

Salvation: Here A Little; There A Little

When A Born-Again Believer Sins

Introduction

We have accomplished much in our study thus far, but in this lesson we turn to answering practical and common questions about sin and its effect on the born-again believer. We will endeavor to give sound, scriptural answers for the questions that haunt many believers and along the way, we will address what many regard as the “hard-to-understand” scriptures in the Bible; maybe instead of “hard-to-understand” we should use the term “often misunderstood” or “twisted” scriptures of the Bible.

Much confusion in these areas in the denominational world comes from preaching an incomplete message of salvation. For example, in those churches that wrongly teach that only mental or verbal belief is needed for salvation and that they are “once saved; always saved,” they are faced with a conundrum of how to deal with scriptural teachings on sin in believer’s lives. Many have turned to an invented doctrine of “if you sin after you were saved, then you really were not saved in the first place.” Which begs the question, “If you can think that you truly believed and were saved only to have your actions later tell you that you were not, then how can you ever know that you were truly saved?” Indeed, many members of churches that preach such an “easy believism” doctrine, struggle with doubt of whether or not they are saved.

If we follow the Apostolic pattern preached by every preacher of the New Testament, then we have no such issues. If a person believes in Jesus Christ and then repents of their sins, is baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and then receives the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues, then they can have an assurance that a genuine conversion experience took place and can know exactly when it happened!

The Necessity of Receiving the Holy Spirit

It must be stressed that a person has not truly been born again until they have been – as Jesus taught – born of the water and of the Spirit, or having been baptized with water and the Holy Spirit, respectively. According to the New Testament, being baptized in the name of Jesus and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit just as they did on the Day of Pentecost is an essential part of conversion and salvation from a sinful lifestyle. We must also keep in mind that the Book of Acts records people actually receiving the Holy Spirit and the remaining New Testament was written to believers who had already received the Holy Spirit. The original apostolic church taught the essentiality and expected believers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. One scriptural proof of this is Paul’s dealing with the twelve believers in Ephesus:

A believer has not truly been born again until they have been born of the water and of the Spirit!

Acts 19:1-2 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Upon finding these disciples, the first question that Paul asked was to make sure that they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. If this was not extremely important, then why did Paul ask this and ask it first? Additionally, the fact that this is recorded in scripture indicates to us that this was Paul’s normal mode of operation in witnessing and winning people to God. Again, when we read Paul’s later writings, we must remember that he is writing to people who have already received the experience that he led these twelve men to receive. When the men answered that they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit, Paul backtracked even further and inquired about their baptism:

Acts 19:3-5 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." 4 And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

These men had been disciples of John, that is, they had repented of their sins and been baptized, but had done so without a revelation of the name of Jesus being implemented. The correct response was to be rebaptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and then we find:

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Acts 19:6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

After their baptism, Paul prayed these men through to the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. This was the same experience that the believers had received on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And this is the same experience that the household of Cornelius received when Peter later preached to them:

Acts 10:45-46a And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. **46** For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

The men with Simon Peter easily recognized that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit “for they were hearing them speaking in tongues.” It is notable that after receiving the Holy Spirit, the people in each of these three examples did other things and had other gifts and signs and wonders accompany the experience, but the common thread in each baptism of the Holy Spirit was that they spoke with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. That is, they all spoke in a heavenly or foreign language that they had never studied or learned and did so supernaturally as the Spirit of God spoke through them.

Not only is this fact explicitly stated in these passages, but in the lesser-detailed, conversion passages, such an experience is strongly implied. For example in Samaria in the 8th chapter of Acts, Simon the Sorcerer “saw” people receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and it was a different and much more impressive miracle than just healings and signs and wonders. From the rest of the scripture’s teachings it is obvious that what Simon “saw” when an invisible Spirit of God came into a person’s life was the outward manifestation of tongues. Likewise, the jailer in the 15th chapter of Acts had an experience of great “joy” after his baptism. Likewise Saul/Paul was visited by Ananias so that he could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and although that experience is not detailed for us, obviously he received the very experience that he would later take great care to make sure others had received! It is important to note that the tongues are a sign accompanying the Spirit and not the Spirit itself, nevertheless, if the Biblical record is our source of truth, then believers should expect to speak in another tongue as the Spirit gives the utterance when they receive the Holy Spirit, themselves¹.

