

8-1-1950

The Sacerdotal Office of Christ According to the Letter to the Hebrews

George Stoeckhardt
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stoeckhardt, George (1950) "The Sacerdotal Office of Christ According to the Letter to the Hebrews," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 21, Article 53.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol21/iss1/53>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXI

AUGUST 1950

No. 8

The Sacerdotal Office of Christ According to the Epistle to the Hebrews*

By GEORGE STOECKHARDT

By His one sacrifice Christ has obtained an eternal salvation, which requires nothing to supplement it. By His sacrifice our sins are expiated once and for all, and our iniquity is atoned. In the very center of our Christian faith stands this Jesus Christ, who on the great Day of Atonement of the New Testament died and shed His blood for us. But even though Christ sacrificed Himself only once, even though the real work of redemption and reconciliation is completed, yet Christ has not relinquished His high-priestly office. The Epistle to the Hebrews throughout directs our attention to the Man sitting at the right hand of God as our eternal High Priest.

IV

The Exalted Christ Even Now Continues to Administer His Sacerdotal Office by Making His Merit Effective Before God in Heaven and Applying It to Sinners on Earth.

By suffering and death Christ was exalted. After Christ had died for our sins, God again brought from the dead this Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. And He did this "through the blood of the everlasting covenant," 13:20. The exaltation of Christ was brought about by the blood of the new covenant. The blood of the New Testament, the one offering of Christ, is the cause for His exaltation. Christ shed His blood and thus carried out

* Second and final section. See note in previous issue, p. 483.

the will of God concerning our salvation. Through His blood He established an eternal covenant and thus completed the divinely appointed work of redemption. Thereupon God exalted Him, brought Him again from the dead, and thereby accepted and endorsed what the great Shepherd of the sheep had accomplished by the shedding of His blood. Hence we may rest assured that the new covenant, which Christ established by His blood, is in effect.

The writer of this Letter draws another significant analogy between the Old Testament high priest and Christ. The prototype entered into the holy places made with hands, but Christ entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us, 9:12, 24. This refers, as the writer points out, to Christ's exaltation, even as the Lord in His valedictories to His disciples summarized His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension, in the term "going to the Father."

But how and why did Christ enter heaven? By His own blood He entered into the holy place, 9:12. The preposition *dia* often describes the attendant circumstances, e. g., under duress, with fear, by or through compulsion. In the Old Testament the high priest entered the sanctuary *through* blood; the blood granted him access. However, he entered also *with* blood, which he carried into the Holy Place and sprinkled upon the Ark of the Covenant. Thus he brought the blood before God's throne. All this applies to the antitype. He entered *through* and *with* blood into the sanctuary of heaven.

But here the analogy ends, for Christ "appeared in the presence of God," 9:24. True, the prototype also went into the Holy Place of God, stood before the throne where God dwelt and sat enthroned. But He did not actually come into the presence of God, for He dwelt there in a cloud and darkness, and even this screened glory of God was veiled from the eyes of the high priest by the smoke of incense with which he first had to fill the sanctuary. Our High Priest, on the other hand, appeared in the very presence of God. He is the eternal Son of God, "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person," 1:3. He is as great as the Father Himself. He can step into the unveiled presence of God. And He appeared there with the blood of reconciliation. As the blood of the Old Covenant was brought close before God when

the priest sprinkled it upon the horns of the altar or upon the Ark of the Covenant, thus Christ brought His bloody merit into God's presence, before His very eyes, as it were. Yes, it has found entry into the heart of God and has erased the guilt of sin. Our sins are erased from God's memory. God sees only the blood of reconciliation, only expiation and grace. When our memory recalls old sins and when new sins are added—for as long as we live, we can never entirely and completely forget sin—we have the comfort that the memory of our sins has been removed from the heart of God by the merit of Christ's blood. In the heart and conscience of the sinner there is still much fear and wrath; in God's heart there is only peace and love. If our conscience accuses us, we are to know that it is an erring conscience; for with God there is no longer any remembrance of sin.

Christ remains a Priest forever and at the right hand of God discharges the duties of His sacerdotal office until the end of days, 8:1-2. As Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, Christ "is faithful to Him that appointed Him . . . in all His house," 3:2. He faithfully performed the duties as High Priest in procuring salvation for all men once and for all. However, Christ still faithfully discharges the duties of His sacerdotal office by showing that His precious sacrifice is now in force before God.

