

Hebrews 2:14-18
“Reasons for Hope”

Introduction:

In the prior passage the author was speaking about how Christ was not ashamed to call those He came to redeem His brothers and sisters. In this passage, the author goes on to elaborate upon why the incarnation was a necessity, and what Christ has become for God’s people because of it.

I. The Purpose of the Incarnation: (vs.14-15)

This passage opens with the words, “*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same*” (vs.14a). The reference to the redeemed as “*children*” comes from Isaiah 8:17-18 which the author had just quoted in the previous verse. In showing that the family connection between the Messiah and God’s people was anticipated in the OT; the author now uses the reference to that connection to speak about the means through which that connection was established. In order for the Messiah to become our brother, He had to become a flesh and blood human being. The above translation of the first part of this verse misses a key idea; specifically, that in the original text the author conveys that having flesh and blood is what we have in common as human beings. However, the Messiah adopted flesh and blood as a choice to become something He was not before. Therefore the incarnation was a purposeful choice to embrace a new existence.

The author then adds, “*that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil*” (vs.14b). This is a purpose clause and explains why the Messiah became a flesh and blood human being. The purpose was that He might die. This means that the idea of flesh and blood that the writer is focusing upon; is mortality. The Second Person of the Trinity could not die, being immortal and indestructible. Therefore in order to accomplish the redemption He had to become mortal, and mortal in a way that made Him one with those He intended to save.

The writer indicates that this salvation involved the goal that He “*might destroy the Devil*”. The tense of the verb and the flow of thought indicate that Jesus had first resolved to do this at some point in the past and then sometime after than He had accomplished it. But in what sense has the devil been destroyed; after all, other portions of the NT speak of the devil as a real ongoing threat (Eph.6:11; II Tim.2:26; I Pet.5:8). The Greek word translated as “*destroy*” does not mean to annihilate or eradicate, it means to render something or someone powerless, or ineffective. The author then goes on to explain the specific way in which the Messiah would render the devil powerless through death; it was in regard to the power of death that the devil possessed. This might seem to imply that the devil can kill whomever he chooses. However, other passages make it clear that a person’s death, like everything else that happens is determined by God alone (Eph.1:11). Therefore, whatever power the devil might have, he does not have the

power to kill anyone he chooses. We gain further clarification regarding the devil's power in the word the author chose here. The Greek word translated as "*power*" implies authority or control over something (rather than strength or force).

Therefore since the devil does not really have control or mastery over when a person dies, something else must have been meant. A popular interpretation is that this refers to Satan's role in the Fall; essentially murdering mankind by luring Adam and Eve into sin so that they and their descendants would come under the penalty of death that God had decreed would result from disobedience. Though this is an attractive option it does not do justice to what the author says here. The author speaks of Christ taking this power away from the devil at His crucifixion. However, the Fall was not an ongoing event, it happened once in the past. Therefore, at the time of the incarnation, causing the Fall was no longer something that the devil had the power to do. Nor could it be said that he had control over the ongoing consequences of the Fall; rather those consequences were under God's control. The fact is that the author himself elaborated on this point, explaining what power it was that Jesus took away from the devil in His redemptive death. The author, wrote, "*and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" (vs.15). Therefore the power the devil wields in regard to death relates to humanity's fear of death. In the ancient world the greatest fear concerning death was what would follow after death; either the thought of punishment or oblivion. The author explains that the devil uses the fear of death as a way of enslaving mankind. The idea is that the devil uses the threat of death to manipulate human beings. He uses humanity's fear of death to influence people to disobey God. In the case of these Hebrew Christians, he was attempting to convince them to leave the faith by scaring them with the thought that continued fidelity to Christ would eventually lead to their deaths. This is an example of the devil's work at large. He seeks in general to fill us with fear regarding what we will lose if we obey God; and thus through those fears induce us to disobey God. But the author points out that the believer has been freed from this bondage because now we know what comes after death. We anticipate that death is not the end, or the doorway to punishment; it is a portal to God's presence and eternal blessedness. This is true with all our fears; the antidote is faith in the promises of our good and gracious God; trusting that obedience is in our best interest in light of God's goodness.

