

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **That Great Shepherd Of The Sheep Hebrews 13:20, 21**

These two verses are truly glorious because they exalt God and Christ. It is, of course, in the form of a benediction. Benedictions invoke the blessing of God upon the people of God and call upon God to perform His Word. The application of the benediction is found in verse 21 which applies to us. Behind the performance of the benediction rest the great truths revealed in verse 20.

This benediction is a fitting conclusion to the book of Hebrews. It ties together the great themes of God working salvation on our behalf with the redemptive work of Jesus as fulfilling the covenant promises of God.

The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ has defeated death and has brought into being the new covenant. This is also a reference to the eternal covenant of God. The covenant promises of God are fulfilled completely in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus. This covenant is also referred to as the covenant of redemption (and grace). It is right to speak of an eternal covenant of redemption.

Verse 20 begins with a reference to the “God of peace”. Paul concludes his letter to the Romans (15:33) with a similar declaration. Why does the writer to the Hebrews refer to God in this way? The one thing that stands out for us in Hebrews is that peace has been accomplished between us and God. This peace is through the death of Christ. It is God though who is named as the God of peace. It is God who grants peace. Peace with God is achieved only because God is a God of peace first. This extension of peace to us is through the dying of Jesus for us. Again, the stress is on the work done for us. There is no work done by us. In order to demonstrate His peace toward us, God has raised Jesus from the dead. There would be no value in speaking of a dead Savior. In fact, a dead Christ would be no different to a mere idol or person, but a living Christ is proof of the power of God to deliver us from our sins. The Apostle Paul makes frequent use of the phrase “the God of peace” (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23).

It is this God of peace who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus. The Resurrection stands as an assurance that peace can now be obtained from the very God who is peace and whose peace was far from us by virtue of our sin. It is important to note that it is Jesus brought back to life. The One who died now lives and we can have peace with God. If there were no Resurrection there would be no peace between God and man. The atoning work of the Lord Jesus would then be considered as simply another kind of sacrifice similar to the Old Testament sacrifices, but no different, rather than being the only true sacrifice that fulfils and accomplishes what the Old Testament sacrifices could not (namely; peace with God, consciences cleansed from sin, and complete forgiveness with sins removed). It is the Resurrection that confirms who Jesus is, and assures us of sins completely forgiven, since Jesus has power over death. The work of Resurrection is attributed to both God the Father and God the Son.

Our Lord is called the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. He is also referred to in Scripture as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). The Old Testament contains many references and allusions to shepherds. There are literal shepherds of the sheep (see Gen. 46:32; 47:3; Ex. 2:17; 1 Sam. 25:7; Isa. 13:20). “Shepherds” is a term that refers to the leaders of God’s people who either shepherd well or who do evil (Isa. 56:11; Jer. 23:4; 25:34; 50:6; Ezek. 34:2, 7 – 10). Elders in the New

Testament are called to the work of being shepherds over the flock – the people of God, the Church (1 Pet. 5:2; see also Acts 20:28). The work of shepherding involves caring for the sheep, protecting the sheep, feeding the sheep, leading the sheep, and ruling the sheep. All of these are done by our Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. He cares for us. He sustains us with our daily bread and spiritual bread. He rules us. He leads us. He protects us. He is truly the Great Shepherd.

The implication of raising Jesus from the dead as our Great Shepherd stresses the implications and necessity laid upon Him to keep us to the very end, to preserve us as a people for Himself. Without the Resurrection this could not take place. The work of the Lord Jesus continues on our behalf by our Lord.

The Messiah revealed in the Old Testament is a Shepherd (Ps. 23; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:23; refer also to John 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). Intertwined with the figure of the shepherd are the sheep. Careless to the point of wandering off into danger, not smart enough to know what they should do by themselves, not strong enough to protect themselves, unable to direct their ways and provide for themselves – they need the Shepherd. It is to their own shepherd's voice that they respond and none other (John 10:3, 4, 14, 16, 27).

The blood of the eternal covenant is a reference to the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31 – 34; Heb. 8:8ff; 10:15ff; see also 2 Cor. 3:3ff; 1 John 2:27). Jesus spoke of inaugurating the New Covenant with His own shed blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). The New Covenant is the fulfillment of all the promises of God to His people. It is ratified by the death of our Lord Jesus – through His blood. It is eternal in the sense that it is permanent (see Heb. 9:12 – 15).

All that is said in verse 20 stands behind the believer to whom the writer to the Hebrews now makes practical application. It is the God of peace who will equip the believer with everything good. This has the idea of edification, of equipping us to live lives pleasing to God. It is this equipping done by God, provided by God that will enable us to keep and do the will of God. When Christians are troubled concerning the will of God, they ought to examine those Scriptures that refer to the will of God and then examine their lives in the light of those verses (see Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 8:5; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 6:6; Col. 4:12; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:18; Heb. 10:36; 1 Pet. 2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19; 1 John 2:17).

When God works in us it is to our good and according to His will. It is also pleasing in His sight. Now that God is peaceful towards us (peace established by Jesus through His death on the Cross – Eph. 2:13 – 18), God is working in us His will which pleases Him. God is at work in our lives even when we do not see Him working. When things are not going so well, God is working in us. When we forget God, God is working in us. He is always at work in us bringing to completion that good work which He began in us (Phil. 1:6; 2:12, 13).

He is doing this through our Lord Jesus. Jesus is our Mediator. He imparts to us the benefits of the New Covenant. We are in Him. Nothing happens to us or is done for us apart from Christ. The God of peace will accomplish all these things for us through Jesus. He delights to bless us because we are in His Son.

We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus and we enter into the presence of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Without Christ we can do nothing. He intercedes on our behalf before the Throne of God. To get to the Father, we must go through the Son. It is to our Lord Jesus Christ that glory belongs. Benedictions are replete with glory of God. It is the glory of God that is the focal point. It is God's glory that we must be concerned about. Other benedictions connect the glory to God the Father or the Triune God, but here, I see the glory as belonging to Jesus the Lord (see also Rom. 11:36; 15:5, 6; 16:25 – 27). Jesus is the Lamb who was slain for us, so that as His sheep we might have eternal life (Rev. 5:9, 10). To this Great Shepherd of the Sheep we owe all allegiance and love for He has purchased us with His own blood.