

CHAPTER VI
BENEDICTION AND CONCLUSION
HEBREWS 13:20-25



WHILE the author may now be formally concluding what he considers to be a brief epistle, v. 22, that which is also elementary (5:11-14), yet this in no way discourages him from again rehearsing his grand new covenant theme by way of a final benediction. In stimulating others with this better truth, especially Hebrew Christians, he has continued to stimulate himself as a fulfilled Hebrew Christian. In having called for prayer, v. 18, he responds with prayer that embodies the heart of his new covenant hope.

A. The new covenant benediction, vs. 20-21.

It is helpful in an extended sentence such as this to determine the main elements comprising the subject, main verb, and direct object, to which everything else attaches in a subsidiary and qualifying manner. Thus the essential simple sentence is, “God” (subject), “[may He] equip” (main verb), “you [plural]” (direct object).

1. The ground established by the eternal covenant, v. 20.

“Now the God of peace, having brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant [through] Jesus our Lord.” This term “God of peace” occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Paul’s epistles (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; I Thess, 5:23, cf. II Thess. 2:16). The nature of God is to make peace, even as was the case in the garden of Eden when He called out to Adam, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:8-15). Having established reconciliation, “the Lord will bless His people with peace [שלום, *shalōm*]” (Ps. 29:11; cf. 85:8). God is the source of peace; hence “He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me” (Ps. 55:18); “He makes peace in your borders” (Ps. 147:14); He is the source of “the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6); but ultimately “He will speak peace to the nations” (Zech. 9:10). So in the new covenant there is supreme proof of God’s peaceful intentions with turbulent, aggressive man.

a. Through God’s resurrection of the Shepherd of the sheep.

Here is the *Agent* of the new covenant, Jesus our Lord, who, according to the Father’s plan of peace, vindicated by the resurrection of His Son from the dead, redemptively recruits His own flock for a kingdom of peace (Rev. 11:15) over which He will reign (Isa. 9:6-7). However this Shepherd’s end goal is that these equipped sheep might “do His [the Father’s] will” and “please Him,” v. 21.

- b. Through God's blood covenant in Jesus our Lord.

Here is the *transaction* of "the eternal covenant," otherwise designated as the "new covenant," 9:15-18. The "eternal" quality, based upon resurrection which overcomes death, is emphasized here due to the fact that this High Priest, unlike the Aaronic and Levitical priests who died (7:23), "continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. . . . [and] always lives to make intercession" for those who draw near by faith (7:24-25).

2. The growth enabled by the eternal covenant, v. 21.

"May He equip [καταρτίζω, katartizō, aorist optative expressing desire] you in every good thing, to the end that you do His will, [it] working in you that which is well-pleasing [εὐάρεστος, euarestos] before Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom [be] the glory [δόξα, doxa] for ever and ever. Amen." Surely the means employed includes the teaching of this epistle as well as the leadership recommended in v. 17.

- a. To do His will in every good thing.

What then is this will of God? It is the apostolic truth that became inscripturated and needs to be heard and digested, but especially its capacity for producing discernment (5:14) and practical outworking in 12:1-13:19. Thus it is the obedience of faith, as actively represented in 11:1-40.

- b. To be well-pleasing before Him through Christ.

Here activity is qualified by affection, ours and His, duty by delight, ours and His; here motivation is distinguished between that of a slave and a son; here true Christianity is identified as God-centered, God-driven. It is for this reason that "love [of God] is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

- c. To accomplish the glorification of Christ.

As the Mediator of saving righteousness, hence sanctifying grace "working in us," ποιῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, poiōn en hēmin, through the endowment of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10, 14; I John 3:20, 24), He, Jesus, is to be given exultant recognition because of the lavish endowment of the Spirit of grace which He bestows upon us (Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7-8). Thus the "Amen" is an affirmation of this most essential element of authentic Christian worship. Good hymnody is especially helpful in this regard. So Charles Wesley guides us.

My heart is full of Christ, and longs
 Its glorious matter to declare!
 Of Him I make my loftier songs,
 I cannot from His praise forbear;
 My ready tongue makes haste to sing
 The glories of my heavenly King.

B. The filial bequest, vs. 22-24.

Perhaps the author anticipates some critical responses to his epistle, especially by the less mature, who, with an “unbelieving heart” (3:12), with “disobedience” (4:6), might groan and complain concerning the variety of sober warnings and the prospect of discipline (12:7-11). However, personal presence is hoped for that will better communicate and lovingly persuade. An epistle, indeed any piece of literature or medium, however helpful and fruitful, must always rank below the greater impact of preaching and teaching in the flesh.

1. Attend to this epistle, v. 22.

“I exhort you [παρακαλέω, parakaleō], brethren, bear with/hold on to [ἀνέχομαι, anechomai] the word of exhortation [παράκλησις, paraklesis], for through a brief [βραχύς, brachus, writing] I wrote [ἐπιστέλλω, epistellō] to you.” This is the first time that the author refers to himself in the singular, no doubt because of a sense of sober responsibility. Much has been packed into a relatively brief discourse. This infers that more extensive teaching has been delivered in the past; so it is hoped this will be the case in the near future. Thus the gospel, although having a necessary simplicity that is suitable to initial conversion (I Cor. 15:3-4), yet is also wondrously complex in its outworking with regard to sanctification (Rom. 3:21-26). As a “word of exhortation,” this epistle reflects ministry that was common within the early church, but especially where the congregation was considerably Jewish.

2. Anticipate Timothy’s possible coming, v. 23.

“Be aware/know [γινώσκω, ginōskō] that our brother Timothy, having been released [ἀπολύω, apoluō], with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.” It is commonly assumed that the Timothy here is Paul’s beloved younger companion, who, although imprisoned nearby, will soon be released and thus enabled to join the author in his imminent journey to the addressees. It seems implicit that this prospect of assisting ministry from another esteemed Jewish Christian leader will excite the readers since they have previously appreciated his teaching.

3. Accept Italian greetings, v. 24.

“Greet [ἀσπάζομαι, aspazomai] all your leaders [ἡγέομαι, hēgeomai] and all the saints [ἅγιος, hagios]. Those from Italy [Ἰταλία, Italia] greet you.” Again, a plurality of elders is indicated; there is no suggestion of a presiding bishop. It simply cannot be decided whether the author refers to Italian Christians residing in Italy, probably Rome, or those removed from its shores. The former view might support a Pauline authorship (cf. v. 23; II Tim. 4:9, 21), as does the style of the conclusion here; but the bulk of this epistle is quite un-Pauline in its character.

C. The gracious blessing, v. 25.

“[The] grace [χάρις] be with all of you.” This is not an abstract reference, but a commendation of new covenant grace. It encourages us to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16), and thus “be strengthened by grace” (13:9). This epistle commenced with a grand

declaration concerning how God “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son,” and thus of His “appointment” for making purification for sins and His climactic “session” beside His Father. Though the term “grace” was not explicitly employed in these introductory verses, yet the divine initiative described there, that designed to save sinful man, is but an eloquent introduction to the essential grace of the new covenant. Hence, how fitting it is that this epistle should also conclude with reference to this abiding, saving truth that is, according to Doddridge, such “a charming sound, harmonious to the ear.”