

Grace and Peace be with You

Benediction

- ¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.
- ¹⁹ I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.
- ²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,
- ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
- ²² I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.
- ²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.
- ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.
- ²⁵ Grace be with all of you."

Hebrews 13:18-25

Invocations and Benedictions

INVOCATIONS AND BENEDICTIONS, how worship begins and ends. For many thousands of years, OT and NT saints gathered together in the name of God with these blessings and were sent away with more. When God comes to people, he invites them. When he sends them away, his peace goes with them. There is something about the gathering together of people in worship that is more than just a physical gathering, more than listening to a sermon on a podcast, more than reading your Bible in private devotions.

Curiously, this is true whether we are in the realm of the secular or the realm even of non-Christian religion. This past week a black professional football player refused to stand for America's national anthem in a political protest. Whatever you make of his reasons, one person I know stated that, "There is no real reason other than being told to and following the crowd" that people stand for such a thing. "It means nothing and does nothing."

I would argue that this comment is profoundly naïve, and is the result of a culture that has lost all touch with the

past. In actuality, sporting events are secular counterparts to religious worship services. They have their own liturgy filled with invocations, singing and music, public readings (introducing the players), ongoing commentary, sacramental food, proper times to stand and sit, benedictions, and so on. The National Anthem is basically the invocation, and it is this way not only in our country, but everywhere you go in the world. Why? It is a kind of secular-sacred (if I might put those two words together) time to most people, even those from other nations, as we witnessed at the Olympics when the fastest man who ever lived made a reporter stop her interview while he paused in respect to an anthem being played that wasn't even his own country's.

Simply put, these rituals prepare people for the gathering and in some kind of mystical way even do something to them corporately during that gathering. They create a kind of bond. If you don't think that is true, then you have simply never been to a game. Or you have not been anywhere near civilization this past week, because for some incredible reason, this football player's protest has

been the ongoing number one news story. Don't mess with our invocation.

But if it true in a world that **pretends there is no supernatural**, how much more true in a world that admits that there is, even if it isn't Christian? The Anthem reminded me of the invocation. Another story I heard a couple of years ago reminded me of the power of a benediction. It is told by the late **Leonard Nimoy** who gave us one of the most famous blessings in the world called the Vulcan greeting. Everyone has seen this thing, even if they've never watched a second of Star Trek.



Here is the story of how this greeting came into being,¹ and I give them to you in his own words so that you can hear how a *secular Jew* understood the power of a religious benediction:

¹ I think I've told this story before, but my emphasis was on the sign itself and its meaning, not on its nature as a benediction.

It was in an Orthodox Shul (Yiddish for synagogue or school). I was there with father, grandfather, and my brother. We were sitting in the bench seats. The women were upstairs. There comes a point where five or six men get up on the bimah (stage), facing the congregation, they have the tallit (fringed garment) over their heads, and they start this chanting. And my father said to me, “Don’t look.”

So every body has their eyes covered by their hands, or their tallit covering their faces, or they turn away with backs to the men. I hear this strange sound coming from them. They are not singers, but shouters. Dissonant. Discordant. [He makes a sound like an Indian chant: ioiyaiaioia]. Wailing. Not together. Suddenly the the leader started shouting something [speaks something in Yiddish]. And the congregation shouted back [repeating it]. It was chilling. I thought, something major is happening here.

So I peaked. I saw them with both hands outstretched beneath the tallit like this [Spock sign] toward the congregation. Something got hold of me. I had no idea what was going on, but the sound and look of it was magical. So learned how to do it.

Much later I learned that this is the shape of letter *shin* in the Hebrew alphabet. A very interesting letter in the language. It is the first letter of the word *shaddai*, of *shalom*, and of *shekinah*. [At this point he repeats the Kabbalistic understanding of the *shekinah*, which is different and yet similar to the biblical view]. The Shekinah is the Name of the feminine aspect of God, who supposedly was created to live amongst humans.

Why you aren't to look came much, much later. A rabbi friend of my wife's told me, "The legend is, during that benediction, the Shekinah comes into the sanctuary to bless the congregation, and you don't want to see that because it is so powerful it could injure or kill you. So you protect your eyes." I survived.

