



GRACE CHURCH

Remembering

Hebrews 10:1-18

Grace Church | 1.22.23

Recently I was told by someone that they were confused why we believe the Lord's Supper is simply a "memorial". That is, their understanding of communion was that it was just a way to commemorate Jesus' death, but has no real spiritual power. To them, such an act would be empty. But they were mistaken—while some Christians believe that the Lord's Supper is merely a memorial—it is not the official position of our church. In fact our teaching statement clearly says that the supper is where the church "spiritually communes together with Christ in a covenant meal."¹ In other words, what happens at the supper is that we really are invited to the table to sit and eat. We really experience intimacy and communion with God through Christ's shed blood and body. Not physically—as if we are transported to a different dimension—but spiritually, which is just as real. And yet, the way we meet with God there in the supper, although more than just a memorial, it's actually *through* remembering, *through* the image of Jesus' death swelling in our minds and hearts, that we meet God. What Paul says happens in the Supper is that we "proclaim the death of Jesus". It's this proclamation of Jesus, this association with Jesus and his death, that says: "we have been crucified with Christ". So then it makes sense that on the night when he was betrayed, right before his death, Jesus took the bread and wine and told his disciples: "do this in remembrance of me". Remembrance then is more than just thinking of Jesus' death—it's recalling, and being renewed and transformed by the truth that his death is for *you*, that Jesus is one with *you*, and we are living into his story. It is in that kind of remembrance that God meets us with his grace.

A widow or widower who visits the grave of their lost loved one gets this. There in the cemetery they are remembering—but they are also communing together. As they recall all the joys of their marriage union, they feel them again in their heart, and if they are Christians, they know a day is coming when they will see them perfected. Remembrance is the key to experiencing their covenant with one who is not physically with them. How much more is it with Jesus—who is not lost to us and is not dead but alive in us through his Holy Spirit?²

So every week when we partake in the Supper we acknowledge that there is incredible power in remembrance. Remembrance is not just a mere memorial—it's the way to open our hearts again to the grace of God, the way to meet and commune with Christ. Remembrance has spiritual power to lift us towards hope.

¹ www.gracewaco.com/teaching

² See J. Todd Billings, *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table*



But remembrance also has the power to crush us with despair. The very thought of past pain or suffering can take us into a tailspin. Visiting the grave of a loved one only brings hope when we view their life through the lens of the grace of God. At the graveside, a marriage defined not by grace and covenant love but by selfish motives or abuse would not be pleasant to remember. If all we brought to the table of the Lord was a remembrance of our failings, the wine would be only bitter, and not sweet.

It's into this dual-sided power of remembrance that we enter into Hebrews 10 today. This text begins and ends with remembrance—but two drastically different kinds.³ In **verse 3**, there is a “reminder of sins”, and in **verse 17**, there is a “remembering of sins no more”. When we think about our life in Christ, when we remember who we are and what we've done, which is it that we remember? Our sins, or our forgiveness?

Let me help you today to answer that question. Far, far too many of us, far too often, live in remembrance of our sins. We live haunted. But as we approach the Lord's table today, we don't have to stop there. We can have a better memory, a transformative one, a hopeful one. So let's consider these two memories.

The Memory of our Sins (1-10)

Think back to one of the main reasons that the book of Hebrews was written. It was likely written to a small house church, possibly in Rome or elsewhere in Italy, who had endured persecution for their faith and were anticipating more. So their temptation was to go back to the Jewish roots of their faith—accepting Jesus as just a prophet or less than God, making Christianity a little less offensive—and returning back to the sacrificial system. This way, they could avoid persecution from the Romans, be accepted by the Jews, and hopefully deal with their sins as well. So one of the main thrusts of Hebrews is convincing them, and us, that following Jesus is really worth it, really better.

Which you see again in **verse 1-2**. Chapter 10 is for us a fitting place for some remembrance, because in these first 18 verses the author of Hebrews is recapping for us some of what we have already seen in chapter 9. Jesus's blood, remember, is not like the blood of animals that were sacrificed in the old system of gaining access to God, here in **verse 1** called “the law”. The primary difference is that “the law”, or the old sacrificial system, was simply a “shadow” of good things to come. In other words, it was a kind of object lesson for the Israelites. Every time they offered a bull or goat or ram or lamb on the altar, they were shown the cost of their sins against God. Because of their sin, something had to die, blood had to be spilt.

³ I am indebted to Timothy Haupt at FBC Nixa, MO for pointing out this connection and sparking my central image.
https://clovermedia.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/78ccf14349/attachments/_Hebrews_10.1.18__Do_This_In_Remembrance_of_Me.pdf



So although it may be tempting to return back to the old sacrificial system, as a “shadow”, it can never accomplish what is really needed to stand before God. Not just a clean slate or a pacified deity, but *perfection*. The evidence given in **verse 2** that this system of the Law can never perfect those who draw near to God is in the fact that it keeps going. Its lack of finality reveals its insufficiency. If it really perfected, then the worshippers in that system would have stopped offering! It would have been complete.

