

Shorter Catechism 2-3
Jeremiah 31:27-40
Psalm 40
Hebrews 10

“Faith and Practice”

October 14, 2012

The first part of Jeremiah 31 connects back to the Exodus,
and speaks of the restoration from Exile as a sort of new exodus.

Jeremiah speaks of the joy and comfort that will come to Zion,
when the LORD ransoms and redeems his people,
when the glory of the nations flows into Zion.

When the LORD restores the fortunes of Judah –
when the LORD returns the captives of Zion –
then the blessing of the LORD will come upon his people.

And in the verses we read, Jeremiah uses a three-fold repetition of the phrase,
“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD...”

the days are coming, first,
 when God will no longer bring disaster,
 but he will do good to his people;
the days are coming, second,
 when God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and of Judah
 and God will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more
and the days are coming, third,
 when the city shall be rebuilt – and never uprooted again.

In other words, the three declarations: “behold, the days are coming”
express a new *fruitfulness* – among the people of God,
a new *faithfulness* – to the covenant,
and a new *steadfastness* – in the holy city.

Israel’s problem has been the faithlessness of the people of God.

Prophets, priests, kings, people –
the whole history of Israel is a never-ending cycle of rebellion and ruin.

And it is only when God establishes a new covenant –
a new way of dealing with our sin –
that we will be fruitful, faithful, and steadfast!

And that’s what Psalm 40 is all about.

Hebrews will tell us that Psalm 40 is the song of Jesus –
so let us remember that as we sing!

Psalm 40
Hebrews 10

Last time we focused on the first question of the Shorter Catechism:
“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

It’s all nice and good to say that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever,
but how do you do that?

That’s where we turn in questions 2-3:

Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,[3] is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.[4]

Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God,[5] and what duty God requires of man.[6]

Today I want to walk you through Hebrews 10.

If you want all the details of this passage,
you can find three sermons on my webpage.

But the big picture of Hebrews 10 illustrates the catechism’s point beautifully –
both in showing how scripture
is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God –
and in showing that the scriptures principally teach
what man is to believe concerning God,
and what duty God requires of man.

Because what we see in Hebrews 10 is how the author of Hebrews
weaves together various scriptures in order to teach a certain doctrine,
and then show us what we should do because of this doctrine.

1. What Man Is to Believe Concerning God (v1-18)

a. The Sacrifices of the Law Cannot Perfect the Worshiper (v1-4)

10 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

We see in verses 1-4 that the law has but a shadow of Christ (the good things to come).

The offerings and sacrifices of the Law foreshadowed Christ,
but they could not – in themselves – cleanse from sin.

They were a picture of cleansing from sin –
but the blood of bulls and goats cannot actually take away sins.
And this is made clear by the fact that the OT sacrifices had to be repeated
over and over and over.

And in order to demonstrate this point *from scripture*,
Hebrews quotes Psalm 40 in verses 5-7:

b. What Does It Mean for Christ to Do God's Will in Psalm 40? (v5-10)
In Psalm 40 David praises God for raising him out of the miry clay—out of destruction's pit—
and calls on God to deliver him from all his troubles.
(Read verses 5-7)

⁵ *Consequently, when Christ^[a] came into the world, he said,
“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;
⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”*

Hebrews teaches us to think of Jesus as the singer of the Psalms.

Psalm 40 is the song of the Christ – the Messiah – the Lord's anointed –
when he comes into the world.

Psalm 40 demonstrates (from the scriptures) that the OT sacrifices were not sufficient.

The OT sacrifices did not create a desire to do the will of God.

That was the point of Jeremiah 31—the reason why there must be a new covenant.
The old covenant could not remove sin, and it did not change the heart.

And so Hebrews explains Jesus' singing of Psalm 40 as follows:
(Read 10:8-9)

⁸ *When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings
and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law),⁹ then he added,
“Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the
second.¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus
Christ once for all.*

The point is that the Anointed One not only listens to God and does his will,
but his own body is the sacrifice that removes sins.

The Son must be made like his brethren in every respect—except sin.

And so when Jesus sings,

“I have come to do your will,”

the result is the abolition of the first covenant!