I never dreamed I would do that someday. But sure enough one day while making a Star Trek episode *Amock Time*, Spock goes home to Vulcan to be married to his betrothed. The lady who conducts the service was a Jewish actress. I'm supposed to greet her as we exchange hellos. I thought, this is the first time we have seen other Vulcans, so I thought we need some kind of special greeting that Vulcans do. We humans do things like shake hands, nod, salute, what do Vulcans do? I suggested this

to the director. He said OK. Within days on the air, people were doing this to me on the street. Fifty years later, people are still doing it. It touched a magic cord. Most people have no idea what it is all about. There is just something intriguing to it. Like a secret handshake. People don't realize they are blessing each other with this.²

Now, if secularists and non-Christian religious people can get the power and importance of invocations and benedictions, how much more should we? This is the question before us as we come to the last section of Hebrews.

The Christian tradition has had invocations and benedictions since the very beginning, as they understand the public worship of God to be a meeting, literally, where God is present. He invites us to come into his presence, and something happens when he does. **Invocation**: from the Latin *invocare* meaning “to call or invoke.” God calls us to worship and we invoke his presence, asking him to be in our midst not magically, but covenantally according to his promises in Christ Jesus.

² Leonard Nimoy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuVK3C1oawQ>.

Likewise, he gives us his peace when we leave. This is indeed profoundly powerful. Nimoy could see it with physical eyes. But do you see it with the eyes of faith? Why would it be so? Because it is the Word of Life speaking and the Holy Spirit breathing these powerful words into our hearts and minds. The God who calls the universe into existence by his word is certainly doing something very special when he speaks to us in these ways.

The word **benediction** comes from the Latin: *bene* meaning “**well**” and *dicere* meaning “**to speak.**” A benediction is a speaking well to the people. It is a word from the leader of the service who is but a messenger to the people on behalf of God. Thus, in effect, it is God’s word to the people. It is God’s speaking well to us as the last word we hear together. It is Gospel. It is his well-wishing. It is his peace.

Our passage today is the benediction of our letter, which is itself quite interesting. Originally, Hebrews was meant to be **read as a sermon in a worship service** (we actually did this ourselves just before starting our study of the book). That worship service would have had its own benediction. But this letter or sermon has its own separate benediction.

Throughout the Bible we see these. You find benedictions in the **Psalms**. “May the Lord preserve you from all evil: The Lord shall keep your soul. The Lord shall keep you coming in, and in going out, from now and forever” (**Ps 121:7-8 LXX**). This means that our songs that we sing (for the Psalms are songs to be sung) to God and to each other are tiny forms of a worship service. Which is why they belong in worship.

You find them in **the Law** of God. “May the LORD bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be merciful to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (**Num 6:23**). This means that the reading of his law together is a form of worship as well.

We find them throughout the **many letters of the NT**, again, including our letter today which is a sermon. But this means that sermons are part of the worship of God. They are kinds of little worship services that belong in the larger worship service. They are fit vessels for invocations and benedictions in and of themselves. Have you thought of these elements of the worship service as things that impart God’s peace and well-wishing to you?

We need to be thinking this way, especially when the days are evil as ours are. We gather together to worship the risen Savior and his mighty Father. I was told growing up that worship is not about what you get, but what you give. To get anything out of worship, you have to come with a mind ready and prepared to do it. Worship doesn't just "happen" to you. You have to enter into it willingly and happily. But this saying goes much too far. For indeed we do gather to receive, and not merely to give. In fact, what possible thing do we even have to give to this God who created everything? We can bring him our sin, and that's about it.

But we bring him our sin so that he might forgive it. We come to worship him, not so that he will somehow change because of us, as if our worship makes him happier or greater or something. We come because he alone is worthy, and amazingly, because he is worthy, he again, in covenant, has promised to do something to us when we gather together. Yes, worship is for us. It is for us to be sanctified and conformed to the image of the Son—together. And you need to see that this happens through every phase of our gathering together, including even the benediction.