But instead, they kept going. Why? Because they also intuitively knew what **verse 4** assumes: “It is *impossible*” for animal blood to take away sins. They lived with a “consciousness” of their sins that provoked them to continue sacrificing, day after day, year after year. But deep down it was no secret that this kind of ongoing sacrifice and penitence was ineffective. God made it no secret. In Isaiah 1 God tells his people: “I have had enough of burnt offerings... bring no more vain offerings.” In Hosea 6, God says: “I hate, I despise your feasts, even though you offer me [your sacrifices], I will not accept them.”

Wait a second: didn’t God command the Israelites to do this? Why would he command them to do something he hated? He did it not to deal with their sin, but to teach them—to show them the weight of their sin and cause them to turn to him in faith and obedience, not first to sacrifice. When the Israelites trusted their sacrifices to save them, and not God, they missed the point, and it was those sacrifices God hated. The point they missed was simple: the blood of animals is not effective for clearing away sins.

The author of Hebrews shows us more evidence of this by using a quotation from Psalm 40 in **verse 5-7**. Interestingly enough, he attributes this quotation to the pre-incarnate Christ, that “as Jesus was coming” into the world, he knew the reason for his coming was not to make sacrifices and offerings. It’s as if we are picturing the dialogue of Heaven. He knew the Father took no pleasure in seeing animals sacrificed that were completely insufficient. But rather, the Father prepared *his body* for sacrifice.

The main thrust of the argument here is simple: every other sacrifice of atonement for sin besides the work of Christ only ever leads to, **verse 3**, a *remembrance of sins*. And while none of us are tempted to go back to offering bloody animals, we are all tempted to stop simply at the remembrance of our sins and never take them to where they are really dealt with. If we are not careful, the faith we profess can become nothing more than a constant reminder of our insufficiency. Why do you think some people hate church so much, hate Christians so much? Because no one wants to be constantly reminded of their failures, and what they see us doing is making vain sacrifices to take away our sin, which only increases its remembrance.

This week in our community groups we asked a very difficult question: “What parts of your life are you attempting to hide from God or others, afraid of anyone finding out?” Or in other words, “what sin in your life do you struggle to believe is really forgiven”? It could be something you have done, or something you have not done. But we all have those times, not all the time but sometimes, when we remember those parts of ourselves that we hate the most, those actions or inactions that we



are least proud of. And what I want to ask is: how do we deal with it? How do we live with ourselves? Well I can think of all sorts of ways: self-deprecation, depression, distraction, laziness, busyness. Maybe we go back to familiar sins like pornography or other sexual sins, because we are really trying to bury our pride or our selfishness or our guilt with something like lust, which feels more manageable or understandable. We can confess to our friends how lustful we are because it's easier than confessing how conceited we are. Oftentimes we put pressure on others—spouses or friends—we think: “if they can just accept me, forgive me, then I can live with myself!” Perhaps even more common for many of you is to simply achieve more: better grades, better performance, more praiseworthy actions. Perhaps, you think deep down, achieving more will finally drown out that insecure, uneasy conscience!

What are we doing, when we try to deal with our sin in these ways? It's like using the blood of bulls and goats. It's living under the law. And none of it—whether half-hearted confession, distraction, depression, acceptance by others, praise of achievement—can take away sins. It's *impossible*. Instead, all you are doing, in trying to bury your sin, is bringing more opportunities to remember it. Like getting away with murder—no one else may ever know what you did, and you can find all sorts of ways to try to bury it, to live with yourself—but you remember. There is no way you forget.

Hear me very clearly: God is holy, and in his law he demands total holiness. That standard never changes, that goalpost never moves. You want to be with God? You must be perfect. But the solution to your problem, namely that you aren't perfect, is not in the law. It's not in any self-sacrifice you can make to prove yourself or cleanse yourself. It is *impossible* to take away sins by just trying to do what is right. As you attempt to clear yourself, you will only be reminded of your failure even more. By trying to forget our sin, we only increase our guilt. I'm reminded of that little poem often attributed to John Bunyan:⁴

Run, John, run, the law commands
But gives us neither feet nor hands...

So what do we need? Well, you know what we need. We need a better memory. We need a remembrance that goes beyond our memory of our sin. We need Jesus, who in **verse 7** does the will of the Father and in **verse 10** we see that his will does something for us: *sanctifies* us once for all.

What does it mean to be “sanctified”? It means to be holy, pure, perfect. Past tense: we *have been* sanctified. Or, as the second part of that poem puts it:

Run, John, run, the law commands
But gives us neither feet nor hands,
Far better news the gospel brings:

⁴ It actually seems unlikely Bunyan wrote this. But we don't really know who did.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/run-john-run/>



It bids us fly and gives us wings.

