

Heb. 10:1-10 The Insufficiency of Old Covenant Sacrifices

This passage concludes what began way back in chapter 5 as the author began to show the superiority of Jesus' priesthood, which is after the order of Melchizedek. And Jesus did not merely bring the blood of bulls and goats; instead he brought himself. And this offering, to which ALL those offerings under the old covenant pictured, was their perfect fulfillment. And in this one-time offering Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant (9:15). In the new covenant the sacrifice on the cross of our Lord accomplished what the old system and the Levitical priesthood could not do. If you are a Christian, your sins are taken away. Your guilty conscience is cleansed. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you are pure; you are righteous in God's sight. Instead of fear and trembling at the base of Mt. Sinai as Moses alone ascended and spoke with God under the old covenant, we, as 10:22 says, "**draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**" And all of this because of the most glorious sacrifice of our Great High Priest!

I have 3 truths concerning the insufficiency of those sacrifices: 1) They remind the worshiper of sin; 2) They are merely shadows; and 3) They could never accomplish the will of God.

1. The Sacrifices under the old Covenant are insufficient as they only remind the worshiper of his sin. They never perfect. They only remind. This means that as long as they are in place, they are insufficient. Look at vv. 1-4: "**For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**" Really, this is one of the author's main points as he spoke to those Hebrew Christians who were considering going back to the old covenant with its sacrifices. He was saying, "*Don't do it! It is insufficient to save to you! Those sacrifices cannot 'perfect' you. In fact, if they were sufficient to make one 'perfect' they would have ceased. If they truly cleansed you from your sins, they would have served their purpose.*" And look at v. 3. Instead of cleansing the worshiper, they only "remind" him of his sin year after year.

The older I get the more I need to be reminded of things I have forgotten. This is why I am so grateful for Kristen. She reminds me of the things I forget. Recently I came back from the grocery store very happy and satisfied that I got EVERYTHING I was supposed to get. And then, after going through the groceries, I hear the words, "*Jon, you forgot the avocados.*" And then I am reminded, "*Yes, I did forget them!*" And so I head out the door again. Well, this is what the author is saying about the old covenant and its sacrifices. As long as they are offered, there is a reminder of sins . . . year after year. Why? Verse 4: "**It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**" As we've seen, those sacrifices cannot purify the guilty conscience of a sinner (all of us). Those sacrifices cannot make the worshiper "clean". Those sacrifices cannot "sanctify" or set the sinner apart as acceptable in the sight of God. Those sacrifices cannot secure an "eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11-14). All they do is remind of sin.

In Christ, there is no reminder of sins. All of them were laid upon Christ in his sacrifice on the cross. If you are a Christian, God does not look down and say, *“I saw that sin. You are guilty. I will judge you for that.”* If you are in Christ, God does not remind you over and over again that you need another sacrifice. There is no longer fear and trembling as in the old covenant when the people waited for the high priest to come out alive from the holy of holies. We do not wait at the base of Mt. Sinai with its lighting and thunder, wondering if Moses will make it down alive. As Christians, we look to the one-time sacrifice of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus! If you are a Christian, your sins are taken away. They are thrown as far as the east is from the west. You are clean! God does not accept you and your sin. Instead, he accepts the eternal sacrifice of the Son. This is why the Apostle Paul can say, **“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come”** (2 Cor. 5:17). Or, **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”** (Rom. 8:1-4).

Christian, please remember today that God is not your accuser. Satan is! I am reminded of a song we sing called *“Before the Throne of God Above.”* *When Satan tempts me to despair. And tells me of the guilt within. Upward I look, and see Him there who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied. To look on Him and pardon me.*

2. The Sacrifices under the Old Covenant are insufficient as they are But Shadows that Direct Attention to the One True Sacrifice. Look at v. 1: **“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.** Here, the author uses the concept of shadow and reality to describe the difference between the old covenant and the new, particularly the deficiency of sacrifices under the law of Moses. We’ve already spoken of its insufficiency, in that those sacrifices cannot perfect the worshiper, but instead, only remind us of our sin. Here, the emphasis is on their function to picture, to illustrate, to show that another sacrifice is coming. And this sacrifice is the real, effectual, sacrifice.

