

Everything Good • Hebrews 13:20-21

How well I remember those days long ago when I shopped to buy an engagement ring for Charleen. It was a secret, a surprise. I never told anyone including her until that night in New York City when I asked her to marry me and placed the ring on her finger.

I approached the matter from various angles. The first was a matter of education. I knew virtually nothing about diamonds up to that point. So, I went to the library to study about cuts and facets and karats and points. I found out about ordinary jewelers and certified gemologists. Facts . . . cold, hard, analytical facts.

It was also a matter of money. I was a college student and I didn't have much money. I had to negotiate a loan from my father without telling him what I wanted to do with the money.

It was a matter of choice. First, I had to choose to ask her to marry me. Then there was the choice of finding a ring that fit what I had learned and what I could afford. And, I had to keep it a secret while I was shopping. I recall walking into a tiny shop in a downtown Chicago skyscraper and seeing two students I knew standing there. They asked me what I was doing. I didn't know what to say so I just turned around and walked out!

But, it was also a matter of the heart. When I took the ring from my pocket that cold December night I thought nothing of the cut, the karats or the price. It mattered little which jeweler had sold me the ring. I was in love and she was what mattered most.

There are parts of the Bible that are much like diamonds. They, too, can be looked at and studied from many different angles. It's a matter of the mind. Brilliant scholars spend their lives studying ancient manuscripts, languages, grammar, syntax, history, theology and interpretation. It is a good and necessary angle from which to approach God's Word.

It is also a matter of the will. We must choose what we do with the Bible and its teachings. We must make our decision on how it relates to our lives and our eternal destinies. And, there is a clear cost no matter which way the decision goes.

Ultimately, it is a matter of the heart. When we fall in love with Jesus Christ we seldom think much about anything else but him and our relationship to him.

One of the diamonds of scripture is Hebrews 13:20-21. There the author writes:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This is a sentence with many facets that can be looked at from many different angles. First, let's look at this diamond with our minds. Let's pretend we're in a classroom. I'll be the teacher, you be the students. I expect you to sit up straight! Open your text book! Take notes!

Let's look first at the structure. It is addressed to the God of peace. This pair of verses is a prayer. In some ways a prayer is like a memo in a business. There's a big difference between a memo to the newest employee and one that is to the Chair-

man-of-the-Board and the CEO. This prayer-memo is addressed to God himself and that impacts the rest of what's written.

In a business, whenever a memo is written it is extremely important to know the basis for the proposed action. In this verse

the basis is double. It is addressed to him "*who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep*" and it is "*through the blood of the eternal covenant.*"

The basis of this memo is a contractual relationship between God and Christians. It has been purchased by Jesus' blood and is attested to by Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

The actual petition, what it is all about, is to "*equip you with everything good for doing his will.*" This is the real meat of the matter. This is what the whole prayer is all about.

If God can raise Jesus back from the dead then he can do whatever needs to be done in our lives.

How is that going to come about? What's the means for this equipping with everything good? Well, that's twofold as well. First, it is God working in us what is pleasing to him; and second, it is through Jesus Christ. This quickly answers the question of how the petition is going to be granted. It is the stated means to the end.

The result is that he receives the glory for ever and ever. Here is what is supposed to be the bottom line. In an American company the memo may list the final expected profit. In this prayer the expected result is that God will get the glory for ever and ever.

When the prayer ends there is an opportunity for those who are involved to agree or to disagree. The "amen" at the end of this prayer is the response of agreement and affirmation.

You are still students and I want you to keep your minds sharp as we move from structure to wording.

Early in this verse we read about the God of "peace". The Jews who spoke Hebrew used to say "Shalom" but when the New Testament was written it was written in Greek so a different word had to be introduced. The Greek word that was introduced is the word "eirene." In many ways it was a substitute for the Hebrew word "shalom." This word "eirene" is loaded with meaning. While peace is the absence of war in a broader definition it's the "state of rest." But the meaning goes on to include "prosperity" and "total well being."

In his 1984 campaign Ronald Reagan said that the nation had been "at peace" during his first four years in office. But he meant more than the fact that the United States didn't have a declared war going on somewhere in the world. He meant that they were years of good times, peaceful times, prosperous times, times of calmness and goodness. They were times when everything was okay.

Frankly, eirene is what most people are looking for in life. People get money in order to buy it. People enter relationships to try and find it. People spend lifetimes waiting for it. Peace!

The second word is "resurrection". The actual word doesn't appear in Hebrews 13 but that is what is meant by the phrase "*who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus.*" God made two great demonstrations when he resurrected Jesus from the dead. On the one hand he demonstrated his

acceptance of Jesus' death on the cross to pay for human sins. You see, when Jesus died on the cross he paid the penalty for our sin and took that offering up to heaven to the throne of God. But, at least theoretically, God could take it or leave it. God had to give his answer. And that's what he did in the resurrection of Jesus. When God raised Jesus back to life it was his stamp of approval on all that Jesus had offered.

The second point was that the resurrection demonstrated that God can do anything. If God can raise Jesus back from the dead then he can do whatever needs to be done in our lives.

The third word we want to look at is "Shepherd". Shepherds aren't very important to our lives or area economy. I doubt that most of us know a single shepherd. But shepherds were very important to most of the New Testament readers. Shepherds are people who love and care. The shepherd will even give his life for the welfare of his sheep.

Jesus is the great Shepherd of his sheep. Christians are his sheep. He loves us and cares for us . . . even to the point of giving his life for us.

