



A Final Prayer for the Hebrew Christians and For Us

Series: *Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 13:20-25

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

For every pastor, there comes the point where having said all that God has given you to say, you must, with confident and expectant hope, entrust the Lord to bring forth fruit in the hearts and lives of your hearers. At the very best, any pastor is only a faithful messenger, a voice, a mouthpiece for the Lord. It is God that gives power to His word and brings forth fruit in the hearers. The writer of Hebrews understands this and so as he brings his letter to a close, this sermon in which he has exalted and praised and glorified Jesus Christ to the fullest, this sermon in which he has instructed, encouraged, challenged, confronted, and exhorted the Hebrew Christians to faith in and faithfulness to Christ, he prays to God that this church will respond to his words, to the Word of God that he has preached to them. And the prayer, itself, is really pretty simple. If you remove all of the descriptive and supporting phrases and clauses, the prayer is simply: **“Now may the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do his will. Amen.”** (cf. Hebrews 13:20–21, ESV)

Now, of course, as in any letter, he gives some personal information and sends greetings and makes requests. We see that in verses 22-25, **“I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you.”** (Hebrews 13:22–25, ESV) Just incidentally, I find it interesting that he speaks of this sermon, his **word of exhortation**, as being brief. If you were to read this letter out loud to a group of people, as would have been done, it would take just a little under an hour, so clearly, if we believe that this man was inspired to say all that he did, God’s idea of brief and ours is quite different, right? So, I would just, you know, encourage you to keep that in mind.

So, this pastor says a lot in this closing paragraph, but clearly the heart of it is his prayer for the church. He prays that this church, that had been wavering and waffling, that had been

weakened by persecution and trial, that had been rocked by defections, God would restore to fruitfulness and usefulness and make them able in every good thing to do His will, that is, that God would restore them to their central purpose and focus above all else, to bring glory to God in all that they did. It's quite a prayer, but the foundation of this pastor's hope is not in his own eloquence or oratory power of persuasion; it is not in the Hebrew Christians themselves. His hope is rooted in God Himself and I want us to see that this morning. This prayer reveals a deep trust in God that He will bring forth fruit from this sermon in the lives of this congregation that he loves so much. Just listen to it again. ***“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.” (Hebrews 13:20–21, ESV)*** What a fitting prayer for the Hebrew Church and for us. There is a lot to think about here, much to see, and the first thing I want for us to see is the foundation of this prayer.

The Foundation – Confident Certainty in God's Heart For His People The first thing that we need to see is that the pastor's prayer for the Hebrew church is established on the confidence that he has in God's heart toward them – a heart of peace and eternal love. Notice the title that he uses to refer to God as he is offering this prayer. He calls Him, ***the God of peace***, and that is not an insignificant statement. He could have called God: the God of glory, the Righteous Judge, the Holy God, the Lord of Hosts, any number of things, but he chooses to call upon Him as the God of Peace, the author of peace. That's important.

Now, most of us are familiar with the concept of peace – shalom – in the OT. It speaks of wholeness, soundness, well-being, where everything is just as it is supposed to be. Sin destroys that shalom and puts conflict and chaos in its place, chaos and conflict that causes us to try to be our own god, to control our circumstances and other people, to give ourselves to all manner of unrighteousness and try to excuse or cover it up, to try to prove our worth at the expense of others, seeking our own glory – all of which make us God's enemies. And that is what we are and all we ever will be except God act to forge peace between us and Him. God must forge peace between us peace will never exist. And he has in Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1-2 testifies to that fact, ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1, ESV)***

But there is more to this word, “peace,” than the OT concept of shalom – wholeness, soundness, well-being. The word for peace in this text is the Greek word “eirene” which means to join together. It comes from a root that was used to speak of gluing things together. The idea being that one something is glued to another, they are one, never to be separated. Do you see the significance of this? When the pastor calls God, **the God of peace**, he is saying something profound about our relationship to God and the reason for his confidence that God will answer his prayer. We are united to Him in Christ; do you see that? For that reason, what is good for us – eternally and spiritually good – is good for God in the sense that it brings Him glory. This prayer is good for us and it is pleasing to Him. We are at peace with God in Christ, the enmity gone and our lives inseparably joined together with Him. We are glued to God, joined to Him, and He is the one that has made that happen. That is the heart of God toward us. And the centerpiece of that union is God’s eternal covenant with us in Christ.