Anatomy of a Liturgy

We are in the last few verses of the end of the sermon of Hebrews. This is actually where we learn that it is a sermon and not just a letter. He calls it his “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22). The phrase appears only one other time in the NT. In Acts 13:15 Paul goes to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and gives them a “word of exhortation.” One commentator said that this phrase “The expression appears to have been an idiomatic designation for the homily or edifying discourse that followed the public reading from the designated portions of Scripture in the hellenistic synagogues.”³ This makes our the entire letter that much more appropriate to the subject of worship.

But it gets more interesting. Some have argued that the last chapter is an early processor of the ancient liturgies of the ancient church. Think about our own worship service in light of the following. For while we do not follow all of the superstitious rituals that crept in, we have the basic skeleton

³ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, vol. 47B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 568.

of these liturgies. **Vv. 1-5** would mirror **the examination of the conscience** which leads to confession of sin. These verses are laws, and they tell us what we are to do. That naturally leads to us recognizing that we do not fulfill the law. I'll have more to say about this later when we look at the author's view of his own obedience towards the law.

Vv. 5b-6 are from the Old Testament, which mirror **the reading of God's word** in the service. We have a reading from the law and the gospel. Others read from the OT and the NT in their liturgies. These follow that pattern.

Vv. 7-17 mirror the climax of our worship, which is **the Lord's Supper**. This section is all about food, and some have suggested that they may even be referring to wrongful views of the Supper. This section also uses an interesting phrase, the "**sacrifice of praise**," which is used in the fourth section of the chapter. Of course, praising God includes singing.

This fourth section is all about **remembering your brothers in prayer**. In the ancient rite, after the supper but before you are dismissed you have things like this, *"Remember, Lord, your people. Remember all of us gathered here before you. You know how firmly we believe in you and dedicate*

ourselves to you. We offer you this sacrifice of praise for ourselves and those who are dear to us. We pray to you, our living and true God, For our well-being and redemption.”⁴

Finally, you have the **benediction**, which is the last word in all of the ancient liturgies, and in our own. Why? Because God should have the last word in a service that he has called us to. (The remaining verses are not technically part of this liturgy, because Hebrews is not just a sermon, but also a letter, and it was standard in the ancient world to end your letters with greetings and such as we find in **vv. 22-25**).⁵

The point of sharing this is that the last chapter of Hebrews, which is the chapter of ethical application, may itself be a mini-liturgy. So not only is the whole sermon itself something that fits into a larger worship service. But our chapter emulates that larger worship service. And the church may very well have developed its order of worship from something like this chapter! What an amazing thing to think about, next time you read the book and the last

⁴ The Latin is actually the same in both instances, at least in some of the alternative versions of the Vulgate.

⁵ **James Swetnam**, “A Liturgical Approach to Hebrews 13,” *Letter & Spirit: The Authority of Mystery: The Word of God and the People of God 2* (2006): 169–170.

chapter. It should lift you up to heaven in worship of our Great God.

Prayer

As we come to our specific text ([Heb 13:18-25](#)), we come to what would be [the fourth part of the liturgy](#) of the chapter, and near the end of the service. This is a call to remember your brothers. The idea would be that as soon as his sermon is concluded in their hearing, that they would then stop and take some time to do what he requests here.

The form of remembering the Apostle asks for here is the last command in the chapter and in the letter. “[Pray.](#)” Prayer. Everyone does it. But what is it? Christian prayer is that means of communicating with the Living God through the Only Mediator between God and men, whereby we approach the throne of grace with words of [adoration](#), [confession](#), [thanksgiving](#), and [supplication](#) or ACTS as the popular acronym goes. If you do not go through him, you simply are not doing Christian prayer.

[To adore](#) God is to praise him. To praise him is to simply tell God how wonderful you know that he is. You praise

him for his power, his might, his wisdom, his works, his goodness, his faithfulness, his kindness, and his grace. You praise him for whatever you know is worthy of praise. If you can even make it beyond this, you **confess** your sins to him, humbling yourself, realizing that he is God and you are not. You become contrite of spirit and heart, so that God might work that work of renewal in your heart by his Spirit. For God hates the prideful, but gives grace to the humble. You **thank** him in your prayers. Thanking God can go on as long as praising him. Thanking him for salvation, for life, for health, for suffering, for everything he brings to your life. Giving him thanks makes you a thankful and less angry or bitter person. And it keeps him from giving you over to your sin because of your thanklessness.