This is accomplished when we come to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel, 12:24. Abel's blood cried to God for vengeance. By Christ's blood, however, reconciliation was made, and it cries for mercy, not for vengeance. And it does so continually and with a loud voice. It cries, as it were, into the ears of God, "Mercy! Mercy!" By His death Christ expiated sin and gained grace, and, anthropomorphically speaking, it constantly reminds God of what happened on that first Good Friday and Easter. When we become guilty of sins of commission and omission, we comfort ourselves with this eternal redemption, knowing that our sin has been erased and buried in the depths of the sea. But our comfort is increased by the fact that Christ's blood constantly speaks for us, raises its voice in our behalf, and reminds God of our reconciliation. Our conscience acts in a strange and peculiar manner. For a long time it ignores past sins, only to raise its voice unexpectedly against

us. Here is the antidote against an accusing conscience: Christ's blood, speaking in heaven, drowns out the voice of our conscience. God does not hear our conscience; He pays heed only to what is said by Him who is the express image of His Person. Thus Christ constantly intercedes for us in heaven, 7:25. We have an Advocate with the Father, who constantly reminds God of His redemption by showing, as it were, His pierced hands as signs of our redemption. Thereby He assures us that God's wrath will not again be kindled against us when because of the weakness of our flesh we so often fall into sin. There is nothing in us on which we can base a claim for grace, else grace were not grace. But Christ has paid the penalty of our guilt and thereby has established His right to demand grace for us. God must and will heed our Advocate's intercession.

But our High Priest's continuing office is not confined to His intercessory work in heaven. The blood of Jesus Christ that speaketh better things than that of Abel is also "a blood of sprinkling," 12:24, similar to the Old Testament sacrificial blood. Sinful mankind is to be sprinkled with Christ's blood. This sprinkling of "our hearts from an evil conscience," and the washing of "our bodies with pure water," 10:22, points to Holy Baptism. In Baptism Christ applies to sinful man the merit gained by His blood. There the hearts of sinners are sprinkled with the blood of Christ, as Luther sings,

The eye of sense alone is dim
And nothing sees but water;
Faith sees Christ Jesus and in Him
The Lamb ordained for slaughter;
It sees the cleansing fountain, red
With the dear blood of Jesus,
Which from the sins, inherited
From fallen Adam, frees us
And from our own misdoings.

Ev. Luth. Hymnbook, Ed. 1927, No. 401, 7

Baptism is the means whereby Christ's merit by blood is applied to us. The writer of the Letter, however, refers also to the other means of grace, namely, the Word. "For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them," "For we also are evangelized, even as they," 4:2. This Word is "quick and powerful" (*zoon, energees*), 4:12, and is the means whereby Christ's merit is applied to us, and

our hearts are sprinkled with the blood of Christ. It is this thought that is expressed by the hymn writer,

When darkness round me gathers,
Thy name and cross, still bright,
Deep in my heart are sparkling
Like stars in blackest night.

L. H., 407, 3. Germ. 426, 3

Thus through Baptism and the preaching of the Gospel our hearts and consciences are sprinkled with the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ constantly heals us from sin, destroys the sense of guilt, and suppresses the memory of sin, even as it cancels the remembrance of sin in the heart of God and stays His wrath.

However, it is faith, and faith alone, which lays hold on this antidote against sin. And it is part of Christ's sacerdotal service to engender and preserve faith. Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith, 12:2. He sprinkles us with His blood, purges and justifies us constantly by His Word. By this Word He creates in our heart the hand which takes hold of and retains this treasure. He works faith, and He also perfects it by preserving us in faith until our end.

Christ is a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec, and is therefore Priest and King in one and the same person. According to this Epistle, Christ places His royal office into the service of His sacerdotal office. It is the office of a king to provide his people with all those things which bring prosperity. So Christ also procures for us, His people, all manner of blessings and riches. Like His prototype Melchisedec, who is the king of righteousness and also king of Salem (peace), 7:2, Christ as our King has procured righteousness and peace for us. Thus also the royal office of Christ with its blessings serves His chief work, that of purging us from sin and saving us.

