

Friday April 25th, 2025

Good Friday

Hebrews 10:16-25

“We Hold These Truths Together”

Dr. Keith Wagner made mention of something very interesting regarding our lesson today from Hebrews. He pointed out that there are fewer phrases in the world of law that cause more headaches, or more controversy, than the phrase “whereas”. In legalese, the phrase “whereas” is used most often when introducing a preamble to a longer and more significant law or court ruling. “Whereas” is defined as a qualifying statement, or a way of telling the reader that there is a fact, or facts, to take into consideration before interpreting what follows.

Other ways of saying the same thing might be “is as much as”; which we use in wedding ceremonies. Also, you could use the word “considering” or less formal the word “since”. One of the more famous uses of “whereas” reads as follows: “Whereas Canada is founded upon [principles](#) that recognize the supremacy of God and the [rule of law](#)”. This phrase is the preamble for which important document? If you said the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, you are correct.

It is interesting that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau did not want this preamble, but his cabinet, heavily lobbied by religious groups, outvoted him. Since its inclusion in the charter, numerous interpretations on the preamble’s value, and meaning, have covered every perspective, from it has no importance, to it means everything must be interpreted by it. There are still many legal minds that want the preamble dropped or replaced with a more secular version.

Theologian Douglas Farrow has written that while some courts have rejected that the preamble's mention of God can have any force, the preamble indicates that, "Canada cannot be regarded as a strictly secular country, in the popular sense of the term." Farrow writes that either Canada "is, or is not, committed to the notion that divine worship is linked- one way or another- to 'a love of the laws,' and a love of the laws to divine worship".

The word "Whereas", moreover, indicates all sections of the *Charter* should be read considering the principle recognizing the supremacy of God. This includes the "rule of law", which comes after the "supremacy of God" in the preamble, and Farrow writes that the rule of law "is hard to account for, to interpret, or to sustain without reference" to the supremacy of God, as the rule of law developed from the religious backgrounds of Canada. (Wikipedia)

In Christian circles, both churches and denominations love preambles with “whereas”. Most often it is used to introduce a preamble before describing a position or decision on a social issue. Quite often the preamble includes bible references that are believed to provide the foundation for the declaration that follows. For example, we might say, “whereas the bible declares all life sacred, we therefore are against abortion”.

Now notice then that every time “whereas” is used, it is always followed by “therefore”. The “whereas” defines the belief of the group, or church, and “therefore” tells us the application of the belief. I share this with you because our lesson today from the letter to the Hebrews has a “whereas” statement, followed immediately by a “therefore”. You can see the therefore in verse 19, while whereas, may not be there explicitly, but it is certainly implied in the verses before.

And what is that preamble; that whereas statement? Verses 11-12, and 14 is a wonderful synopsis of the preamble.

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“And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God...For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” Later in verse 18 is added, “Where there is forgiveness of these there is no longer any offering for sin.”

This is the whole reason for us being here today to mark Good Friday. Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins, and because of this, we no longer must burn animals to gain forgiveness. As Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished”. This belief, that Christ atoned for our sins is at the very heart of the Gospel. It is the confessional statement on which the church of Christ rests. Jesus died so we can live.

It would be impossible, in my mind, to declare you are a follower of Christ without at least some agreement with this belief. Much of what we do, and what we believe, flows from this foundation; especially when coupled with Christ’s resurrection. Today, and in many other worship gatherings, we preach about this truth; we sing about this truth; we pray about this truth; and occasionally we even produce dramas to underscore this truth.

For many of you, there is in your faith journey a passionate focus on this “whereas” statement. Some will affirm that it is always for God’s people “about the cross”. For others this “whereas” statement will make them quite uncomfortable. So much so, that they prefer to jump right over Good Friday and head for Easter. Thus, they skip the suffering and death part of our faith. Each one of us can decide how passionate we are regarding the “whereas” statement about the forgiveness of sins.

You may be right at home in debating the intricacies about what happened in the transaction of atonement. However, we cannot ignore the “Therefore” that comes after the “whereas”. Belief in what Christ has done for us on the cross, however you unwrap it, has consequences for our lives. I have said to you many times the “all theology is transformative”. If you really believe something, there should be evidence in your life of that belief.

That evidence is the “therefore” of our faith. On March 15, 2013, By *Eric Geiger* wrote:

As church leaders, we long to see transformation in the lives of people, our church, and our city. Alton Garrison of the Assemblies of God says, “Our mission is not complete until we have seen people have life change.” The word from the Scriptures often associated with transformation is “metamorphosis.” It communicates lasting and irreversible change at the core, not merely external alterations or tweaking the appearance. Metamorphosis is used to describe the process a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly.

The Apostle Paul paints a picture of transformation: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:17–18)

I do not know how many of you indulge in watching those programs on TV that portray real life court cases, like Judge Judy. In every instance, the judge listens to both sides of the argument to discern the truth, at least as the judge sees it. When the judge believes they have the facts sorted out they report to the court the “whereas” about who was at fault etc. Then there is always a “therefore”; an action that the judge requires one of both of the parties to do; an action.

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Whereas Jesus died for our sins, the writer of Hebrews says, “therefore” what? What is the transformation that is going to happen because of the events on Good Friday? This passage does not let us just walk away, content that if we believe, we are on the right side of things. If we really believed Jesus died for our sins, and we no longer must undertake regular burnt offerings, because Jesus is the final and complete sacrifice, then there should be evidence of this in our lives.

Hebrews tells us a few things, but there are many more in scripture we could cite. The writer talks about approaching God with great assurance, because our hearts are sprinkled clean, and our evil consciences are washed clean. We are told to hold fast to our confession of Christ being our hope and not waver because of life’s circumstance. We are told to consider how to provoke each other to love and good deeds; not to neglect meeting together and to encourage one another.

The consequences of this are staggering. Because of Christ’s sacrifice my relationships with everyone here today are fundamentally altered. Our theology tells us that no one should leave here not having been known by someone else. No one should leave here without being affirmed by something good being said about them. And no one should ever leave here without being encouraged.

If they do come as a stranger and leave as a stranger, then we do not really believe that Christ died for our sins. Intellectually we may convince ourselves we believe but our hearts remain untransformed. The caterpillar remains in the cocoon never emerging as a butterfly. Tony Campolo tells the following illustration to capture the same point.

“when I was a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, I had the opportunity to lead several of my students into a personal relationship with Christ. One young man, who served as my graduate assistant, had grown up in a completely secular home. He had a wonderful born-again experience and was radically transformed by Christ.

One day, as the two of us were walked across campus, a young man from Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, a dynamic Christian student group, saw me and said, “Doctor, we ‘re looking forward to having you speak at our meeting tonight? The meeting starts at seven. Don’t be late.” My graduate student immediately asked, “Can I come?” The young Christian leader, who confronted us, asked him, “Are you a Christian too?”

To which my assistant responded, “Only you can answer that!” (Stories to Feed Your Soul, p. 43) What a great answer! Let me rephrase it a bit and ask, “Do you really believe that Jesus died on a cross to save you from your sins?” The right answer is that only those who interact with us can answer that question truthfully.