But the form of prayer that is in mind here is the last one: **supplication**. “**Pray for us.**” Prayer for your brother is the final way that you show love to your brother, a theme that started chapter 13. Now, the “us” here is obviously the Apostle, but perhaps also those with him. What does he ask for? What is his request? (Yes, even pastors can give prayer requests for themselves).

“For we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner” (18-19). The first verse is a desire for prayer for their behavior and faith, and second for their restoration.

The first explains their clear **conscience**. There are two points here. First, the how. How does he have a clear conscience? This is quite important. He has brought this up several times. Do you struggle with a clear conscience? What do you look to to find it? Do you look to your obedience?

Earlier in the letter it said that the old covenant “gifts and sacrifices ... cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper” (9:9). Then he said that the “blood of Christ” “through the eternal Spirit” “purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (14). Then, “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” (10:22). Where does it seem that he is getting his clean conscience from? Himself? His righteousness? His goodness? No. Rather, it is from the blood of Jesus.

Perhaps this explains the second point. What is this about his desire? He (they) “**desire to act honorably in all things.**” Someone pointed out what this does not say, and it seems quite relevant to what we just said. It does not say that they have **acted** honorably in all things. It says they **desire** to. The desire, because they are Christians, is to act honorably in every thing.

We really need to say two things about this. First, does this thought bother you? Some people have this strange notion that pastors and leaders are holier than everyone else. If you don't believe me, just tell someone that you are a pastor next time they ask what you do for a living and see how they immediately change their own behavior. (Don't worry, God will forgive you).

But if you hear this as somehow a suggestion that pastors are supposed to be sinful, like some kind of an antinomian, then you also badly miss the point. He said that they desire greatly to honor God. And their conscience, cleansed by the blood of Christ, drives them to this desire. Recall what he said earlier in the chapter. One of the earlier commands was to, “**Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God**” (this obviously includes

him). And then, “Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7). While it doesn’t necessary mean that they are acting perfectly, clearly their faith includes their behavior. Anyone who justifies sin and says that God approves of it does not know God and is a deceiver.

The command here to pray for the leaders follows on the heels of the other commands to “obey” and “submit” to your leaders (17). What is clear is that he is now letting them know that even though God has put the leaders over them in terms of church authority, they re in just as much need of prayer as anyone, if they re to live a life pleasing to God. Let the law do its work convicting them. It is also seems clear that he is not just saying they *want* to do something, but haven’t, yet they trust in Jesus. No, that isn’t it. He is saying that they honestly don’t know of any place where they have not sought to honor Christ among them, either in word (his sermon here) or in deed. He greatly desires prayer that if they might be deceiving themselves that it would be revealed, so that their conscience in Christ would line up with their behavior that they so greatly desire. For what Christian is there who doesn’t want to obey his Master, even

when he falls? I believe the way he has written this certainly leads to this kind of an application.

Next, he says, “I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner” (19). There isn’t a lot said about this author in our book. This verse makes it clear that they know who he is, and more, than he is part of their fellowship. He didn’t need to tell them who he was. They knew him. But it also shows that his own conscience is so clear that he wants to be with them very badly. This is not something you want if you are actually guilty of much misbehavior among a group of people. Rather, if you were like that, you would never want to see them again.

The relationship of this verse to the previous may be **circumstantial**. To see those circumstances, we need to go to **vv. 22-23**. These really do belong in many ways to **18-19**. First, he appeals to them. “I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly” (22).

His letter is, at the end of the day, just a short letter. It takes all of 45 minutes to read. Given that it is a sermon, it is interesting that it isn’t 10 minutes or 2 hours. Some in our

day seem to love speaking for as short a time as they can. The shorter the better. So we can get on with the “real” “worship”: the music! Some people seem to pride themselves on how long they can preach or listen to a sermon, as if that makes you holy. A pastor friend of ours, James “Grizzly” Adams once told me, “A good sermon need not be long. A long sermon need not be.”