Furthermore, the Bible teaches the importance of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us glance at a few of the man scriptures that declare this truth:

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Mark 16:17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;

John 7:37-39 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. **38** Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." **39** By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.
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The Holy Spirit was not given until after Jesus was glorified – crucified, buried, risen, and ascended into heaven – therefore those believers who followed Christ during His earthly ministry had to wait to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Today, the Spirit has been “poured out” and so we must ask ourselves the question that Paul asked, “Did we

¹ We know that this experience is for us today because Peter declared it so in Acts 2:37-39.

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receive the Holy Spirit when we believed?" That the question was asked proves that it is possible to believe and not receive the Holy Spirit. And if the answer is "no," then we must act in faith and receive all that God has for us! Perhaps no scriptural passage sums up the necessity of the Spirit of God dwelling within you than this one:

Rom 8:9-11 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

There are three good reasons why we must have the Holy Spirit within us given here:

1. We cannot truly live for Christ and conquer our flesh without the Spirit.
2. If we do not have the Spirit, we do not truly belong to Christ.
3. It will be the Spirit that dwells within us that will give life to our mortal bodies when Christ comes back for His church.

It is vital to have the Holy Spirit and it is a promise that is given to every true believer!

When A Person Receives the Holy Spirit

When a person receives the Holy Spirit as they did on the Day of Pentecost, there are two things that happen at that moment simultaneously.

1. *The Spirit of God moves in to dwell in the body as a temple.*
2. *The Spirit of God brings back to life the dormant, dead spirit of man.*

There is a difference between feeling the Spirit of God in a service around you and the Spirit of God coming within you. The promises of resurrection and overcoming sin given in the passage in Romans above were conditional "if the Spirit dwells *in you*." Many religious people confuse feeling the presence of God in a service or situation with having received the gift of the Holy Spirit within them. Paul taught that when a person received the Holy Spirit, that their body became a dwelling place of God's Spirit much like the temples of the Old Testament and the Tabernacle of Moses:

1 Cor 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Our body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit that is "within" us! It is important to realize that the Bible teaches that there is only one Spirit of God:

Eph 4:4a There is one body and one Spirit

And the Bible emphatically declares that the Lord Jesus Christ is that Spirit:

2 Cor 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

It was to this truth that Jesus alluded to when after teaching about the coming of the Holy Spirit, He told His disciples, "I have been with you, but I shall be in you."² What this means is that it is impossible for a person to receive the Spirit of Christ without receiving the Holy Spirit or vice versa because that is just two different titles for the same Spirit of God of which there is only one! To use denominational lingo, it is impossible to "accept Christ" and "receive Him into your heart" without receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit as taught in the book of Acts. Similarly, it is false teaching to tell a child that "Jesus lives in their heart" because Jesus will only live in their heart when they have received His Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit. Jesus is certainly with them, guiding them, and dispatching angels to watch over them, but He is not technically "in them" until they receive the Holy Spirit. If you tell a child all of their life that the Spirit of God is already inside of them, then why should they ever seek to receive the gift of the Holy

² See John 14:17.

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Spirit? We should be careful to match our everyday beliefs and teachings to scripture and not to man-made traditions.

While we are on the topic, let me point out that such phrases as “accept Christ as our personal Savior” or “receive Christ into our heart” are never found in scripture. We certainly must accept the fact that Jesus Christ is the only one who brings salvation, but the commands of scripture deal more with us obeying the Word of God so that God will accept and receive us. Biblical phrases are instead, “being baptized with the Holy Spirit” or “receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.” We should seek to put emphasis on what the Bible emphasizes and the Bible emphasizes the necessity of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues, and only then do our bodies become a temple of the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God coming within us is the first of the two simultaneous things that happen in a believer’s life when they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The second is that God’s Spirit brings back to life the human spirit that was dead and dormant.