The Centerpiece – God’s Eternal Covenant in Christ The centerpiece of God’s heart to the Hebrew Christians and to us is the eternal covenant that He has forged with us in Christ. Now this is going to blow your mind, ok? God’s mind toward us, His heart toward us, despite our wickedness and sin, despite our rebellious hearts, has always been a disposition of desiring peace. The **blood of the eternal covenant**, of which this text speaks, was the sealing of the eternal covenant of peace that God made between Himself and sinful, fallen man in and through Jesus Christ. From eternity, God’s heart toward His chosen people has always been peace – it’s an eternal covenant. **“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4–5, ESV)** Christ’s incarnation, His coming for our sake, His fulfillment of the whole law of God on our behalf, achieving for us a full righteousness where we have failed, His receiving in our place the punishment we deserved for our sins, shedding His blood for us on the cross as the wrath-bearer for our sins, forged – **in time** – the peace between God and His elect which shall stand forever and ever, a peace that was in the mind and heart of God **from eternity**.

Christ’s life and death, His passion, is the power, the means by which, the promises of the New Covenant, inaugurated by the blood of Christ comes into effect, the promises foretold by Jeremiah and repeated by the writer of Hebrews in chapter 8 and 10. **“I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people... For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”** (Hebrews 8:10, 12, ESV cf. Heb 10:16-17) This is the heart of God toward us who have

abandoned the slavery of sin for faith in and surrender to Christ as Lord, for the Hebrew Christians and for His church.

And the proof that this covenant is in effect is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The God of Peace testified that this covenant of peace and life, this eternal covenant with His people, has been fully enacted, all requirements completed, everything necessary accomplished in that He has **brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus**. When our Savior arose, and even more when He ascended on high and sat at the right hand of God the Father, then before the entire created universe was declared that God is at peace with His people. **“(Jesus Christ) is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25, ESV)** God is our God and we are His people, one with Him, joined to Him, at peace with Him.

And more than that, His heart toward His church is revealed more wonderfully in this: God the Father has not only provided for us a Savior, but a Great Shepherd, **our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep**. Man, this just keeps getting better. Christ’s work, His ministry, did not end with His work of salvation, but He is our Great Shepherd. We know the words of Jesus in John 10, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (John 10:11, 27–28, ESV)** What is it that a shepherd does? He care for His sheep, feeding them, protecting them, leading them, correcting them, going before them.

But look, there is a specific reason that the pastor talks about Christ as the Great Shepherd of the sheep. The pastor talks about Christ as the Great Shepherd of the sheep because he is confident that Christ, by His sovereign will, has been intimately involved, has ordained, has shepherded everything that this church has been through. Everything. They have never been on their own – the hardships, the trials, the waffling and wavering, the persecution and the trial, the defection and departure of some, it was all purposeful, all designed in God’s inscrutable, unknowable, unfathomable will, to bring them to this point – to bring them to this point of decision, to this point of renewal, to this point of refocusing, of revitalization, of returning to devotion to Christ, of revival even. It is true of the Hebrew church and beloved, it is true of us. Look we cannot fully know God’s ways, why He does what He does, why He allows what He allows, but everything that we have been through, has brought us to this point, right? To this point of renewal. And the prayer that this pastor prays, the petition

that he makes for this Hebrew church, I can pray with him, for us, in whole-hearted agreement.

