

Some Key Words of the Epistle to the Hebrews

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Salvation.

The word Salvation appears and reappears again and again in this epistle. It is one of the outstanding words of Hebrews, and, indeed, of the whole Bible. For if the question were asked, What is the great subject of the Bible? The answer might very well be given in that one word—Salvation. The careful reader of Scripture would find that this is the one word that confronts him at every important turn of events, when God has determined upon some new line of action.

To take a few outstanding instances. Although the word is not actually found in Gen 3:15, yet Salvation is what is implied. In the very face of man's failure and fall, and of Satan's apparent triumph, God promises full deliverance. At that important crisis, not only in Israel's history but the world's, when the Egyptians were seeking to recover their hold on their erstwhile slaves, the word reappears, and God's instructions to Moses are: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the Salvation of the Lord."

When the greatest crisis of all arrives, and the long promised Messiah, the Son of God, is about to appear, and His forerunner, John the Baptist, preaches, "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," the announcement is "And all flesh shall see the Salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). So Zacharias, in foretelling the mission of the child which had been given, says: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation" (ch. I: 76, 77).

So the Apostle Paul, later on, sums up his own mission in the following words: "For so hath the Lord commanded us saying, I have set Thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for Salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). And finally, when he definitely denounces to the Jews in Rome, who will not receive his message, that their day was over, he concludes by declaring: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the Salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles" (Acts 28:28). And so on and so on.

Now, as we have said, this word holds a very important and prominent place in Hebrews. It is a word of large importance, and its meaning must not be limited. Take the statement in the last verse of ch. 1: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." This refers to those who will inherit the world to come. Whatever service angels may render to the children of God today, yet this is not the dispensation to which primarily the above statement refers, but to a future day. Angelic ministry had equally characterized Israel's history. That is one reason why they are given such a prominent place in Heb 1. We have to do with One greater than angels. One Who cares for us and intercedes for us.

This angelic ministry will be taken up again in that coming day when Israel will once more be prominent, and back again in their own place in the land. Thus our Lord says to Nathaniel—"an Israelite indeed"—"Thou shalt see greater things than these . . . Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God, ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1: 51). Thus "heirs of salvation" refers to the time when God will establish a new order of things.

When we come to ch. 2, we have a further use of the word and with greater scope, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation.” Salvation regarded in various ways. We are told it “first began to be spoken by the Lord.” This refers to our Lord’s ministry on the earth, and would include all those works of mercy by which He delivered man from the bondage which held him. But these works referred mainly to man’s bodily infirmities—the blind, the lame, the deaf, the diseased, the dead—all found deliverance. What a testimony to the power of God and His salvation, and to the truth as to Christ’s mission and Person!

But we wish to look at this “great salvation” with regard to the present and our participation in it. It is now of an even higher character, in consequence of Christ’s finished work, and has more to do with the spiritual realm than the physical.

In ch. 2, the writer proceeds to unfold the many-sided aspects of this “great salvation.”

1. First, as regards our sins. This relates to the past. In v. 17, we read that Christ has made “reconciliation (or more properly propitiation) for the sins of the people.” Perfect satisfaction has been rendered to God on account of our sins. A holy, spotless life has been laid down—a life in which God had been infinitely glorified in every respect—and in this sacrifice is found all that is required. For the full penalty of sin has been borne, on the one hand, and the sweet savor of all that Christ is, has been rendered to God, on the other. So at the very opening of the epistle we read, “When He had by Himself purged our sins.”
2. But not only so, we are also delivered from the power of Satan and the fear of death. (See vs. 14, 15) This has been effected by the death and resurrection of Christ, and is part of this “great salvation.” The devil is said to have the power of death. This is the result of the fall. Man listened to the seductions of the tempter, and so came under his power. Satan seduced him, yet has the power to make man conscious of the penalty incurred—death. But the death of Christ has altered the whole situation. Instead of death being the penalty of man’s sin, it has become through the death of his Substitute, the greatest expression of God’s love. Instead of God being against the sinner, He can be for him, if only he believes—“the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” And since Christ, the sinner’s Substitute is raised from the dead, the triumphant question can be asked, Who is he that condemneth? Thus sin having been judged in the death of Christ, death has no terrors, the sting of death is gone. In Christ risen, the believer is placed beyond sin and death and Satan’s accusations. There is a complete answer to all.
3. But though we may not be afraid of death, we may be afraid of what is going to happen tomorrow. In other words, though we may know salvation as regards sin and Satan’s accusations, we may not know it as regards circumstances. But the salvation God offers includes deliverance from every kind of fear. The provision for this is found in the last verse of the chapter: “For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted (tried), He is able to succor them that are tempted (tried)” (v.18).