The Jews had been singing Psalm 40 for centuries,

but when Jesus sang it, it gained new meaning!

When Jesus sang it, it had the effect of abolishing the old covenant!

Why?

Because that was the point of Psalm 40!

What God desires is not a never-ending cycle of sacrifices!

What God desires is one who will do his will.

But no one had arisen in all of Israel’s history who would truly do God’s will,

because God’s will was that the Son of God would offer himself

as a once-for-all sacrifice that would remove his people’s sins.

Jesus came as the one who had come to do God’s will—

not just in living a morally perfect life!

but to offer himself as the final sacrifice.

And so it was by the will of God that we have been sanctified

by the once-for-all offering of the body of Jesus Christ.

Do you see, then what it means to be sanctified?

The problem with the old covenant was that the worshiper was still conscious of sin—

he knew that the continual sacrifices meant that sin was still a problem.

What it means to be sanctified through the once-for-all offering of the body of Jesus,

is that we are no longer conscious of sin!

I know, I know,

at this you look at me and say, “Are you nuts?

We’re all conscious of sin!”

You are?

Haven’t you confessed your sins?

Isn’t this what your baptism was all about?

that your sins are *washed away!*

Didn’t you hear God’s promise that he is faithful and just to forgive your sins,

and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness?

Why are you still conscious of something that isn’t there anymore?

Yes, we all still sin.

I know all too well that I still sin.

But we should not be conscious of sin—

there should not be a single sin left on your conscience—

unless, of course, you are harboring sin.
If there is a sin that you will not repent of—
if there is a sin that you delight in—
then you have a different sort of problem
(For a sneak peak, look at verse 26).
If you see these sorts of sins in your life,
talk with me—talk with one of the elders—talk with a respected Christian friend.
For we died to sin—how can we live any longer therein? (Rom 6)

Yes, we still sin.

But if we confess our sins, he is faithful *and just* to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our sanctification means that we have definitively broken with that old life,
the dominion of sin and death has been decisively broken,
and now we are more and more to put to death the deeds of the flesh.

Believer in Jesus Christ, you are *free* from the guilt and the power of sin!
I say that every week, and I hope that it is sinking in!

But this is the central point of verses 11-14:

c. But the Offering of Jesus Christ *Does* Perfect the Worshiper (v11-14)

¹¹ *And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.* ¹² *But when Christ^[b] had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,* ¹³ *waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.* ¹⁴ *For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*

Notice the already/not yet language here:

“by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

There is a definitive, once-for-all, aspect to our sanctification!

You have been made complete and perfect in Christ.

There is also an ongoing aspect:

“those who are *being sanctified*.”

But through this single offering, Jesus has perfected you for all time.

He has destroyed the dominion of sin over you.

Because Jesus is the perfect and complete Son of God –

and because you have been united to him by faith –

therefore he has perfected *you* by his single offering.

There are echoes here of Psalm 110:1 –

“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”
Jesus is the great high priest according to the order of Melchizedek
(the main theme of Hebrews 7),
and he is the one who establishes the new covenant
(the main theme of Hebrews 8).

And verses 15-18 remind us of all this:

d. The Holy Spirit’s Testimony in Jeremiah 31 (v15-18)

¹⁵ *And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,*

¹⁶ *“This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:*

*I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds,”*

¹⁷ *then he adds,*

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

¹⁸ *Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

What was the problem with the old covenant?

the problem was that God remembered their sins.

What is the promise of the new covenant?

God will no longer remember our sins.

Notice that the problem is not *that we sin*.

The problem is that in the old covenant, *God remembers our sins!*

The problem of sin is the *same* under the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant!

The problem of the old covenant was that there was no final solution for sin.

And there’s no way that God is going to just “forget” your sins.

There must be an atoning sacrifice that pays for our sins.

Sin must be atoned for.

The wages of sin is death – and so *someone* has to die!

But, once your sins are forgiven, they are paid for – they are washed away.

If God has forgotten your sins,

why do you still remember them?

Why do you act as though God still holds them against you?

