

Nothing But Christ

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The Epistle to the Hebrews calls us to leave all for Christ. Whatever be the objects in which thus far we may have gloried, it is necessary to abandon them now, and to receive in their stead Jesus the Son of God. Angels give place to the Son: Moses, the servant of the house gives place to Christ, who is the Builder; Joshua, the ancient captain, that led into Canaan, gives place to Christ the Captain of salvation who is now conducting the children to glory; Aaron, the carnal and dying priest, gives place to the true Melchisedec who lives and serves in the heavenly temple for ever; the old covenant gives place to the new which Jesus administers; and at the same time the old carnal or earthly ordinances give place to the spiritual and efficacious ministrations of the heavenly Priest; finally, the blood of the victims gives place to the blood of Christ offered by the eternal Spirit.

Such is one of the principal characteristics of this divine and glorious Epistle, which thus annihilates all that in which man puts his confidence, in order to establish the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, as the object of glory and only refuge of poor souls.

But this was a doctrine hard to bear, particularly for a people such as the Jews, who had in so many ways put their confidence in the law and legal righteousness. Amongst us also at the present day when, amidst so many religious forms, men propose with authority other foundations of confidence than Jesus, and other men blindly receive them, we have to consider carefully what are the bases of this doctrine. In these days, when all creation groans, the soul thirsts, after this simple gospel which preaches to us the perfect satisfaction of Jesus; and it is the design of the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Hebrews to unfold to the eager soul the reasons for which it can thus embrace Jesus as all that forms the object of its confidence and glory. This Epistle declares what authorises it thus to appreciate Jesus — to estimate Him as having no equal — to judge that He, is in a word the one and only stay of the poor sinner.

But how does the Holy Spirit assure us of this truth by this Epistle? How does He show us that it is our own salvation to leave every other prop in order to have none but Christ, alone for our stay? He shows it to us in the only way in which it, could be done, — by presenting to our soul the appreciation which God makes of Christ.

That which warrants the value I am to attach to Christ is that God has before this made known to us the worth which He possesses. If my soul confides exclusively in Him, I cannot be grounded in so doing but by seeing the foundation of Israel's confidence at the time of the blood-sprinkling in Egypt. God had prescribed this blood: such is my divine and sure-warrant; and the Epistle to the Hebrews it assures it to me. It speaks to me of the high value God sees in Christ; it tells me how clearly, simply, and exclusively He has laid upon Christ in all that can relieve the soul. Such is the reason why this admirable Epistle lingers with so much complacency upon Christ in all His present relations with us, in all the ministrations He accomplishes for us. There is what explains the numerous quotations (Heb. 1) which establish Jesus far above angels; there is what explains the glorious commentary which Heb. 2 gives on the dignity of the Son of man, the declarations of His great superiority over Moses, (Heb. 3) the abundant and varied testimonies (Heb. 4) borne to His priesthood, supplying in quite another way that wherewith Aaron had been honoured or what the law conferred (Heb. 7). There is the reason why He is represented as anointed and consecrated by an oath, and seated in the heavens in the midst of the sanctuary, as well as at the right hand of Majesty (Heb. 8).

In all this we have the hand of God Himself exalting the merit of Jesus, weighing Him in His dignities known in heaven and on earth. The soul is invited in the most pressing manner to come and be present at this grand work, at this divine proof of the merit of Jesus. Just so the congregation of Israel was commanded to wait at the door of the tabernacle, in order that each for himself should contemplate and know how pleased with the priest God was; so that each, however large the congregation was, should have personally, individually, all liberty to resign himself to the care and intercession of Aaron (Lev. 8, 9.) It was a matter which concerned each individually; and the same liberty should also appertain to every one of us individually.

The soul is a thing which concerns ourselves; for it is written that "none can by any means redeem his brother;" and it is ourselves who should know the divine remedy, ourselves who should possess it. It is not a faithful brother who can hear and believe for us; it is not a church which can represent us; we must be at the door of the tabernacle ourselves; we have ourselves to know the worth of Jesus in the eyes of God, and the Epistle to the Hebrews is commissioned to reveal this secret in the holy of holies. It is addressed, not to a certain order of privileged persons, but to us all, in order that there we may each contemplate Jesus, such as He is there, weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and that we may gather the blessed fruits of this ensured supply which has been stored in Him. It is not the question in this epistle of a particular church, nor of a class of privileged persons, as is very often thought and said; but it is the voice of the Spirit addressing itself directly to the soul, in order that it may learn to know for itself Him in whom God has placed the help which is necessary to it. In this Epistle, our soul breathes, in some sort, the perfume of the plain which the Lord has blessed, and faith breathes the perfume of Christ; it enjoys Christ as God Himself enjoys Him and we have the divine light in our hearts, we are converted from darkness to the light of God. In a word, God becomes our own.

There is yet another thing in this Epistle: it makes us understand in what characters God has set this exclusive value on Christ; and these characters are such as fully answer to our necessities, The victim or the sacrifice, Heb. 9: 14; the priest, Heb. 7; the prophet or teacher, Heb. 2: 1-4; the captain who brings His own to glory, Heb. 2: 10; and in all these qualities, as in each of them separately, we see Him estimated in the most exact manner by the hand of God, and we find Him perfectly what it is needful He should be, for persons so wretched as we are. According to God, Jesus is a victim perfectly suited to purify, a priest perfectly suited to intercede, a prophet perfectly suited to instruct, and a guide perfectly suited to transport us safe and sound unto glory. There is that precisely which we need. This Epistle traces our book of travels, in leaving our place of exile as sinners, up to our dwelling in glory, where we shall be in the companionship of Jesus. Yes, we clearly read there our rights, and we rest on Jesus as our Victim, our Priest, our Prophet, and our Guide, because God has given Him all that is possible of worth in these qualities with which He is endowed for us, and God has appreciated Him because of His work, because of His person, because of His obedience, because He has shed His blood and fully accomplished the will of God for us. There, in this Epistle, the soul may read its titles, not according to the estimate which itself makes of them, but according to that which God makes of Christ.