V

In the Name of the Redeemed, Christ has Even Now Accepted the Promised Inheritance in Heaven, and will Deliver It to Them at His Return.

Christ is called an "High Priest of good things to come," 9:11. The writer explains this in the light of the ceremonies of the Great Atonement. On that day not only the Ark of the Covenant,

but also other vessels of the sanctuary as well, shadows of heavenly things, were sprinkled with the sacrificial blood. These holy vessels had become defiled by being handled by the priests, sinful men, and had to be purged again and reconsecrated with the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood. Lev. 16:18-20. It was therefore necessary that the antitype, "the heavenly gifts," must be purged and sanctified with sacrificial blood, with the "better sacrifices," namely, with the singular sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, 9:23. Stripped of its Old Testament symbolism, the meaning is: sin has excluded us from heaven and deprived us of our right to heaven. If we would enter heaven, sin must be abolished. Christ has blotted out sin with His blood. By the blood of Christ, heaven's sanctuary is dedicated and its doors reopened to us sinners. We now have a perfect right to heaven; it is ours by the blood of Christ. The truths which are here expressed in highly figurative language are usually stated quite simply as follows: By the shedding of His blood Christ has earned for us, first, forgiveness of sins and, second, life and salvation. Thus Christ is the Mediator of the New Testament, by whose death and blood we were purged and shall also receive the promise of eternal inheritance, 9:15.

The Christian's hope of eternal life is not only glorious, but also firmly established by two immutable things: God's promise and His oath. Therefore our hope is likened to an anchor, which firmly holds the vessel in the surging sea. The sailor lets his anchor down into the depths of the sea; the Christian casts his anchor upward into the innermost part of the veil, into the sanctuary of heaven. There our anchor, our hope, has taken a firm hold and will not let go. By it we are, as it were, chained and bound to heaven. Our hope as Christians is a living, firm hope, which even here takes hold of eternal gifts and actually ties us to heaven.

Our hope is firm and reliable, like an anchor, because Christ has already entered within the veil and is now sitting on the throne of God. Since Christ, who is in heaven, is the object of our hope, we are bound, as it were, by this hope to the heavenly inheritance. Christ is our Forerunner. As our Substitute He entered within the veil, and as our Representative He is enthroned in heaven. This heavenly sanctuary is now also our goal, and our union with Him in the sanctuary is our glorious hope.

After Christ had tasted death for every man, God crowned Him with glory and honor, and we now see Christ enthroned in divine majesty, 2:5-9. But the holy writer evidently wants us to view Christ's exaltation also from its vicarious side. Christ has become the Captain of our salvation, v. 10, and as our Representative He has accepted in our stead the inheritance destined for us. The author of our Epistle quotes Ps. 8:4-8 and identifies the "son of man" as none other than Christ. In this Psalm the Son of Man appears as the Representative of mankind. The Psalmist points to the fact that all beasts, sheep, oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea, are put under His feet. The words remind us of the first chapter of Genesis. God had delivered the rule over all creatures of the earth into the hands of man. It was God's will that man should rule over creation. To be sure, in a large measure this will of God was hindered by sin. However, there is one Man by whom God's original destiny for man is fulfilled, who has passed through unto the dignity originally intended by God's will for all, namely, the Man Christ Jesus. And this Man Jesus, our Substitute, is crowned with glory and honor after His suffering and humiliation. He is in heavenly glory. But in heaven, too, Christ represents the human race. The same glory which He has in heaven is intended for man. The same beauty and glory lost by the Fall, Christ as man's Representative has regained by His life, suffering, and death, and in His exaltation. Christ sits at the right hand of God in that glorious dress designed for us. In Him man has already been elevated to that heavenly dignity and glory which he is to have. As our Vicar Christ has even now in our name received the heavenly inheritance and preserves it for us. Not only have we a rightful claim on heaven, an open door to heaven, not only is the anchor of our hope fastened there, but Christ has already prepared and beautifully adorned our future home for us. He Himself dwells in exalted glory, and in Him we have taken possession even now of our heavenly inheritance.