The Psalmist speaks not only of being saved out of all his troubles, but of being delivered from all his fear” (Ps 34: 4, 6). How much more then should we know what this means! We are not only justified by Christ’s blood, but we are “saved by His life.” His succor and His sympathy are available. We are borne upon His shoulders and His heart.

“He knows what direst trials mean,

For He has felt the same.”

Our place is at the Throne of Grace, His place is to save. He is the leader of our salvation, made perfect through sufferings—thus He is fully acquainted with all our trials and difficulties, and who could suppose that any trial or any difficulty is beyond the capacity of One Who has sat down at the right-hand of God? “His strength shall be ours on the road.” God is bringing many souls unto glory, and only when we reach that glory will our salvation be complete.

But this great salvation embraces “the world to come” when all will be put beneath the Son of Man. Then He will be “crowned with glory and honor” even as regards this scene, and there will be emancipation from all the evils which now oppress mankind, for Satan will be bound a thousand years. That is future. Salvation, in its full sense, as regards the present, means deliverance from every fear—even from the fear of man. (See ch. 13: 5, 16)

In ch. 5: 9, we read: “Being made perfect, He (Christ) became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” From a state of humiliation and suffering, He has passed to one of glory and perfection, and as we submit to Him in every way, this same condition will one day be ours.

How this is brought about ch. 7: 25 tells us. “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Thus we see how salvation enters into the whole thought and fabric of the epistle to the Hebrews, and at the close of ch. 9, it is the one word selected to describe the usherings in of all that the day of Christ’s appearing will mean—to ourselves, to Israel, to the nations, and to creation. That one word “salvation” sums up all that that future prospect includes—the blessed fruit of His sufferings. We thus see what a very comprehensive and outstanding words salvation is.

Perfect—Perfected.

These words are amongst the most prominent words of the epistle, and certainly amongst the most important. They refer (a) to Christ’s present position and office; (b) to His finished work; and (c) to the believer.

1. As To Our Lord Himself.

He has been made “perfect through sufferings” (v.10). This does not apply to His Person or to His character, but to His present position and office. Our Lord was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, but He is now crowned with glory and honor. In contradistinction to Adam who began at the top, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Man, went to the lowest point possible in enduring the cross, but has now been exalted to the highest. In Person and character, He was always perfect; though we are told “He increased in wisdom and stature (or age), and in favor with God and man.” But everything was in season and perfect in its time and place, just as the bud is in its season as perfect as the full blown flower.

But as regards office and Priesthood, our Lord qualified for this. "In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." He "was in all points tempted (tried) like as we are, sin apart." Thus He can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. His sufferings were of various kinds. He hungered; He was weary; He knew what physical pain meant; and He suffered in sympathy, as when He wept at the grave of Lazarus.

But He is now beyond all this. He has entered into His glory, and thus has become the Leader of our salvation. He is competent and qualified to save us, not only from our sins, but in all our infirmities and under all necessities.

"Touched with a sympathy within

He knows our feeble frame:

He knows what sorest trials mean,

For He has felt the same."

His perfected state in glory, where no want or woe or weariness can ever be felt again, is the pattern of what our condition will be when as the many sons, God is bringing to glory; we are as perfect as He is. The word "perfect" in this connection appears again in chapter 5: 9. "Being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him." Here, again, it is connected with what He suffered. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." He had never been in the place of obedience before. Others had obeyed Him. That path of obedience is to be ours. He learned obedience; we are to "obey Him." If we do, He will never fail us. His strength will be ours on the road, and we shall reach the same goal. The Son is "perfected for evermore" (chap. 7: 28, see margin).

2. As to His Work and Its Effect.

In chap. 7: 19, we read: "The law made nothing perfect;" and in chap. 10: 1 it is affirmed that the sacrifices of old "could not make the comers thereunto perfect." In contrast with this, we are told (v.14) that "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Wherein lies the difference?

The offerings under the law were not perfect. "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." God could find no pleasure in such sacrifices. They had no value in themselves, they had no moral worth, and consequently they were insufficient. The proof of this lies in the fact that they were "offered year by year continually." Had they taken away sins, then they would have ceased to be offered. The priests work was never done. There was a "remembrance again made of sins every year."

But Christ needed to offer Himself only once. He could say, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." That is, God found in Him all He wanted. All that He was personally and morally, gave infinite value to His sacrifice. All His love, His devotedness, and His obedience ascended to God as a sweet savor, and that at the moment of severest pressure under the judgment of God. And so we read that "through the eternal Spirit, He offered Himself without spot to God."