Think about how much amazing information is packed into Hebrews. And it is a sermon. It could literally take you ten lifetimes of study to even begin to understand what he is saying. Some people don’t like deep sermons. Hebrews is a profoundly deep sermon, and he expected that the Christians could grasp it. He had taught them well. He clearly took a lot of time writing it, as the theology, the structure, and the literary style all show us.

Like a deep sermon that you might hear here in our day, you need to bear with it if you don’t understand it all. One little step at a time. Grasp one thing first. Then move on. Persistence. You need to stick with it and try to understand it. You need to talk about it with your friends, and let it enter your soul, because it is telling you about the riches of Christ of whom there is no end of depth. When you get hold

of him, it changes your life. The sermon should not end once you bow your head in prayer. It should last. May Hebrews last and last and last in your heart and mind.

Next, he says, “You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon” (23). This is pretty clearly the Timothy that Paul knew who became the pastor of the church at Ephesus, who has two books of the NT written in his name. The fact that he knows Timothy is one of the major reasons that some think Paul is the author of Hebrews. But obviously, plenty of people knew Timothy, and many of the other suggestions for the authorship would have met this criteria, including Luke, who journeyed with Paul and is my choice for author.

But the point is, Timothy has been in prison. This brings back one last time a very serious minor theme of Hebrews. That of persecution for the name of Christ. Life as a Christian in the first century was anything but like life as we know it here. Nero murdered Peter and Paul, and did absolutely unspeakable things to hundreds of Christians in Rome, things that we would have to make half of the people in this room leave just to speak them out loud. Emperor Domitian at the end of the century was not much better.

And let us not forget the crucifixion of Jesus, the stoning of Stephen, the beheading of John, the murder of James, the imprisonments of the earliest Christians in Israel by the Jews. Anywhere you went, trouble followed you.

These people were labeled by the state as seditionists who meet in secret, who have sex orgies because of their “love feasts,” who are cannibals because they eat the body of Christ, and who are atheists because they only believe in one God. The rhetoric of Liberals in America doesn’t hold a candle to the Roman Empire and the Jewish elite. The temptations to give in or to forget one another to keep yourself from such horrors was very real. It is hard for us to imagine it. Prepare yourselves now.

Into this, [the circumstance](#) here might have been that the Apostle of Hebrews was detained for some reason. Perhaps he, like Timothy was being held by the State. Perhaps he was waiting for Timothy to be released for such a long time that it was making his friends anxious and even suspicious. We just don’t know. But he is urging them earnestly in these verses, I think, to pray all the more so that they might be able to come back home. They should not take his absence as any kind of a sign that he is no longer acting honorably

towards them. But they should entreat the throne of heaven, knowing that their God is King and Ruler of all and can deliver them if he is so moved to do so.

Certainly, all of our times of gathering together should be filled with prayer. Our services should have prayer time. Our small groups should have prayer time. Our daily lives should have prayer time. Are you praying for one another? And do you know what you should be praying for? The Apostle's command and request here should be a pattern for all of our lives as we live in concert with one another.

Benediction

At the end of a service, there is the benediction. This is the theme I began us thinking about earlier. Now we get to see the power of a true benediction. Like the previous sections in our text today, this one is two verses. “**Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his**

sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:20-21).

The benediction is God’s good will towards you. Thus, it begins with God. The “God of peace.” This is a common benediction in the NT (Rom 16:20; Php 4:9; 1Th 5:23; etc.). Sending someone off with the peace of God is found throughout the Bible. Can you imagine being welcomed into God’s presence, going through all of the things we go through in a worship service together, and then not having God’s peace go with you? It is a horrible thought. And yet, this is exactly how it may be with some here.

God’s peace does not just go with someone because of a benediction. It presupposes that you and God are at peace. Now, as we have said many times before, biblical peace (*shalom, eirene*) is not just the absence of war. It is the presence of God’s good will towards you. We are born enemies of God, under his wrath. You have to have God’s wrath turned aside from you to be at peace with him. Are you at peace with God? You can be, for he is the God of peace. He loves peace and hates hostility. That is why he sent Jesus.