In a certain sense we share in this heavenly inheritance even now. This inheritance is not only a future possession, for we are "come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the

heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect," 12:22-23. Some commentators wish to restrict this description to the Church of the New Testament; others to the congregation of perfected saints. But no doubt, both are in the writer's mind. Through faith Christians have come nigh unto the heavenly holy place and are in close contact with the spirits of just men made perfect. The believers on earth and the saints in heaven are essentially one congregation. If we could look through the veil, we would see the Church Triumphant, the glory which is to come, and the inheritance ready for us in heaven. In faith and hope we possess this salvation and glory even now.

Only one thing is required before we shall see and enjoy all that which we now possess in faith and hope. That, too, will come to pass, when at His second appearance Christ will deliver our inheritance to us. The first time Christ came to be sacrificed for sin, and He was manifested in sin. Sin, as it were, characterized His first appearance in the flesh. But at His second coming He will appear without sin, 9:28, clothed in all the glory and splendor which is now His. At His first manifestation He blotted out sin once and for all. On that Day His redeemed children will hear not a syllable of sin, for He will appear unto salvation and personally give them who await His coming the fullness of good things to come. He already has taken charge of our inheritance, is enjoying it, and will impart it to those whom He leads to salvation. In His final priestly service He Himself will give eternal salvation to us poor sinners who had excluded ourselves from heaven. He will let no one deprive Him of this prerogative. This gift will not be conferred on us immediately. On the contrary, our High Priest wants to experience the joy of personally pressing this inexpressibly glorious gift into our hands. Then the final consummation is at hand.

But Christ remains a Priest forever in name and in fact. To be sure, there is no longer any need of His sacerdotal and mediatorial service, for all earthly mourning is changed into praise and thanksgiving. We have been made perfect and behold God face to face and no longer need to flee into the wounds of Christ. But Christ,

our High Priest, will be the very center of heavenly worship, even as St. John beheld the Lamb which was slain from the beginning surrounded by the whole number of saints and receiving eternal praises. Christ in His sacerdotal office will be the theme of the heavenly doxologies. The strains which here give all glory to that blood by which we have been redeemed will resound in the heavenly Jerusalem throughout eternity. There we shall worship Him who is our flesh and who has purchased us with His blood. The worship of eternity is worship of the Lamb that was slain for us.

VI

This Sacerdotal Service of Christ Enables and Obligates Us to Come to God with All Confidence and to Serve the Living God.

The first practical consequence of this doctrine is this, that we are empowered and obligated to come to God with all confidence, 4:14, 16, and especially 10:19-24. We have a faithful High Priest. He has opened unto us the way into the sanctuary. And this way is a new and living way, a way which actually carries us to heaven. The blood of Christ incites and gives courage to walk this way. But we must also make use of our prerogative, we must come *en pleerophoria pisteos*. The holiest place is open to us, for it is a throne of grace, and we must approach it with joy. In our prayer we draw near the living God, and this is a joyful experience. True, our first reaction is, that because of our sinfulness we are not worthy to come into the presence of God. But we comfort ourselves with the knowledge that Christ, our High Priest, intercedes for us and prays with us. In our prayer we remind ourselves that Christ's blood avails in heaven and that nothing can sever us from God. Trusting in Christ's merit, we speak to God with full assurance of faith and pour out our heart to Him, yes, speak as confidently with God as children with their dear father. Thus by faith and prayer we are to draw near to God's throne of grace. Then we will also hold fast the profession of the hope which Christ has gained for us, though our experience often seems to contradict our hope and to be incompatible with the things beyond the veil, the inexpressible glory reserved in eternity for us.

The doctrine of Christ's priesthood teaches us furthermore to serve the living God. By His sacerdotal office Christ has made us

priests before God. Therefore we are obligated to purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God, 9:14. The purpose of our redemption is that our life be a continuous divine service. We must serve God with reverence and godly fear. To that end we have received a kingdom which cannot be moved, 12:27-28. If we do not walk as citizens of heaven in reverence and godly fear, we shall lose the joy of eternal life and fall under the wrath of God, v. 29. Thus this article of Christ's priesthood obligates us to newness and holiness of life.