The Petition – Equipping and Enabling Look again at this prayer in light of all that we have seen. In light of his certainty of God’s heart toward this flock, he prays, **“May the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do his will.”** The meaning of the word that is translated as “equip” is used of mending torn nets, of putting a bone back into place, of restoring something so that it can realize its intended purpose. He is saying in effect, “Look, I know you guys have been through a lot. You’ve endured much and there will be more challenges in the future. But I know God’s heart toward you and I am praying that God will mend you, will put what is out of joint back into place, that God will restore you and pour out His goodness and grace on you so that you will do, once again, what you have been saved to do. I am praying that God will restore you so that you may do His will. God can put you back together so that you do His will no matter the past and no matter what you will face.” What a sweet, healing, life giving hope!

And the power for all of this, well, it isn’t in us, is it? We know that. The power for this is not in us but in Jesus Christ and the pastor knows that and that’s why he says, **May the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.** The power for this is in Christ, so that He gets the glory.

Now think this through with me. What do we know? God saves us by His sovereign grace, not because of our merit, not by anything that we do. Both saving faith and repentance are His gift, His work in our souls, and not anything that originates with us. Having saved us, He then blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He works in us, moving us and empowering us to do His will, and yet at the same time, we must respond to Him. Ephesians 2:8-10 makes this so clear: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** (Ephesians 2:8–10, ESV)

Each of us in Christ, the church as a whole, we have good works, a eternally designed walk of obedience – a divine job-description, if you will – gifts, abilities, lives to live of faithfulness and obedience, places to serve that we are to fulfill. God saved us by His grace, put us in this family of believers, and prepared the very works that we should do for Him –each one of us, individually and together – but we have to walk in them, trusting Him, by faith empowered by Jesus Christ. By faith we have everything that we need. Our aim, every day in every situation, in every relationship, in every responsibility, should be, “God I want to please You because of Your abundant grace that You have showered on me. Empower me, through Jesus Christ, to do that which is pleasing in Your sight.”

Now listen, the power to do what is pleasing to God will always be given to us through Jesus Christ – if we lay hold of Him, if we want it! The real question is, “Do we want this?” Do we want the presence and power of Christ to so control us that our lives are consumed with this desire – that Christ would be exalted where He belongs in our individual lives and in our corporate life together as the family of God that we would do His will in the big and small things?

Do we want this, because if we do, if we really long for this, we can and will have it and we will not be the loser. It is God’s will that we would live in such a way that pleases Him, that honors Him, that speaks well of the gospel, so that to Him and to Christ would **be glory forever and ever. Amen.** The will of God for every one of us is that we would use our lives to bring glory and honor to Him. Beloved, hear me when I say this, believe me when I say this: There is nothing more excellent, nothing more worthy, nothing more deeply satisfying than living to bring glory to God, living to display God’s grace, His power, His goodness, His mercy, His wisdom, His greatness. We are each vessels created by God to display something wonderful about God so that people will marvel at His glory. **“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16, ESV)** There is a greater purpose for which to live our lives than material wealth, protecting our reputation, the approval of men, satisfying our fleshly desires, taking the easy road, pursuing knowledge and experiences. The grand purpose of our lives is to live to the glory of Christ... **together.** We are part bigger than sixty, seventy or eighty years on this planet. If we really believed that, if this truth just captured our hearts, it would make all the difference in everything, but do we really want that? I do and I believe that you do, too. I really believe that. Let’s pray that this prayer would be answered in us, together. Let’s pursue this, together.

Let's Pursue This, Together How do we put feet to this prayer?

Pursue Peace – If our God is the God of Peace, then let us, together, pursue peace. Sin creates strife but holiness, godliness, love for Christ and for one another is the mother of peace. If God has forged peace with us and for us, then one of the identifying characteristics of the church should be peace. Charles Spurgeon said, **Brethren, it is essential that we have peace in the church. Whatever is the enmity without, we must love one another. If we do not walk in love, we certainly cannot have prosperity. God, alone can give peace to a church and He only gives it by sanctifying its members, stirring them up to good works, keeping them in sacred activity, making them fit to labor for Him, and working in them to do that which is well-pleasing in His sight. When you hear of disturbances in churches you need not so much seek to compose the differences among the members as to amend the men themselves. We would not gather so many thorns if the plants were fig trees. Wars and fights would never spring up among us if we were not carnal and unsanctified. If we were more spiritually-minded, we would be more ready to forgive and less likely to offend or to be offended. “Are you not carnal?” asks the apostle, “because one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Cephas,” and the like. But once let the God of peace sanctify each believer and then will every man seek his brother’s good and the things which make for peace.** Let’s pursue what makes for peace. Let us be a church that walks in grace.