Now, in the benediction, this God of peace is distinguished from “our Lord Jesus” later in the sentence.

The God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. It is one of the most common things in the NT to say this. Peter's first sermon says, "This Jesus God raised up" (**Act 2:32**). Paul says, "God raised the Lord" (**1Co 6:14**). Because they are distinguished, it is common to think of "God" here as the Heavenly Father. And so it is, "... through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead," Paul begins Galatians. The **Father** is called God, and Jesus is given the title Lord (*kurios*).

And yet, it strikes me that most of the time we find this, we do not see the Father being specified as he is in **Galatians 1:1**. It is just "God." Why might this be? Well, we confess **One God in Three Persons**. It is not only the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus himself said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (**Jn 2:19**). Thus, **Jesus** is called "our Lord and God" (**Rev 4:11**). He is even called "the Lord of peace" (**2Th 3:16**). Also, we read "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you..." (**Rom 8:11**). When Ananias and Sapphira lied "to God" (**Acts 5:4**), they lied to "the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 5:3**). The **Holy Spirit is God**. So who raised our Lord Jesus from

the Dead? God did. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Hence, “God” raised him from the dead.

The **resurrection** is the focus of the initial part of the benediction, and this is because it is the central tenant of the Christian faith, other than perhaps the deity of Christ. Jesus is not dead. Therefore, he has great power. In this case, it is the power as “**The Great Shepherd of the sheep.**” The Apostle here is but an under-shepherd. Peter (**1Pe 5:2**), Jude (**12**), and others refer to pastors as shepherds. It is a term used by the king of Israel in his position over the people of Israel. And yet, the king said, “**The LORD is my Shepherd.**” The flock is not David’s, but God’s, and he is but a sheep himself. This touches again on the way the “leaders” are to lead Christ’s sheep. For if they lead his sheep astray, what can there be but wrath to pay? Peace belongs to those who are Christ’s sheep. May the peace of God be with the sheep, he says.

But **how do we have peace?** If Jesus is raised, it is only because Jesus died. He has been “**brought again from the dead.**” And why did Jesus die? So that he might bring peace between you and God. God brings you peace through Jesus.

Do you see? He is absolutely central. Do you believe in him today?

It says it is specifically, “By the blood of the eternal covenant.” He speaks here of an “eternal covenant.” He ends his letter with the theme that has taken up so much of its time, and which we Reformed Christians love to much because of how it organizes our thoughts and brings unity to the Scripture. Which covenant is this?

Some are tempted, as John Owen points out, to think of this as the eternal covenant of Redemption. But he notices rightly that this covenant had no blood in it. It was made in eternity past with the members of the Trinity. The covenant of works with Adam is called an “eternal covenant,” as everyone on earth has broken it (Isa 24:5 LXX). Is this the covenant in mind? Kind of. Jesus died to redeem us from the curse which was broken. He obeyed the covenant of works and by his works we are saved. There is certainly a relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant in mind here.

The Noahaic covenant is called an “eternal covenant” (Gen 9:16 LXX). But the promise here is to never again flood the entire earth. Its promise does not involve blood,

but water. The **Abrahamic** covenant is called an “eternal covenant” (**1Ch 16:16-17 LXX**). But this covenant involved a physical land and a biological people. And the blood that was spilled in it is circumcision, which is no longer a sign performed in the church.

The **Mosaic** covenant may be called an eternal covenant (it is difficult to tell if it is the Law in mind or the priesthood; **Lev 24:8 LXX**). It is a covenant “from the people” eternally. But, of course, they broke covenant with God. The **Levitical** covenant is called an eternal covenant (**Num 18:19 LXX**; **Num 25:13 LXX**). But its focus seems to be on a priesthood that has passed away. The **Davidic** covenant is called an “eternal covenant” (**2Sa 23:5 LXX**). But this is about the kingship of Israel.

