacrificing love. God’s plan from the beginning of creation was to give Himself as the ultimate gift of love. The sacrifice of animals served only as an illustration of what sin does—it kills. They pointed to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (see John 1:29). God hates sin because it brings death and death is an enemy of God—the last enemy that God will ultimately destroy (1 Corinthians 15:26).

The Sacrifice of Love

God’s abhorrence of animal sacrifices and death itself is reiterated by the prophet Isaiah: “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

NOTES

“God having provided something better for us.” —Hebrews 11:40

All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?" (Isaiah 1:11-12).

God asks us the very question we so often ask Him. Why all the sacrifices? What is the purpose? I don't delight in them. Why are they required? In the context of these questions He gives the answer. These sacrifices are the result of our own evil (see Isaiah 1:16). Blood is life, but when it's shed it brings death. God gives us life, the wages of sin brings death (see Romans 6:23). Therefore death in any and every form is not God's will but our choice. This is the same teaching of Jesus in the New Testament:

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Hebrews immediately connects this truth about God together with the truth about Jesus. Not only was it sin that required death, but God, in the person of His Son, would provide the only death that could destroy sin and restore us from sin (see Hebrews 1:3).

This teaching is foundational to the good news of Jesus Christ. It teaches that God gave Himself, not some third party, in order to meet the demands, or consequences, of our sin. This is the reason the very first chapter of Hebrews is devoted to clearly establishing the divine nature of Jesus Christ as God.

From this beginning the book of Hebrews builds on the theme of "something better." From this first chapter we unfold the God who is so unlike any other deity. The God of the gospel of Jesus Christ supplies what every other deity requires from its followers—Christ as God upholds the universe taking our sin, the just consequences of our rebellion.

The apostle Paul has wasted absolutely no time getting to this gospel truth (verse 3). He does in fact call this truth "so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3). It is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of the person of God, who has by Himself purged our sins! It reveals to us who God is—what He is really like. And this revelation transforms the selfish human heart.

- 1) God Himself took responsibility for our sins, not some third party.
- 2) God accomplished our salvation by Himself, without our help.
- 3) God purged our sins. The wording here is "to do," as in I have something important "to do." God took care of our sins. He "cleansed" (Aramaic) our sins. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul likens this salvation to the washing of dirty clothes (Ephesians 5:25-27). Apparently there's a lot of gospel in washing clothes. Another way to look at this is to understand that when it comes to our sins, God "did them in."

In terms of strict justice, there is none who ought to pay the penalty for sin but mankind, since we are the ones who chose to sin.

In reality there is none who can save us from the consequences of sin but God. Only God could make restoration for sin, only man ought to. Man should, but cannot. God ought not, but can, therefore He does. Love does whatever needs to be done for the good of others. Yet in order for God to accomplish this salvation for us, He must become one of us. In this way, man's accountability for sin is combined with God's ability to take care of sin. This is the winning combination of the gospel of Jesus Christ—God in human flesh. It is therefore the focus of the first chapter of Hebrews to present the reality of Jesus Christ as God who, by Himself, purged our sins. In this way man is still taking responsibility for sin, but he is doing it in the person of God the Son who alone can pay the penalty for sin.

Jesus is God

The truth that Jesus is God and not a created being is foundational to the gospel. Therefore, Paul makes this point the central focus of Hebrews 1:12-14

- 1) It was Jesus who made the worlds (Hebrews 1:2).
- 2) Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His person, who upholds all things by the power of His Word (Hebrews 1:3).
- 3) Jesus is, by inheritance, much better than the angels (Hebrews 1:4).
- 4) Jesus is the Son of God (Hebrews 1:5).

- 5) Angels worship Jesus (Hebrews 1:6).
- 6) God calls Jesus God (Hebrews 1:8).
- 7) God calls Jesus Lord and Maker of heaven and earth (Hebrews 1:10).
- 8) God describes Jesus as eternal (Hebrews 1:11-12).
- 9) God calls Jesus to sit at His right hand where no angel can at any time sit (Hebrews 1:13).

At least nine times, from every angle and in varied comparisons, the divine nature of Jesus Christ is established. Jesus Christ is God the Son, the very “brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). God the Father has said of His angels that they are ministering spirits. “But to the Son *He says*: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom’” (Hebrews 1:8).

Amazing Love

This truth builds power and significance to what we have already seen as the central point of Hebrews 1. God alone can pay the debt of sin. Man alone ought to pay this debt. Jesus, being God the Son, pays this debt for all sin by Himself (Hebrews 1:3). This gospel is nothing less than the truth echoed in the words of Charles Wesley’s heart moving hymn, *And Can it Be*:

“Amazing Love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, should’st die for me?”

Some have been afraid of such a thought, fearing that it borders on heresy, but we cannot do without it. If God did not die for mankind, then we are lost. If God could not die for our sin, then there is no hope for salvation from sin. All have chosen sin and the just wages of sin is death (see Romans 3:21; 6:23). God cannot, in the face of rebellion and sin, do nothing. Love must, in strict justice and mercy, either inflict punishment or assume it. God chose the latter, maintaining justice in His universe while flooding mercy upon the world fallen in sin. He did this in the person of God the Son and for the purpose of clearing forever the charges of rebellions against planet Earth (see Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 3:10-11). The death of Jesus is in some mysterious way then, the dying of God Himself, but how? How can God die? Or can He? This is the subject matter of the next chapter of Paul’s letter to the Hebrews.

For the present it is vital for us to understand that Jesus is not some third party separate from God the Father, and therefore, a disconnected victim of God’s wrath against our sin. Jesus is essentially one with the Father, the eternal God, the Son, who as God, is taking upon Himself the consequences of our sins (see John 10:30). In the drama of the cross, we see not three separate actors but two—ourselves on the one hand and God on the other. Sin came by the means of man substituting himself for God, believing the lie of the serpent that he could become God (see Genesis 3:4-5). Salvation from sin comes as God sacrifices Himself for man by becoming a man and putting Himself where man deserves to be. Man brought sin to this world by claiming the prerogatives that belong only to God. God recovers us from sin by receiving in Himself the penalties that belong only to man. Amazing love indeed!

Summary

Jesus is God the Son—the overall idea communicated in Hebrews 1 is that Jesus Christ is “God, the Lord,” who “sustains” all things and has taken care of our sins by Himself. Jesus is the “exact representation” of the “person” of God. As God, His throne will stand “forever” and His “years will never end.” Jesus is therefore worthy to be worshiped by all the angels and all mankind. God has given Himself for us in the person of God the Son. God’s just wrath against sin was not manifest upon some third party, for He Himself took the consequences of our sins. This gospel truth established before the universe is that God is in nature and character self-sacrificing love! He does not need to be appeased by sacrificial demands upon others, for He is self-sacrificing, self-giving. And the sacrifice He gave is Himself.