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

The Holy Spirit brings a “regeneration” or bringing back to life and a “renewal” into our life. That means that it resurrects something that was once alive but dead within humanity. When Adam sinned by eating the forbidden fruit in the 3rd chapter of Genesis, he did not die physically that day because he lived to the ripe old age of 930 years.³ Adam did not die mentally at that time, either because we find that he was able to function and speak and till the ground. But God had said that if he ate of that tree, “on that day you will surely die.”⁴ What died, then? The Apostle Paul later wrote that man is made up of three distinct parts: body, spirit, and soul (or mind)⁵. Obviously God cannot lie so it must have been the spirit part of man that died that day and we find from Paul’s later writings that this spiritual death – this dead and dormant spirit – was passed on to all of Adam’s descendants⁶.

This is why parents do not have to teach their children to be disrespectful or to be selfish, because men and women are born into this world with their fleshly nature very much alive and without their spirit in perfect communion with God. In this sense, men and women are born with a “missing piece” in their life and much of the longings and stuff that people try to fill their life with and seek after – money, relationships, power, religion – is a desperate attempt to fill that void. But that void can only be rightfully filled by God, Himself! And when a person receives the Holy Spirit, there is a regeneration or a renewal that takes place and the spirit of that believer is resurrected to close communion with God as it was before Adam sinned. When the spirit of a person is resurrected, it begins to praise God and commune with Him and this is why when a person receives the Holy Spirit, it often feels like instead that joy and happiness is flowing up out of the believer. This is the experience that Jesus referred to when He said that “streams of living waters will flow up out of” the Spirit-filled believer⁷. Such joy is the result of the Holy Spirit resurrecting our dormant spirit!

What Happens When a Spirit-filled Believer Sins?

When the believer has repented of their past sins and had them washed away in the waters of baptism and then received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they stand “born again” in God and ready to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the kingdom of God. There are no hindrances to impede their spiritual growth at that point and truly “all things have become new.”⁸ They stand with a new nature alive within them, the nature of God, that comes to fight against the nature of sin. The nature that they nurture and feed the most will win the battle!

Every believer has sinned at some point after they have been born again of the water and of the Spirit. John, writing to the apostolic church that had been baptized in Jesus’ name and filled with the Holy Spirit, wrote:

³ See Genesis 5:5.

⁴ See Genesis 2:17.

⁵ See 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

⁶ See Romans 5:12.

⁷ See John 7:38.

⁸ See 2 Corinthians 5:17.

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1 John 1:8-10 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. NIV

We must also distinguish between “accidental” sin and “willful” or “deliberate” sin. The Law of Moses in the Old Testament which was a type and shadow of things to come distinguished between the two types, therefore it is must be possible to accidentally sin. This usually occurs when the new believer does not realize that what they are doing is sinful because they have not yet been taught the Word of God in that area. Under the Law, when a person realized that they had accidentally sinned, they had to bring a blood sacrifice to the priest to pay the price for that sin at the altar. If they did this, then they were forgiven of that sin. In the same way, when a Spirit-filled believer sins accidentally, God will eventually lead them to a place where they become aware of it, usually through the preached or taught Word of God. At that time, they must go to our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and find a place of repentance at an altar and they will be forgiven. If they refuse to repent and turn from their sins after they realize it for what it is, then the sin become willful and deliberate.

Under the Law, willful or deliberate sin was punished by death⁹. Now under Grace, deliberate sin still brings death, only it is the death of the close communion with God that was resurrected in receiving the Holy Spirit. As Adam died the very minute he deliberately and knowingly partook of the forbidden fruit, so do we. Deliberate sin causes our human spirit to return to a dormant state. What has happened if a born-again believer willfully sins is that they have fed their fleshly, sinful nature and allowed it to dominate their actions. James said:

James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

That is, when a Spirit-filled believer has willfully sinned, there has been a process take place: they have first thought about the sin, and then have desired it, and then they dwelt upon and “fanned the flames” of that desire until they have acted on the desire and the result is spiritual death in their lives. They have dealt a serious blow to their spiritual walk with God and won a major victory in their life for their sinful nature. If they are to reverse it, they must reverse the process. They must first “die out” to their sin by being convicted of it and desiring to get things right with God. They must then act by repenting of that sins and thus coming to the altar of God. They then need to change their desires, and then cleanse from their lives the weights and circumstances that caused them to dwell on the sinful thought in the first place. They must then seek to serve God with all of their heart as they did at first. In fact, a good scriptural example of such a process is the commandment of Jesus to the church of Ephesus:

Rev 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place, unless you repent.

