

The final part of the discussion of Christ's perfect sacrifice presents what the author believed was the failure of the old covenant through temple sacrifices, but now replaced by the better covenant. Frances Taylor Gench speaks of the two covenants as different in two respects.

First, Jeremiah had announced an inner covenant, an experience of one's inner being. (Heb. 8:10-11). This would mean a cleansing of the conscience, something the old covenant was unable to do because the repetition of the old sacrifices amounted to a reminder of sin (10:3).

Secondly, the new covenant effectively forgave sins. The sacrifice of Christ brought about the new reality that Jeremiah envisioned. However, the prophet did not say how the new covenant would do this.

*Hebrews* went on to explain that with our conscience no longer burdened with guilt, we were free to enter into a new and intimate relationship with God. With confidence we could go on living faithfully and so engage in true worship. (9:14 cf. John 4:23-24)

As a still faithful Jew, this author believed that there could be no new covenant without the shedding of blood. Because of the sacrifice of Christ we now have a new and permanent relationship with God (9:18-28). With our commitment in faith, God intends that we have the power to advance in moral perfection. This gift of forgiveness has definite implications for our behaviour every day.

The traditional theological term for this personal growth is *sanctification* or making us holy people. This is not something that can be mandated by any political or institutional authority. It must take place within each person in his or her own time.

The most egregious violation of this principle was the Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell following the English Civil War of 1642-49 and the Puritan colony in

Massachusetts. Any religious or political institution that tries to exercise mandatory moral and spiritual control over its members and wider community similarly becomes unjust and immoral.

Gench declares further that it would be "a misuse of Hebrews, and grossly insensitive as well, to declare to our Jewish neighbours that our experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ renders their religion and their covenant obsolete." Thus *Hebrews* expresses a difficult view for us to hold in our time. Sadly, it happens all too often. We live in a more multicultural world where a plurality of religious experiences, traditions and convictions exist side by side. The value of *Hebrews* for us, however, was more sophisticated than a simple good and bad situation.

To quote Gench in detail:

*Still, we may rejoice with Hebrews that the reality of human sin has been finally and effectively dealt with by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We may rejoice that we need not be paralyzed by the guilt and power of sin. We too may approach God through Jesus Christ, find our consciences cleansed, and experience forgiveness at the deepest level of who we are. We may embrace the good news that God both forgives and forgets, thereby freeing us to grow in grace and get on with the business of living in faithfulness to God's for human life.*

Thus we see that by wrestling with the tensions of the Jewish Christian community toward the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, *Hebrews* has given us a way to bridge the gulf between our different periods of history. *Hebrews* also shows us how even the most traditional faith stances may evolve as new insights lead us into new truth while not totally displacing the old. The writers of scripture were right about human failure and sin in their context, but did not determine how we should see the discipline of faith in the context of our time.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

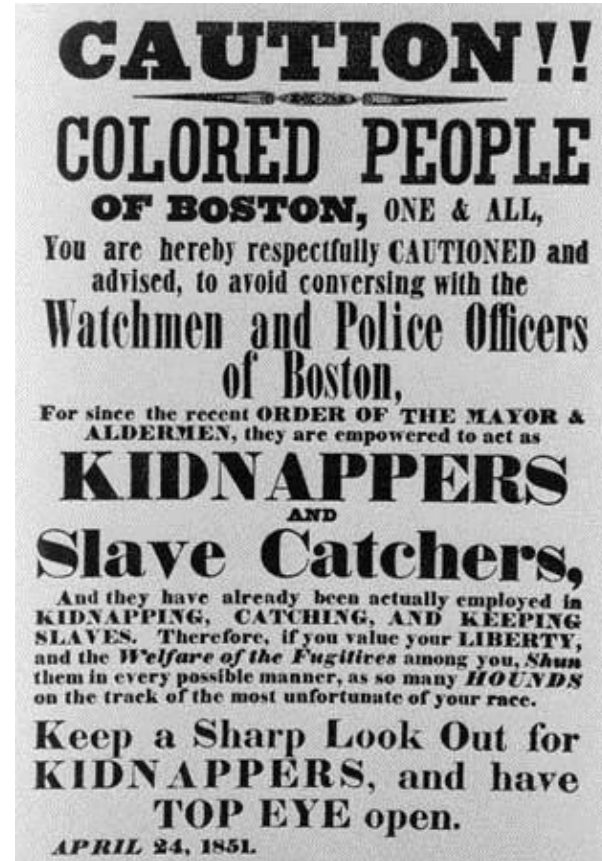
1. The advertisement for a lecture by a well-known scholar read “*Hebrews and the Rise of Anti-Semitism.*” How does this affect your attitude toward the letter as we have it in our scriptures?
2. For many centuries Christians called Jews “Christ-killers,” confined them to ghettos, forced them to convert on pain of exile or death, and often massacred them. How can we deal with or overcome these dark shadows on our history? How would this affect our treatment of the Native People of Canada?
3. How valid is Professor Gench’s view that Christian faith in Jesus’ self-sacrifice gives us a final and effective way of dealing with the guilt and power of sin?
4. In recent years several attempts have been made to change the way of speaking of sin, both personal and corporate. How important are the concepts of sin and the need for salvation in our spiritual experience?

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Lay upon our hearts, O God, where we need to change our ways that we may truly live to make Jesus Christ known as the Saviour and Lord of the world. Amen.**

## 13 - THE PERFECT SACRIFICE – Part 3

### Hebrews 10:1-18



## OPENING PRAYER

**Learning the ways of Jesus, God, may our own faith become more concrete and specific, and our own experience broader and deeper. Amen.**