Walk in Grace Let’s not merely say that we believe the gospel, let’s seek to live out the implications of the gospel in every area of our lives. ***“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*** (Titus 2:11–14, ESV) Let us walk in grace. Then, let us be a church that will

Pray in Confidence If this benediction from the pastor teaches us anything, we can pray in confidence based upon the character of God the Father. The pastor tells us that ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw***

near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15–16, ESV) We are a needy people and God has made it that way. We have no strength, no power, no might – not really. Spurgeon said, **“Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom. If you may have everything by asking in His Name, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is.”**

Glory in The Lord I want to close with these words, again from Charles Spurgeon because I cannot say it any better than the Prince of Preachers and I am not ashamed to say so. He says, “O you hearts that love Him, glorify Him first as the God of peace who had thoughts of peace and designs of peace and executed a covenant of peace on your behalf. Glorify Him who is at peace with all His believing ones today. He lays His thunder by. He hangs His bow in the cloud as the token of His love. He puts aside His javelin and His buckler—He loves, He smiles, He speaks in tenderness. He is the God of peace. Approach Him with holy delight. Adore Him. Glorify His name evermore. Then magnify Him, next, because He found for us a Shepherd. We were as sheep going astray and He sent His Son to shepherd us. He took from His own dear bosom His equal and eternal Son and sent Him here to gather us from the wilds and save us from the wolves. Glory be to You, You Shepherd of Israel and to Your Father who sent You to this end. Glorify Him, next, for the covenant. What mercy is this that God should enter into covenant with man! Adore Him for the blood of the covenant that He gave His only-begotten to die to make that covenant sure, that the purchased, blood-begotten possession might never be alienated from one of those for whom He laid down His glorious life. Glory be to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, you blood-bought sons of men! Lift up your hearts with gratitude and joy, and bless the Lord who brought back the dying Shepherd to live and reign for you. And then adore Him because the power which He exerted upon Christ (to raise Him from the dead) He is now exerting upon you. You are not perfect yet, but still in your measure you are fitted for every good work. In many ways the Lord is qualifying you for service. In some of you He is working to do and in others to suffer the good pleasure of His will. Bless Him for every grace received, for faith, however little, for love, even though it burns not as you would desire. Bless Him for every conquered sin. Bless Him for every implanted grace. Bless Him evermore.

Bless Him that He deals with you through Jesus Christ. Through the Mediator all good has come to us and through the Mediator it will still come until that day when He shall deliver up the throne to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all. Meanwhile we will glorify the (Lord Jesus) and extol the Father and the Holy Spirit. Even now we join with cherubim and seraphim and adore Him to whom all worship belongs.”

What a powerful prayer to end an amazing book. The pastor prayed that this church, that had been wavering and waffling, that had been weakened by persecution and trial, that had been rocked by defections, God would restore to fruitfulness and usefulness and make them able in every good thing to do His will, that is, that God would restore them to their central purpose and focus above all else, to bring glory to God in all that they did. This prayer that we have looked at this morning is a prayer that the Hebrew church desperately needed and we do to. The pastor was confident that God would answer that prayer for the Hebrew church and I am confident that God will answer that prayer for us. I am excited and hopeful for our future, beloved, but only because I am convinced of God's heart toward us, of His commitment to the covenant that He has established with us in Christ, and of His commitment to make His glory known through us as we pursue faithfulness in all things to Him. Let's pursue this... together.

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