Such an offering never needs to be repeated, and Christ has taken His seat at the right hand of God in proof of it; and the Holy Ghost bears witness to it. The offering being perfect, the believer is “perfected forever.” That is, God sees us in relation to a perfect offering. It is not, of course, that we are perfect in ourselves. The sanctification referred to in vs. 10 and 14, does not refer to an inward sanctification nor to that which is progressive, but to an outward setting apart. We are set apart in relation to the accomplished will of God in the death of Christ.

3. The Believer Perfected Forever and Made Perfect.

In chapter 10, we read of the believer that he is perfected forever by one offering. But in chapter 13, we have the statement, “Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect.” The question might arise, Why do we need to be made perfect, if we are already said to be “perfected forever”? The difficulty is solved when we see that the passages quoted refer to two entirely different aspects of the subject. We are perfected forever in relation to a perfect work, once accomplished and which never needs to be repeated. In regard to ourselves and our practical life, we need to be made perfect. The first has to do with a work God has done outside of us—the work of the Cross. The other to a work inside—the work of the Holy Spirit. There is no contradiction therefore between perfected forever by one offering, and “Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13: 20, 21). This is continuous, the other is completed. There must be a work within to correspond with the work without. If, as to position, we are perfected forever, because Christ did the will of God in dying for us; then that must be our standard, and nothing less than the will of God must be our object.

“Perfect in every good work to do His will.” The last four words have their place and importance, for the supreme thing to seek is not merely to do what is good, but to do His will. It is not sufficient to ask whether a work is a “good work.” God asks of some what He does not ask of others; and He appoints to each the kind of work He gives each one to do. We cannot seek anything higher than to do His will, and anything short of this will not suffice. Our Lord Himself could place His own mission to this world on no higher plane than this: “Lo, I come to do Thy will O God.” And what gave to His death its value, was that it was doing God’s will. And as regards ourselves, the same thing is required, only in the particular form which applies to us. Only thus will our life be “well pleasing in His sight.”

There is another reference to this aspect of perfect in an earlier chapter. At the end of chapter 5, the writer speaks of two classes amongst God’s people. Those who are babes and those who are “of full age” or “perfect” (margin). That is, of full growth. He upbraids them for being in need of milk instead of solid food—never going beyond the beginnings of the doctrine of Christ. He had many things to teach them concerning God’s Son, but they were dull of hearing, and he found it hard to instruct them. Is it not much the same today? Many need to be taught “the first principles of the oracles of God.” And even those who would not consider themselves ritualists often give a place and importance to forms which they do not possess in Scripture, as if agreement as to an external rite were the beginning and end of everything. This is to remain in spiritual babyhood. May we go on to perfection, remembering that the inspired writer of the epistle to the Hebrews turns the attention of his readers again and again to Christ, and exhorts them to consider Him.

What glories he unfolds, beginning with chapter 1 all through! On every page “we see Jesus.”

“Sanctify” and “Sanctified”

Throughout the epistle to the Hebrews, these words occur many times, and have a very important meaning of their own. The word ‘sanctify’ is not always easily understood, as it is used in more than one sense in scripture. Sometimes it relates to an outward setting apart. What we understand more by the word “separation,” i.e., set apart for a holy purpose. Sometimes it refers to an inward work of the Holy Spirit and the effect of the truth. But never, we think, is it used in this sense in Hebrews. We have this aspect stated, though not in terms, in chap. 13: 21.

We believe the first occurrence of the word “sanctify” is in Ex 13: 2. “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn.” And, to show its meaning, the very words “set apart” occur in v.12, in the same connection. It was recognized that the firstborn, whether of man or beast, belonged to God. That “sanctify” referred to beasts proves that it referred to an outward setting apart.

In Exodus 29: 1 we find the word “hallow” used in the same sense in connection with Aaron and his sons being sanctified to minister unto God in the priests’ office. No question is directly raised as to the inward state of persons, and could not be, of course, with regard to animals. For in regard even to Aaron and his sons, Nadab and Abihu met their death, because acting in disobedience, though they were as much “sanctified” as all the rest.

Bearing this in mind, and recollecting that the words occur in the epistle to the Hebrews, it will help us to understand the statement which occurs in chapter 10, with reference to those who apostatize: “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing.” That is, treating Christ as a malefactor, justly put to death by the Jews, and therefore His blood worthless.