But there is something else about shepherds that we non-sheep people might overlook. Shepherds are absolutely sovereign over their sheep. The shepherd decides when and where his sheep will eat and sleep and whether they are to be sheered or slaughtered. The shepherd has life and death control over every issue of the sheep's life.

The fourth word is really a phrase—"*the blood of the eternal covenant.*" A covenant is a type of contract. When Jesus died on the cross he shed his blood and purchased a contract for human sinners. It was very, very expensive! The terms of the contract allow all human sinners to have their sins forgiven, to become Christians and to live forever in heaven. Once the contract has been agreed to by both God and the sinner it is eternal. It cannot be abrogated and will never be replaced.

Word number five is "equip". This is the every essence of what the whole section is all about. Hebrews 13:21 says that God will "*equip you with everything good.*" The King James Version of the Bible says that God will "*make you perfect in every good work.*" "Katartisai" is the Greek word and it literally means "repairing what is broken" (often referring to broken bones) or "restoring what is lost." The idea here is that God fixes us up. If parts of us are broken, he fixes the break. If

parts of us are missing, he fills in the gaps. If anything is wrong with us, God does whatever is necessary to make us perfect—the way we’re supposed to be—so that we can have everything good!

The sixth word or phrase is “*doing his will.*” The purpose of everything this all-powerful, loving, caring, fixing God does is to enable us to do what he wants, not what we want. We often want God to help us and change us and fix us so that we can do as we please. But our Shepherd cares about us too much to let that happen. His will is far better! So, he equips us to do what he wills. He gives us everything good in order for us to do everything right!

The seventh word is “work.” That he may “*work in us what is pleasing to him*” is a very powerful statement. God doesn’t just fix us and tell us what to do. God also gets inside of us. He himself works to make us do what is right and what is pleasing to him. Too often we are prone to think of God on the outside. But for Christians he is very much the God on the inside.

Number eight on our list is the phrase “*through Jesus Christ.*” God never separates his work from his Son. We can’t have God with-

out Jesus and we can’t have God’s impact in our lives except through Jesus Christ.

“Glory” is the ninth word on our list. The word glory means credit or reputation. When we Christians do God’s will and please him God gets the credit. If you throw a rock in a lake the splash makes concentric circles that reach far beyond the original place of impact. In the same way, when we give glory to God the waves to his glory move out in circles that never end. They last for ever and ever!

The word “amen” means “so be it” or “that’s the way it is.” In the early church people used to say “Amen” out loud together when they were all in agreement with a statement that was made or a prayer that was prayed. When Hebrews 13:20-21 was prayed the people agreed; therefore, “Amen” was added to it.

You can pretend that you are a first century Christian and practice it. If you read Hebrew 13:20-21 you can add your “Amen” to it, too.

You have been good students! You have paid attention as we have looked at the Bible diamond of Hebrews 13:20-21. Please don’t leave your intellects behind, but let’s now look at this diamond text with our wills and our hearts.

The meaning is that peace comes from God. Think about all of the problems and needs of your life. Would they not all be met by “eirene”—by a state of rest, by prosperity and by total well being? I don’t know where you are looking for that kind of peace, but I can tell you that it will not be found in a new job or an ambitious career or the accumulation of wealth. Peace is not the product of power, fame, position or title. It cannot be found in marriage or singleness, home or children.

You may spend a lifetime believing that all these things will bring the peace we all seek. You may even spend a lifetime climbing the ladder of

success, building a bank account, moving in and out of marriages or trying any other means to find peace. But there is only one true source of peace; it is the “*God of peace.*” Only from him can peace be had. Only from him is peace to be sought. The

sooner any of us makes the switch the sooner God’s peace will be ours.

What does your will say? What does your heart say? Where will you go to seek the peace of God?

All the words about our sinfulness, about Jesus’ bloody death, about his resurrection and about the eternal covenant are far more than theological jargon. These are matters of eternal life and death. They are as personal as you and me. If you just hear these words, if you receive them as only a mental exercise and if you die tonight without the benefit of personal salvation then you are lost forever. Instead of the eternal benefits of heaven you are doomed to the eternal consequences of sin.

Like most contracts or covenants both parties must agree to the terms. God has already agreed that Jesus’ death pays for your sin. God has al-

One way or the other we must always respond to God.

ready agreed that if you accept Jesus as Savior and Shepherd you will have your sins forgiven and go to heaven. But, you, too, must agree. You must admit you are a sinner. You must admit that Jesus alone can save you. You must accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Shepherd—Savior from sin and Shepherd of life who will love and care for you but also be absolute sovereign of your life.

This is more than a matter of the mind. It is a matter of the will and the heart. What does your will say? What does your heart say? If they say “Yes” then make the decision, make the commitment, and tell God now.

God shows us his will and enables us to do it. To every Christian God promises he will “*equip you with everything good for doing his will.*” What is God’s will for you? Accept Jesus as Savior and Shepherd. God will enable you to do it! Share your faith with others. God will enable you to do it! Be baptized. God will enable you to do it! Break out of a sinful relationship. God will enable you to do it! Honor him in your finances. God will enable you to do it! End a rotten habit. God will enable you to do it! Serve him near here or over here. God will enable you to do it!

God shows us his will and enables us to do it. That is the truth, the intellectual fact. But what does your will say? What does your heart say? Will you with mind and will and heart commit to do God’s will and trust his enablement?

At the end of the prayer there either is or there isn’t an “amen.” We either speak or we remain silent. In other words, this prayer with all its power and truth is either our prayer or it’s not our prayer. One way or the other we must always respond to God.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen.

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