“Do the works you did at first” is good advice for the person seeking forgiveness. Go back and reverse the process by returning to how you got right with God in the first place. Remember the promise of 1 John 1:8 that we read earlier:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In context, this scripture is written to the church – people who had been born again. It is not a plan of salvation but rather instruction for the believer who has fallen by willfully or accidentally sinning. We must return to our High Priest and His altar and allow His blood to cleanse us again!

But Do They Again Need To . . . ?

Receive the Holy Spirit? Not in the literal sense of the word, because the Holy Spirit has not left. It is a very common misconception that the Holy Spirit leaves the body of a believer the moment that they willfully sin. Some people even quote a “scripture” to prove it that goes like this, “the Spirit of God will not dwell in an unclean temple.”

⁹ See the 21st and 22nd chapters of Exodus.

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The only problem is that their “scripture” is not found in the Bible! Neither is anything found that says anything remotely like that! The truth is that the Holy Spirit continues to dwell in the believer even after they willfully sin. The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit comes into our life to convict us of sin¹⁰. If it left the moment that we sinned, then it would be deserting us the moment that we needed it the most! It is true that the Holy Spirit will not enter a temple unless repentance for sin is made, but the Holy Spirit stays after a born-again believer sins and tries to fight against the sin there.

A good illustration of this principle is found in the Old Testament when the Philistines stole the Ark of the Covenant – representing the presence of God – and placed it within their temple to the idol, Dagon¹¹. Dagon was a half fish/half man idol and when the priests arrived the next morning, they were dismayed to find that the idol had fallen over and was laying before the Ark of the Covenant. They hastily set up Dagon and left, only to discover the next morning that Dagon was again lying on his side but this time was broken up into pieces! They hastily removed the Ark of the Covenant and took it to some outlying cities where God promptly struck the cities with great and painful illnesses until they returned it to its rightful place. This is a good metaphor of what the Holy Spirit does in a believer’s life when they willfully sin. It stays but tries to tear down everything that is not acceptable to the Word of God. Can the Holy Spirit leave a person’s life? We will answer that in a future lesson!

Does a person who has willfully sinned need to speak in tongues again? First of all, to speak in tongues should not be the main focus of the prayer of repentance because it is possible that people can learn to yield to God in the area of tongues and pray to that point and convince themselves that it proves that they are alright with God and go out and keep doing the same thing. Confession and repentance should be the focus of that prayer, not speaking in tongues. If the person begins to seek God with all of the sincerity and passion that they did at first, then they will doubtless speak in tongues as they did at first, but the speaking in tongues should be secondary to the sacrifice that they should be making toward getting right with God. Speaking in tongues is not enough, but should be accompanied by a reversal of the process that led them to sin in the first place, namely the removal of the desire to sin and of the things that brought about them dwelling upon that desire.

Speaking in tongues -- praying in the Holy Spirit -- builds our faith and gives us boldness to do what is right, both of which are qualities that the sinner needs so as long as the speaking in tongues does not fool the person into thinking that they are okay in their sin, then certainly it will not hurt. It could be that the tongues accompany the regeneration of man’s spirit and if this is so, then such a regeneration is needed again to restore that relationship once more. In this sense, “praying through” until a person again speaks in tongues can be very beneficial. But we must beware lest the “tongues” experience replace true repentance. If a person receives this experience again after having fallen into sin, then they are not receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit again but are having their spirit man resurrected. The Holy Spirit has never left, it is just being given complete control for that moment and time. If that experience leads to that person giving the Holy Spirit control of their day-to-day life after they stop speaking in tongues, then it was a beneficial experience. If not, then it in itself did not help them.

Does a born-again believer need to be baptized again in water? The answer is “no” for several reasons. First of all, there is never a scriptural record of anyone getting baptized again because of willful sin. The only reason anyone was ever “rebaptized” was in the 19th chapter of Acts when the disciples of John had not been baptized in the name of Jesus. If a person has never been baptized in the name of Jesus, they should be rebaptized, but in the case of willful sin, it is obviously not needed. This is strengthened by the fact that we find instances of sin in the church but never did any of these cases result in a “rebaptism.”

