

Equipped by the Good Shepherd for everything good

✦ eternal covenant

✦ eternal glory

In the name of Jesus, our perfect Savior and Friend, dear fellow redeemed:

Which shall we talk about today, cars or diamonds? Why not both? So let's say you come home and find parked in your driveway a shiny new luxury vehicle like you've always dreamed of. And there on the dashboard is a little box with a spectacular diamond – both gifts for you. Memorable day, or what? So you go in the garage, grab a paint brush and an old can of clear acrylic and paint the car and the diamond! Ridiculous, right? Yes, but that's the way we humans treat the perfect salvation God has provided in Jesus Christ. Something inside us is like a little kid who can't bring himself to just say, "Thanks!" and enjoy the gift. We need to be **Equipped by the Good Shepherd for everything good.**

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The Hebrew Christians receiving this letter were raised on varnished religion. In fact, all the world's religions have this in common. All have their own recipe for you to "Do and Do, Do and Do." Only God's Bible tells every single soul – pastors and people, preachers and listeners, "Put your paintbrush away. God's Word to you is, *Done!*" Once again the holy writer spotlights Jesus the Messiah: ***Now may the God of peace—who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, in connection with his blood, which established the eternal testament—***(EHV¹)

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He told His disciples, "***Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.***" (John 14:27) Most folks think "peace" is the absence of problems. They pursue independent, wealth so they can pay others to do things they don't like and spend their time and money however they want. They're like the rich farmer building bigger barns, saying to himself, "***Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.***" "***But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your soul will be demanded from you. Now who will get what you have prepared?'***" (Luke 12:19f) Are the rich and famous happy? They finally "arrive" at prosperity only to discover as one billionaire said, "My life just has more zeroes behind it."

See why God was so angry with the *shepherd*-pastors in Jeremiah's day? They were scattering the flock by pouring varnish in the watering trough, teaching work-righteousness instead of God's *peace*. They were supposed to point to Jesus, but they kept telling the people what to *do* for them. The LORD promised ***to raise up shepherds for them who will shepherd them. They will no longer be afraid or terrified, no will any be missing, declares the LORD....The LORD Our Righteousness.***

When ***The LORD Our Righteousness*** came to die on the cross for the guilt of all, Jesus found the flock scattered again. They followed Him to the far side of the Sea of Galilee in hunger and thirst for righteousness that only God can give. Yet in great compassion, Jesus fed their souls by teaching God's Word, and their bodies by blessing a little boy's lunch to feed over 5,000 men, plus women and children.

"For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1 Peter 2:25) And how does our *Shepherd and Overseer* Jesus want us to respect the pastors He places over us? The verses before our text say, "***Obey them, so that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no benefit to you.***" (13:17) The Good Shepherd loves us so.

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

Like the world's religions, in Jesus' day the Jews had lost their sense of God's true Messiah. Highly religious scribes and Pharisees felt they could keep Moses' law from Mount Sinai, by adding more to the Ten Commandments which they could not keep. God promised centuries later through another prophet Jeremiah that He would make a **"new covenant with the house of Israel"** unlike the old one they broke at Sinai and ever after. Instead of "Do!" this one would say, "Done!" One-sided, pure grace, no conditions: **"for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more."** (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

This past week a tech on the phone saw my *Preacher's Apprentice* publishing name and asked about it. He shared that his pastor had just told him that everything is done by Christ for us to go to heaven. The tech was so excited to tell me about this great discovery, almost like a new bride showing off her diamond. You know what I did? I piled on. Together we admired the diamond of God's grace. Trusting in Jesus as your Savior is the greatest gift that brings true *peace* like nothing else.

Realize God's **eternal covenant** says, "Done!" and your whole life changes from guilt to gratitude. How do you thank the God who owns everything? Give Him your heart, then be ready when He calls for good works to serve your neighbor. COVID provides opportunities most of us have never seen before. One Lutheran pastor has had to bury several other pastors in their village as the pandemic sweeps across Africa. He was encouraged to think of pastors like Martin Rinkart who served during plagues of the Thirty Years War. The only surviving pastor in town, 50 burials a day, 4000 funerals one year, including his own family wife – Rinkart wrote, "Now Thank We All Our God." That's...

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"Now may the God of peace...equip you with every good thing to do his will, as he works in us what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ." See who's busy here? It's not about us making our own engagement ring. Or trying to build a ride to heaven. Or painting the perfect coat of acrylic on something already perfect. God is busy as the dear Holy Spirit echoes what He said through Paul: **"God...is working in you, both to will and to work, for the sake of his good pleasure."** (Philippians 2:13) God's **good pleasure** is that you believe in Jesus as your Savior and enjoy His perfect peace that truly surpasses all understanding, that guards your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Even faith is a **"gift of God"** according to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 2. He says we are all **"dead"** by nature, unable to decide for God or even want to believe in God, much less choose God. Jesus said to His disciples: **"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will endure...."** (John 15:16) Unlike athletes, the more you use the equipment of God's Word the stronger you grow in Christ.

Before our sin-dead souls can pray, God must give us faith first. **"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."** (1 Corinthians 12:3) Jesus says, **"Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He is not going to come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life."** (John 5:24) Believe Jesus. You've already crossed over. Done!

The "Ticket to Heaven" some pass out, quotes John 3:16, which simply says, **"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."** Paul told the jailer at Philippi, not what to *do*, but, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."** (Acts 16:31) But then this "Ticket" adds four more things someone thinks "you need to do," including supposedly you must pray this prayer. And there's a red-flag word that gives away the deep ruts of work-righteous religions. Not once, but twice. **"If you believe this say this prayer...."** **"If you said this prayer, welcome to the Kingdom of God."** Extras you supposedly must do before you're forgiven by God? But Jesus says, **"It is finished."** Believe your **Good Shepherd!**

So let's say you drive your new vehicle, wearing your shiny diamond to the big game because the owner says your ticket is waiting. On the way in someone wants to give you this "Ticket." Good News flash: The owner's Son is waiting at the pearly gate with your true ticket "on call." Don't settle for a scrap of paper. **Equipped by the Good Shepherd – To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.**