It is because you are still holding on to some last remnant of works-righteousness.

You are still thinking that “if only I was good enough...”
“If only I was better at doing God’s will, then he would be pleased with me!”
Did you hear what God’s will was?
God’s will was that his son offer “for all time a single sacrifice for sins.”
Sorry.
It’s too late to be good enough!

Yes, I realize the irony of what I’m doing.
I’m making you feel guilty for feeling guilty!
There is no reason in heaven or on earth for simply *feeling* guilty!

If you *are* guilty, then repent!
If you have repented, then you have been forgiven,
and you are not guilty anymore!
Jesus’ sacrifice paid the price.
His blood covers your sins.
He took your guilt upon himself.

Which means, *it’s not yours anymore, so you can’t have it!*

Here’s the true irony:
if you are beating yourself up for sins in the past –
sins that you have already confessed – that *God* has already forgiven –
then you are calling God a liar –
and you are saying that Christ’s sacrifice isn’t good enough for you,
and God’s forgiveness isn’t good enough for you!

Having shown us what we are to believe concerning God from the scriptures,
Hebrews then turns to what duty God requires of us:

2. What Duty God Requires of Man (v19-39)

a. Entering the Holy Places through the Blood of Christ (v19-22)

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers,^[c] since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,*
²⁰ *by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,*
²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ²² *let us draw near with a true heart in*
full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies
washed with pure water.

God requires us to enter his presence – to draw near to him.
If our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever,
then we see in verses 19-22 how God has restored us to that chief end,
through the blood of Jesus – the new and living way that he opened for us
through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.

We now enter the Holy Places – we come into the heavenly Holy of Holies.
In the old covenant the priests had to wash with water,
and then be sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice,
in order to enter the holy places.
Now, we have been consecrated as a holy priesthood,
with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience,
and our bodies washed with pure water.
Our baptism is a priestly consecration,
as we are made part of this holy priesthood that enters the heavenly holy of holies,
with Jesus as our great priest over the household of God.

Verses 19-22, then, set the stage.

We have confidence to enter the holy place through the blood of Jesus,
the great priest over the house of God.

That “confidence” brackets the larger passage (10:19 and 10:35),
starting with “since we have confidence”
and concluding with “therefore do not throw away your confidence.”
Your confidence is grounded firmly and finally upon the once-for-all work of Jesus.
Your entrance into the Holy Places is based solely upon what Jesus has done.

b. Holding Fast the Confession, and Stirring Up One Another to Love and Good Deeds (v23-25)

²³ *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*
²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Verse 22 used baptismal language (washing/sprinkling),
but now verse 23 uses the language of confession.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.”
You live in a world very much like the world of the first century:
a world where Christianity is *not* “hip and cool” –
a world where the Christian confession – the Christian hope –
is mocked and ridiculed.
But Hebrews says “let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.”
Why?
Because he who promised is faithful.

Notice how this works:
we draw near [worship] with a true heart in full assurance of faith,

we hold fast the confession of our hope [doctrine – the resurrection of Jesus]
without wavering,
and then we consider how to stir up one another to love and good works [practice].

It's the same trio of faithfulness, steadfastness, and fruitfulness
that we saw in Jeremiah 31!
(It's more commonly known in the NT as "faith, hope, and love –
and you see each of these words in our passage here).

How do we stir each other up to love and good works?

There are two participles in verse 25 that flesh out the meaning of verse 24:
"Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some"
This refers to the regular gathering of the church for worship.
Sunday was a business day in the Roman world.
It would have been easy to miss worship and say, "well, I had to work!"
That may be true occasionally, but Hebrews warns against making that a habit.
Because absence from worship and fellowship has dire consequences.
The "for" that starts verse 26 seems to suggest
that absence from worship and fellowship
is the first step of "sinning deliberately."
If we draw near to God in our worship,
then it is here, in our worship,
that we are refocused on the confession of our hope,
Jesus Christ.
And yes, you can draw near to God at home, too.
But Hebrews says that what we do when we "meet together"
is at the heart of that love that binds us together in Christ.