Not only the Christian life as a whole, but also its various aspects and phases may be viewed as the service of priests. It is significant that in this Epistle the several admonitions are based upon the sacerdotal office of Christ. The writer again reminds the Christians that they have been redeemed, that they are heirs of life eternal, and that therefore they will also in sincere gratitude serve God. As priests they will continually offer the sacrifice of praise and joyfully declare the name of Him who has done so much for them, 13:15. To the fruit of our lips we will add the fruit of works. Christian conduct is Christian warfare, and that is a constant conflict, 12:1-13. But the courage and joy for warfare can come only when we look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, 12:2, as well as our great Exemplar in this warfare, who through battle blazed the trail to victory, v. 3.

The struggle ordained for us Christians includes also the sufferings. Battle and blood go hand in hand, 12:4. But Christians must patiently bear their cross, and they will do so if they remember that God loves them, 12:5-11. True, in the midst of suffering it seems that God is displeased with His children. But the very blows are the strokes of a loving Father. He is reconciled with us by Christ. Hence He holds nothing against us. His seeming wrath is nothing but love, a fatherly chastisement. On the basis of this comfort we shall not only be able to bear every cross patiently, but shall raise our lame hands and feeble knees and make straight paths with our feet, not being turned out of the way as that which is lame, but rather be healed, 12:13.

A special cross to be borne patiently by the Christians is the reproach for the sake of Christ. This was typified in the Old Testament sacrificial cultus. The goat whose blood was brought

into the sanctuary by the high priest was burned outside the camp. Christ, likewise, was slain without the gate. The identity of Golgotha is shrouded in mystery, except for the fact that it was outside the limits of the holy city. To be cast out of Jerusalem was a deep reproach for Christ, 13:10-12. And Christians will fare no better than did their Lord and Savior. They must come out of the sinful corruption of Jerusalem, separate themselves from the world, and thus share the reproach with Christ, v. 13. But it is by way of reproach that Christ ascended to honor and glory. Likewise Christians, who here have no continuing city but seek one to come, v. 14, must travel via the cross to glory.

The Christian life is a warfare not only with the world, but also with his flesh. Therefore a Christian must daily put away the sins which still cling to him and make him slothful. He must guard against such a vulgar, Epicurean, carnal mind as Esau had, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright, 12:14-16. A Christian will not prefer the vain, corruptible things of this world to the heavenly treasures. Two reasons prompt our sanctification: the first, lest any man fail of the grace of God; the second, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Sanctification, of course, does not earn grace, holiness, the beatific vision, and eternal salvation. Nevertheless he who does not earnestly strive after holiness will lose heaven and its bliss.

The last, but by no means the least, phase of the Christian life is loving service to our fellow man. We are to serve God by serving our neighbor. Therefore the holy writer admonishes each Christian to abound in works of love, and at the same time by word and deed to provoke the brother to love and good works, 10:24. If, for example, a brother forsakes the assemblies, we should admonish him, v. 25. And when Christians keep in mind their High Priest's concern for them, 10:19,21, they will endeavor to manifest the same interest in their brethren. Their brotherly love will continue unabated. They will practice hospitality, visit the prisoners, and sympathize with the afflicted, 13:1-3. These works of brotherly love are God-pleasing sacrifices and stand in intimate relation to Christ's sacrifice. Anyone who neglects to offer the eucharistic sacrifices of his lips and his hands is in danger of losing that one sacrifice on which his hope is built.

As preacher and curate of souls the pastor will always keep in mind the fact that all ethical injunctions in this Epistle are based on the priesthood of Christ. Every admonition and every invitation to practice brotherly love and to follow after holiness must be based on the article of free grace, namely, on the glorious truth that Christ blotted out every sin of our entire life. The pastor will constantly remind them of this and implore them as redeemed children of God to walk in newness of life in gratitude to Him who has redeemed them. This motivation will be effective, for only through Christ's blood and merit can anything good be effected in the lives of the Christians. Thus even when the pastor admonishes or warns his people, the Gospel remains his central theme.

VII

Whoever Rejects the Sacerdotal Service of Christ and Willfully Serves Sin Incurs the Wrath of God, Which Is a Consuming Fire.