Because of Colossians 2:11-12, we know that baptism is a “spiritual circumcision” that replaced the physical circumcision of the Law of Moses. If a person under the Law sinned after he was circumcised, he had to approach the High Priest with the appropriate offering and an attitude of repentance, but it was not possible for him to be “circumcised again.” As the Law was to teach us about Grace, obviously a person does not need to be rebaptized after being baptized the right way. In similar typology, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest washed in water and changed his robes – a type of water baptism – while first approaching the Most Holy place which represented the Holy Spirit. But then he returned directly to the altar, bypassing the water on the return trip. The altar, of course, represents repentance and so this typifies that rebaptism is not necessary, but rather a genuine altar of repentance is what is needful!

¹⁰ See John 16:8.

¹¹ This story is found in the 5th chapter of 1 Samuel.

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Conclusion

Having come this far in this study, we are now able to better understand what is considered by many to be a “hard scripture.” The verse is:

Heb 10:26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Some have misinterpreted this verse to teach that willful sin cannot be forgiven but we have seen from other scriptures that such a teaching is false. To understand this verse accurately, we must first note that it does not say that “if we go on sinning deliberately” that “there is not a place of forgiveness available.” What it says is that if we keep deliberately sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, that there “no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” To understand that, you must take the verse in context.

The 9th and 10th book of Hebrews uses the concept of a special red heifer sacrifice found in the 19th chapter of Numbers and uses it as typology, applying its concepts to grace¹². The sacrifice can be summed up like this:

When a person died in Israel, then if an Israelite were to touch the dead body or even walk through the room where the dead body was, that person was said to be “unclean.” A red heifer was then sacrificed and offered as a burnt offering unto the Lord, then the ashes of the red heifer was mingled with water. To be clean and free from the sin of touching a dead body, the person had to wash with the water mingled with the ashes. This was done on the third day of their defilement and, if the person complied, they were pronounced clean on the seventh day. If a person refused to be washed in the water of the sacrifice, then they were cut off from the people and not allowed to live in Israel. It is important to note that it was not when they touched the dead body that they were permanently cut off, but when they refused the sacrifice. And if they did refuse the sacrifice, there was not another that could help them.

The typology is easy to see when we realize that the Bible speaks of a born-again believer as having put off the “old man” and having become a “new creature.” When we realize that our past, sinful lifestyle is the “dead body,” then we can grasp why the writer of Hebrews was using this sacrifice as a portrait of what happens to us today. When we go back after having been made a new creature and touch the “old man” of sin that we were before Christ, then we have sinned and need to be made clean again by the blood of Jesus Christ who is both our sacrifice and High Priest. We do this by confessing and repenting of our sins and doing what we did at first. The writer of Hebrews was using this sacrifice to show us that it is not when we touch the dead body that we are permanently cut off from the kingdom of God but rather when we refuse the sacrifice of Jesus Christ by refusing to repent and ask Him for forgiveness. If we will confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins, if we are truly repentant.

Some times when people are willfully sinning, then they try to make up for it other ways so that they can feel justified in continuing in their sins. They may do a little above and beyond in another area to pat themselves on the back and think that they are okay in their continued, deliberate sin. But only repentance and getting the blood of Jesus will save us; there is not another sacrifice that can help. Paying extra tithes or cleaning the church or giving to the poor or any other type of sacrifice will not make up for a lack of true repentance. Therefore you should know that if you keep deliberately sinning in such an attitude, there is no longer remains any sacrifice because you have rejected the only sacrifice that could cleanse you!

When a born-again believer sins, they must find a place at the altar of God and seek true repentance. True confession and asking God to forgive them is part of that, but so is a turning away from the sinful actions and cleansing your life of what led you to dwell upon the sinful thought until it became a reality in the first place. They must also return to living for God as passionately and as committed as they did at first. And they must not make excuses or try to do other things to justify their sin. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can save us! Let us make the altar our constant companion in life.

¹² We know this because Hebrews 9:13 mentions the unique traits of this sacrifice. The book of Hebrews, written to Jewish believers, assumes that the reader is extremely familiar with Mosaic Law.