The second participle, is
"But encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

The idea of encouragement is crucial.
We need encouragement.
This includes loving reproof, admonitions, warnings.
We need to be called and exhorted to walk in the good way.
It's really easy to drift away – to think that we don't need others.
But Hebrews warns us that there are serious consequences
if we *do not* encourage each other.

c. Warning against Spurning the Son of God (v26-31)

²⁶ *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,* ²⁷ *but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will*

consume the adversaries. ²⁸ *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.* ²⁹ *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?* ³⁰ *For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”* ³¹ *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

We saw earlier that verses 19 and 35 bracket the passage with references to “our confidence.”
And verses 26-31 warns us of what happens if we throw it away.

Verse 26 uses the language of “sinning deliberately.”
What does “sinning deliberately” mean?

The language of “if we *go on* sinning deliberately”
suggests that the sin in view is already understood—
and the only sin in 10:19-25 is not drawing near, not holding fast,
and not stirring each other up to love and good works—
all of which can be summarized as “neglecting to meet together” in verse 25.

“Sinning deliberately,” then, is synonymous with “throwing away your confidence” in verse 35.
It is apostasy.

After all, what do we do when we meet together?
We draw near to God in faith (verse 22).
We hold fast the confession of our hope (verse 23)
And we stir each other up to love and good works (verses 24-25).

So the heart of apostasy is neglecting to meet together:
it is refusing to draw near to God in faith,
letting go the confession of your hope,
and ignoring and abandoning each other.

Verses 29-31 remind us of the horrific reality of apostasy.
If you spurn the Son of God
and profane the blood of the covenant by which you were sanctified,
and outrage the Spirit of grace,
then God will take vengeance on you!

Sometimes people wonder why I use such realistic language at baptisms.
Why do I say that the one who is baptized is now God’s “child and heir”?
The main reason is because Paul says in Galatians 3:27-29,
“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ...
And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring,
heirs according to promise.”

Those who are baptized do belong to God
in a way that those who are not baptized do not!
But the second reason is because of passages like Hebrews 10.
If only the elect belong to God in any real sense,
then the warnings of Hebrews 10 make no sense.

There are some people who are part of the covenant – part of the family of God –
who will and do apostatize.
They spurn the Son of God,
they profane the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified,
and they outrage the Spirit of grace.

They were sanctified in the waters of baptism – they were consecrated to a holy priesthood –
but like Nadab and Abihu they rebel,
and Hebrews warns that their fate will be the same!

But Hebrews does not want to leave us there with that warning,
and so verses 32-39 provide an exhortation to endurance.

d. Exhortation to Endurance (v32-39)

*³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For,
“Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.”
³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.
If Jesus Christ has taken your sins upon himself,
then all of your sins have been forgiven.
And at the final judgment,
not one of those sins will be held against you.
Therefore, when God judges you for what you have done in the body,
all he will say is “well done, good and faithful servant.”
Because you have endured in doing the will of God.

Another way of saying this is in verses 37-39.

“Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”
But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed,
but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

This is a quote from Habakkuk 2:3-4,

but the author of Hebrews has altered it slightly.

In Habakkuk 2 God says that ‘the end’ will surely come; *it* will not delay.

But Hebrews turns this into a statement about the coming of Christ.

This is accurate enough—the coming of Christ is the coming of the end!

But what he does with verse 4 is even more interesting.

The LXX translation said “if he draws back, my soul will not take pleasure in him,
but my righteous one shall live by his faith.”

Hebrews inverts the order.

This has the effect of distinguishing between the “coming one”
and the “righteous one.”

In other words,

Hebrews has taken what the LXX applied to the Messiah and applies it to us.

Hebrews looks at you and says,

Do not shrink back from Christ!

Believe!

Hold fast to him!

For it is only through faith that you will preserve your souls.

Passages like Hebrews 10 sometimes shake our assurance.

They are intended to do so!

Hebrews wants to shake you.

Do not become complacent!

And do not put your confidence in yourself!

But fix your eyes upon Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith:

let your confidence be in him,

and then persevere in doing good,

endure in doing the will of God,

and when you have done the will of God you will receive what is promised.