The theme of the entire Epistle is that the Old Testament priesthood typifies Christ's sacerdotal office as the only means whereby we can obtain our eternal inheritance and our heavenly rest. In developing this theme it is but natural that the holy writer also speaks of Israel's attitude toward the service which God in His grace had instituted for His chosen people. Israel had spurned God's gracious promises to lead them into the promised rest, and because of its unbelief came short, 3:18-19. It is therefore within the framework of this Epistle when the holy writer uses Israel's example as an earnest warning against unbelief and apostasy, 3:7-8, 12 ff. This admonition is always in order, for the danger of apostasy always confronts us. The Hebrew Christians were inclined to look back with longing eyes to the synagogue of Israel. But a return to Jewry was tantamount to a return to the world and unbelief. Therefore the writer presents the New Testament priesthood in its glorious light and pleads with them not to despise it.

It is indeed significant that the Epistle which presents the loftiest comfort of our most holy faith also contains the most incisive warnings against unbelief. In language which cuts to the quick the writer describes the catastrophic end, the final terrible consequence of unbelief and apostasy, 6:4-8. He speaks of such as were at one time true, believing Christians, have known and felt the

truth of God's Word, were enlightened by the Holy Ghost, have tasted of the good Word of God, were made partakers of the Spirit of grace, had experienced in their heart the joy of redemption so beautifully described in this Epistle for the comfort of Christians. In short, they have had a foretaste of the future glory and from personal experience knew that what they had learned from the Word of God is divine truth.

And concerning such the writer states the possibility of *parapesontas*, 6:6, they may apostatize. This means that they deny everything which they have experienced in their heart; they willfully again serve sin, though they know and have experienced the deadly poison of sin and, on the other hand, the blissful condition of those whose sins are forgiven. They tread under foot, i. e., treat with utmost contempt, the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, that blood by which they have been sanctified and have received the forgiveness of their sins. The doctrine of redemption, once the joy and comfort of their heart, has become unto them a common and an unholy thing. They despise with their whole heart what once they had known as saving truth, 10:26-31. In addition they despise the Spirit of grace and declare that His witness in their hearts had only been a self-delusion. Yes, they may even say they have deceived themselves and others with their Christianity. This is apostasy in its final form. The Apostle is not describing every kind of falling away, for though a Christian may fall into mortal sins which destroy faith, he may repent and be received again. But he who sins willfully after he has received knowledge, 10:26, has reached the final stage of apostasy. Luther often calls this willful sinning after having tasted God's grace the "sin against the Holy Ghost." This willful sinning is not what we are wont to call mortal sin, it is something more fearful, namely, an eventual hardening in unbelief.

It is impossible that they who are guilty of this apostasy be renewed unto repentance because they crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, 6:6. The Jews and their leaders and the heathen crucified Christ in ignorance. But it is far different when they who have come to know salvation in Christ, by their apostasy crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh. With all the powers of their

will they reject the Son of God and everything that reminds them of His work of redemption. Rather than to be partakers of the forgiveness of sins, they want to perish in their sins. In this state repentance is impossible. But their repentance is impossible for another reason. Such people harden themselves and have, as it were, ruined their heart and conscience to such an extent that it is like unfruitful ground which yields only thorns and briers. Therefore God delivers them unto a curse and to utter destruction, 6:8. They have no more offering for sin, having trodden under foot the great Offering of the New Testament. If death was the punishment for the transgression of the Law of Moses, how much greater will be the punishment of him who has disdained the merit of Christ and trodden it under foot? 10:27-29. Such an one will and must experience the solemn truth of the Lord's word: "Vengeance belongeth unto Me," 10:30.

The characterization and dreadful outcome of apostasy is recorded as a most earnest warning. The holy writer does not say that the Hebrew Christians had already reached this state, but he points to the ultimate end if anyone refuses to be warned. But such warnings are necessary for the Old Adam in the Christian, who is constantly inclined to apostasy; he must be told that there is a falling away from which it is impossible to rise again.

Let no one think that this is too strong a diet for our people, or that it is completely out of harmony with the sweet comfort of the Gospel. Whoever is really concerned to make the Gospel message meaningful to his hearers must at times pull also this stop. Such solemn warnings, too, serve to save souls, for the examples of final apostasy have only one purpose, namely, to preserve such as are inclined to apostatize or have fallen away, from a similar fate, lest they become completely hardened in unbelief. A pastor must at times preach the Law in this extreme form, so that his hearers will never be "of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul," 10:39. Then his parishioners will give diligence to enter the rest prepared by their great High Priest, 4:6 ff.