II. The Uniqueness of the Incarnation: (vs.16)

Having explained the purpose for the incarnation, the author next reminds his readers that "*indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham*" (vs.16). The question that we must immediately ask is what this has to do with the author's flow of thought? One might wonder if this is a return to the contrast that the author has made between Christ and the angels. However, the problem with that conclusion is that the contrast is not between Christ and the angels; rather it is a contrast between angels and redeemed human beings.

One might also be tempted to explore the reason why Christ did not give aid to angels. As the sort of aid that the author is referring to, it is clear from the context

that the aid is the provision of redemption from sin; which Christ never provided for angels, but which He did provide for the saints. The problem with seeking to answer why God did not redeem fallen angels is that this passage and in fact all of Scripture is silent on the issue. One can speculate, but there is no way to know whether or not one has arrived at the truth. Therefore, since the author does not seek to answer the question of why Christ did not redeem fallen angels; here it is best to ignore that question and instead turn to discovering why the author did include this statement.

Since no further elaboration is offered, it is best to conclude that the author's point is the obvious one. God simply did not provide redemption for the angels, and thus He is not obligated to provide redemption for any fallen creature unless He chooses to. Therefore, the fact that God did choose for His Son to become human in order to redeem humans means that God, motivated by gracious love, did this not because He had to, but because He wanted to. The lesson then is that this redemption only exists because of the unmerited, grace of God, and for no other reason.

The title "*seed of Abraham*" is employed because this is written to a Jewish Christian group, and is meant to reinforce the point that what these believers are considering departing from is what the entire revelation of the OT pointed toward. In its NT context it refers to all believers in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile (Gal.3:28-29).

III. The Goal of the Incarnation: (vs.17-18)

Next, the author returns to where he had left off in his flow of thought at the end of verse 15, and writes "*Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren*" (vs.17a). But why was it necessary that Christ become human? The author answers this question as he continues, "*that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people*" (vs.17b). In other words the only way that Christ could be the high priest God intended Him to be was for Him to become human. The necessity lay in the basic principle of representative mediation (which is what a priest does). To represent someone as a priest, the would-be priest must be one of that group that they represent. In order to represent humanity, a priest must be human, and thus Christ had to be human. That Christ was both merciful and faithful characterizes the sort of high priest that He chooses to be. One who has genuine compassion for God's people, and who fulfills the role in accordance with God's requirements.

The expression "*in things pertaining to God*" refers to the elements of worship that are involved in being the high priest. The main function of these priestly activities is to open up our way to God so that we might truly come into His presence.

In order to open up access to God's presence the high priest was responsible once a year on the Day of Atonement to make offerings that were to atone for the sins of the people. To "*propitiate*" means to gain forgiveness and to satisfy the anger of God that was aroused by the profound evil of our sins. The OT offerings pictured

what was required, but those offerings did not actually atone for sin (Heb.10:4). Instead, these offerings were symbolic, looking forward to when this would be accomplished by the ultimate high priest, Christ, whose offering of His own blood would truly pay the moral debt of death on behalf of God's people.

The author then goes on to explain the ramifications of Christ's work of propitiation; "*For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted*" (vs.18). The reference to Christ's temptation is made with a singular participle. So it is either referring to all of Christ's temptations in a collective sense, or to one temptation. Most likely given the context, here the focus is on the one temptation in Gethsemane. This makes sense in light of the author's return to the theme of Christ's suffering where the author makes a specific reference to Gethsemane (5:7-8). The author's point here is that the fear his readers faced was not something that Christ could not understand. He too was faced with the temptation to turn away from being faithful because of the cost involved. Therefore He was able to aid these believers as they faced this same fear. The "*aid*" that is being referred to here is primarily that they could share in His victory over this temptation, because He would enable them to do so if they would simply believe and obey.

Conclusion:

We can be tempted to justify our sins (both of commission and omission) by saying that we had no choice. We can tell ourselves that our temptations are too great to resist, or Christ's demands are too hard to fulfill. However, the author wants us to recognize the truth. The believer always has a choice, and victory over sin is always available because of what Christ has done on our behalf. Therefore when we give in to temptation, it is because we chose to, not because we overwhelmed and couldn't help ourselves.