What is sanctification? It's like flying. It's freedom. Which brings us to our second remembrance:

The Memory of our Savior (11-18)

Verse 11-13 gives us a better memory, a memory of Jesus, to draw to our minds when we are clouded by the memory of our sin. He is not like the priests who stands daily, back and forth always making sacrifice. Rather, he has done his work already, it is already complete. This is why he is envisioned as “sitting down”, not because he is taking a well earned break, or because he is waiting to see what our next move will be, but because his work is done. There is nothing left for him to do. His work that is complete is summarized in **verse 14**: by offering himself, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Now we get a better memory to zero in on. But we have to be careful to clarify here. **Verse 10** said we “have been sanctified”, and now **verse 14** says we “are being sanctified”. So which one is it? Clearly we still sin—so it sounds strange to call us “holy and sanctified”. But yet, in **verse 14** the author says we are “perfect”!

Both of these realities can be true at the same time: we can be at the same time perfect, holy, and sanctified, while also a work in progress. The reason this is the case is because of the *efficacy* of Jesus' sacrifice. This is what the author of Hebrews is screaming at us who are hard of hearing: it's done! It's once for all, it's not repeated! Efficacy is “the ability to produce a desired or intended result.” If the goal of a basketball team is to hit 3 pointers, then they would be totally efficacious when they hit 100 percent of the threes they take. So, pardon my simple illustration, but *Jesus never misses*. His sacrifice is 100% efficacious—it always produces its desired result, which is your sanctification. So although you are *still being sanctified*, and you are a work in progress, it is truthful to talk of it as complete. If Jesus' blood really is once for all, then it is no lie to say that your perfection is guaranteed—because his perfect blood, fueled by his perfect and indestructible life, never fails.

What does it mean to be “perfect” in Jesus? It's far more than just a clean slate. This is the witness of **verses 15-16**. See, in Jesus' new covenant, the law of God is written on our hearts. When we are totally complete and perfect with him in the new heavens and the new earth, we won't just be forgiven—we will likewise never pass up any opportunity for holiness. And so even now, God sees you as *perfect* in Christ. It's not just that your worst actions are forgiven—but that all the times you could have done more, shouldn't have settled—all your inactions are perfected. To have the law written on your heart is to feel true conviction of sin—and one day, to never break God's law at all.

All of this leads us to the incredible second remembrance or **verse 17**, which is more like a disremembrance. Notice it's not that God “forgets” our sins, as if he sweeps them under the rug. No, God's lack of remembering our sins is not due to problems in his divine filing system. The



reason God can say that he “remembers our sins no more” is because his memory, as ours can be too, is focused not on our sin, but on Christ’s forgiveness. So **verse 18**, when there is true, final forgiveness, there is no more offering, no more remembering our sins.

Some of you may be wondering: “is this too much grace”? Is my church teaching me never to think about my sin? Well, obviously not. Every week, even in our liturgy, we confess our sins, we bring them to remembrance. But we bring them to our minds not so we can plead with God to forgive us, not so we can offer up something we have, some work or sacrifice, in order to get back on his good side. No, we don’t bring our sins to God to magnify our guilt, but to magnify his grace. Our repentance is necessary, but it is not the cause of our forgiveness. We are forgiven not because of our work, but Jesus’;⁵ We bring our sins to God not so they can be remembered, but so we can remember Christ’s sacrifice, once for all.

As a Father, I am called to exercise discipline in my home alongside my wife. I have a high standard for my children. I want them to learn that obedience is best, that God is glorified through their obedience. And so sometimes, at the end of the day, I am laying in bed with my son, and I go through his day. I want to point out those times where he disobeyed, I want to teach him that disobedience doesn’t profit him anything. But when all of the teaching is done, if I am operating in the grace of God, what should I say? Do better tomorrow? I’m watching you? No—I say, “I love you. I am so glad you are my son.” And then I welcome him into my arms and my care. If I am a Father full of grace, and the teaching is done, I remember his sins no more. Not because I am forgetful, but because they are forgiven. If even earthly fathers know enough love to forgive, how much more our heavenly Father, whose love is perfect?

Friends, God is still sanctifying you. He will still teach you, and discipline you. He wants you to confess your sin—but not so he can condemn you. In Christ and the efficacy of his work, you are perfect. The real discipline is over with, the final discipline. It happened once for all two thousand years ago on the Roman Cross where his Son shed his perfect blood and died so that you could be welcomed into the family. And the Father comes to you, at the end of every day, and he doesn’t say: “do better tomorrow”. He doesn’t say “watch out, I’m keeping a log of your sins and your law-keeping.” He says: “I love you. I’m so glad you are my son, my daughter. Come into my arms and rest.”

So the invitation now to the Lord’s Supper is just that. It’s a remembrance—but not of our sin. It’s a remembrance of Jesus’ perfect, once for all sacrifice, that is calling us to communion with God. Why hold onto your sin, when God has dealt with it? All who are in Christ, come now in remembrance of him, free and forgiven.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1541 edition (Banner of Truth), 307.