There is one more covenant in the future that is called an “eternal covenant” in the OT (**Isa 61:8**; **Jer 27:5**; etc.). It is, to them, a covenant still in the future. One interesting thing about these older covenant is that they are all about “**The Seed**” to come (Noah—**Gen 9:9**; Abraham—**Gen 12:7**; Moses—**Dt 1:8**; Levi—**Ex 28:43**; David—**2Sa 7:12**). These all come from that first covenant promise to Eve in the Garden (**Gen 3:15**). Jesus is The Seed (**Gal 3:16**).

Not in themselves, but in the coming Christ we see these as eternal, because in shadow and type form they have passed away. Jesus is the second Adam (1Co 15:45). Jesus is our ark (1Pe 3:20-22). Jesus has fulfilled circumcision (Isa 53:8; Lk 2:21; Rom 2:29). Jesus obeyed the whole law (Heb 4:15; 7:28). Jesus is the Great High Priest (Heb 5:9). Jesus is the King of David (Jn 12:13).

Thus, the covenant in mind which is eternal is that covenant which was cut in his own blood, that which fulfilled the shadowy covenants of the Old Testament. That which ushers in true grace rather than works. That which brings out of eternity past salvation to time and space. It is his blood that makes this covenant “eternal.” It is eternal because it has always been in mind. It is as if in the plan of God “The lamb was slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8 NIV). It is eternal because God himself died for our sins. It is eternal because nothing can undo his work of redemption. It is eternal because nothing can take you out from under the peace of God. What a powerful benediction from a powerful God.

But it is **only half finished**. It goes on to say. May this God of peace, “Equip you with everything good that you

may do his will.” The Spirit of God equips his saints with the weapons of our warfare against spiritual principalities, and he equips us with spiritual fruit by which we might love our brothers. This is particularly a work of the Holy Spirit who was sent by God to do the very thing promised here. If the God of peace is at peace with you through the blood of Christ, then may he equip you with everything good.

These good things are given to you do that you may “do his will.” What is his will? The children’s catechism asks, “Can God do all things? Yes, God can do all his holy will.” It is God’s holy will to equip the saints to do his holy will. But the will of God here is not his power, but his law. “Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.” These are the commands to love our brother that we have seen throughout this chapter. The benediction is now reminding you of what you have heard about the law of God, how it is holy, how it is good, how he wants you to obey it. And now it is giving you the power to do so. How?

“Through Jesus Christ.” It is the work of our Mediator in his life on this earth as a man that is our power, for it is to him that we are united by faith. We become one with him. One like a head is one with a body. One like a branch is one

with a vine. One **like** a wife is one with her husband. One **like** a temple housed by its God. One **like** bricks that make up that temple, whose chief cornerstone is Christ. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me: I can do his holy will. I can obey him, for I have the desire to do so. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices.

The focus of the benediction is no longer on your sin, which has been paid for. It is no longer on your constant struggles in falling short of his glory as you do throughout your Christian life in the flesh. The focus is **on the peace of God** going with you now, by the power of God in his Spirit equipping you, through union with the Son of God who died for your sins and was raised to life for your justification.

Therefore, “**to [him] be glory forever and ever.**” A proper benediction ends with praising God. For it is God’s **grace** that does these things for a people who do not deserve them. You know, the book actually ends on this note. The verse immediately after the benediction is somewhat anticlimactic. It is a typical ancient greeting that you would write in a letter. “**Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings**” (**Heb 13:24**). Our author is in the same place where Paul and Peter

were put to death by Nero. But he is not dead yet. He sends greetings because they are his brothers.

But **he ends with grace**. We are saved by grace alone. And it is grace alone that gives us all of the rich treasures throughout the book through Christ. “**Grace be with all of you**” (25). And so may God bless you as you have considered this greatest of all sermons ever written—the book of Hebrews. May the God of peace go with you as you leave and consider the myriad of things Christ has done for you because of who he is as **greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Aaron, greater than the temple, greater than the sacrifices, greater than the covenants of old**. And may grace go with you and be on your lips as you praise his name with one another, bearing each others burdens, praying for one another, and praising God together.

This is the power of worship. This the power of benediction. This is the power of God being with you through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.