This does not alter the reality of sanctification for those who truly believe. But it does show it is possible to take an outward place of separation with no corresponding inward work. The words of our Lord come to mind, “Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

But let us now look at the subject from the point of view of reality. And we will refer to a verse in the last chapter first. In chap. 13: 12, we read: “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate.” Here we are informed that the blood was for all the people, not merely for the “elect,” showing that Christ’s blood has been shed for all. Whether all avail themselves of it is another matter. Among the Jewish nation there were three companies.

- Those who never did avail themselves of it.
- Those who appeared to do so, but afterwards apostatized.
- Those who did not draw back unto perdition, but believed to the saving of the soul (ch. 10: 39).

In what sense are they sanctified who truly believe? The blood of old was brought into the sanctuary. So in chap. 10, the apostle can say to those of whom he was “persuaded better things,” “Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus.” That is, our place inside the veil, our title to enter, which is the blood, is the measure of our sanctification. Our place on earth which corresponds to that is “without the camp.” We share Christ’s rejection here, but we also share the place of sanctified ones with Him in the holiest.

But before we come to that, let us see how completely we are sanctified. The word occurs in chap. 10: 14. “For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” Now here the words, “them that are sanctified” do not refer only to those who have attained a certain degree of inward holiness. The word sanctified must be looked at in relation to its context. Who then are the sanctified spoken of here? They are those set apart to God in all the value of the finished work of Christ. By that finished work, He has accomplished God’s will. Coming into the world He saith, “Lo, I come to do Thy will O God.” Sacrifices under the old dispensation had never given God what He wanted. Their value consisted in that they pointed on to a better sacrifice. Christ was that better sacrifice, and He gave God all He required, because He offered all that He was, and so we read: “He taketh away the first that He may establish the second.” And then it is added: “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (v.10) which means that all the will of God was accomplished in the sacrifice of Christ, because it was perfect, and it suffices once for all, because of the infinite glory of the Offerer, as is proved by the fact that it never needs to be repeated, and we who believe are set apart to God in all the perfection of that one offering—we are sanctified. Nothing more needs to be done, and nothing more can be given, and we are set apart according to the accomplished will of God. That is the meaning of “sanctified” in this connection. And so it is written: “For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Set apart to God in all the virtue of that perfect work, we are seen by Him in all its perfection. Consequently it says: “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” Apart from our sins; apart to God; identified with that one offering.

A Sanctified Company.

We would consider, before closing this article, the passage which contains the fullest and highest conception of what it means to be sanctified, because here we have the church viewed as a sanctified company. “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause, He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Saying, I will declare Thy name unto thy brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praises unto thee” (chap. 2:11, 12).

Christ has set Himself apart since His resurrection, for He never showed Himself to the world, and has no direct dealings with the world as once; but He is in relationship with a sanctified company. As He said in His prayer to the Father: “For their sakes, I sanctify myself, that they also might be truly sanctified.”

What a privilege is ours! The Sanctifier and the sanctified are one—one stock, one company; answering to Aaron and his sons. We are His brethren. The world has no relationship with Him, but believers have. He acknowledges us as His brethren—His Father is our Father, and His God our God. What privileges belong to such a company! But alas! how Christendom has

lost the sense of the true character of the Church, and of its greatness. It is occupied with anything—ritual, incense, services, ceremonies—except with Him Who alone is great and worthy, and with what He is able to do. If He is not ashamed of us, surely we need not be ashamed of Him.

My reader, do you know anything of His company? Does He declare the Father's Name to you? Is He in the midst where you meet? And is His presence owned? Does He lead the singing?

I do not ask if you belong to the sect of the Gathered Ones! That is easily possible—easy to mistake the counterfeit for the real, easy to learn the correct phraseology but be without the power, easy to meet according to scripture, but miss the Presence.

Have you ever realized what it means to be amongst the sanctified company referred to in Hebrews 2, where the Father is worshipped, and the Father's love is known, and your heart is filled with singing because you are in the Father's presence, in the company of Christ on resurrection ground? Have you tasted the joys of a resurrection scene where all is new?

It is Exodus 15 over again, only higher and better. We look back into the waters of death, and forward to the glory. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song." Only one greater than Moses leads our singing—He Who has known the floods of God's judgment and has vanquished all our foes. And He brings us into His own part and place—brings us as His brethren to His Father—He the Sanctifier and we the sanctified—and to know, too, the love that passeth knowledge.

"Love that on death's dark vale,

Its sweetest odors spread,

Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail

Redemption glory shed.

And now we see Him risen,

Who once for us hast died;

Seated above the highest heaven,

The Father's glorified."