I think of Plato’s cave. He tells the story of a man who is bound in a cave. And his face is toward the back of the cave. But behind him there is the mouth of the cave where light comes through and makes shadows on the wall. And all the man can do is look at the shadows, shadows of REAL objects. But, they are only shadows. As long as he is bound in that cave, he will never see what is behind the shadows, the real objects. He will never see the substance. Think about it. A shadow has no substance, but only brings before the mind what is pictured. When I see the shadow of a tree, I think, *“hmm, that’s a tree.”* But, what do I find in the shadow of that tree? NOTHING. There is no substance, only a shadow that causes me to think of that which is really behind the shadow. In the same way, the entire Mosaic Law under the old covenant, with all its ordinances, its institutions of worship, etc. are only a shadow. They are not the substance. And shadows only reveal what is behind them. In and of themselves they fall short. And as regards

salvation and the perfecting of the worshiper, they fall short. Let me ask, “*What is the substance to which these shadows point?*” It is Christ! The substance is Christ! Look back at v. 1: The “***law is but a shadow.***” A shadow of what? “***good things to come.***” What are the things to come? The things to come are Christ and EVERYTHING He accomplishes in the new covenant for the believer from his death, resurrection, ascension, all the way to the new heavens and the new earth, and eternity.

Look at 9:23-24: “**Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.**” I also think of Col. 2 as Paul warns those who are holding on to certain things from Mosaic law and the things of this world as if those things could save. He says, “**Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ**” (Col. 2:16-17).

As we consider Christ as the substance of the OC sacrifices, I think of a much more fundamental truth. Since God is Spirit, how do we know Him? Do you remember Jesus’ words: “**If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father**” (John 14:9). Brothers and sisters, Jesus is the “image of the invisible God.” And, “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 1:15; 2:9).

3. The sacrifices under the old covenant are insufficient as they cannot accomplish the will of God. Look at vv. 5-10: “**Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’ When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’ He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**” The important phrase for us here is “the will of God.” The old sacrifices could not accomplish the will of God. Those sacrifices were ANIMALS. They could never actively obey the will of God in their actions or in their hearts, as a man could. Yes, their death was required for that time, but only as shadows and pictures of the real death of the Son of God. They are the “shadows on the wall of the cave.” And, as we’ve seen, as mere creatures of this earth, they could never achieve an eternal salvation. They could never accomplish his will!

I love these verses! Here we see the mysterious plan of God from before the foundations of the world carried out perfectly by the Son in his humiliation . . . to accomplish what the Law of Moses and its sacrifices could never do . . . to accomplish what ONLY He could do . . . which is to secure an eternal salvation . . . to ‘perfect’ the worshiper. Here we see the comparison of the PERSON of Christ and HIS sacrifice with the sacrifices of bulls and goats. And really there is no comparison! Those sacrifices could never accomplish the will of God.

Our author is quoting from Ps. 40:6-8 (turn there with me). The context of this Psalm of David is obedience. Throughout the Psalm he speaks of the man who trusts in God (v. 4), who does not hold back from telling the people of God's great works and deliverance (vv. 9-10). And this is not merely an outward obedience, but a complete obedience flowing from the heart! And then right in the middle of the Psalm we find the most beautiful words about sacrifice and obedience. In vv. 6-8 he says: "**In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."**" I think the picture here with the "ear" is that with the "EAR" we hear the will of God and we obey. Parents, how many times do you say to your kids, "*Listen to me!*" "*Give me your ear!*" And you tell them what you require and what you expect, which is obedience!

And though the initial context was David and his obedience, the author of Hebrews shows how the obedience of David merely pictures the obedience of another King, of another priest, of the ONE who would come and obey the will of God perfectly. But instead of an "ear" the author of Hebrews says that it won't merely be an ear, it will be a "body," a "person." And this ONE will OBEY the will of God completely. In fact, he will "DELIGHT" to do God's will from all his heart. This is none other than the eternal covenant from before the foundations of the world between the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit). And it was fulfilled in the humiliation of the Son, beginning with his virgin birth as He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and from the moment of conception we see this promise begin to be accomplished.

Do you remember the first recorded words of Jesus from the Book of Luke. Jesus was 12 years old. The family went to Jerusalem for Passover. And after it was over, they left with a group from Nazareth. And they didn't check to see if Jesus were with them. So, they went back to look for him. And after 3 days of looking, they found him in the temple, "**sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions**" (I would love to know his questions!). When they found him, they asked him why he did not come with them. And he said, "**Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?**" (Luke 2:41-52). In other words, "*I have come to do my father's will.*" As the Son of God, Jesus knew why He had come. It was to do the will of the Father. (intriguing thought, "When did Jesus, in his humanity, cognitively consent to do the Father's will, agreed upon in eternity?")

This is why he came! Look back at v. 5: "**Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired. But, a body I have prepared for you.**" Once when his disciples were asking about food, Jesus tells them, "**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish HIS work**" (John 4:34). Do you remember once when Jesus told his disciples that he was going to suffer and die? What did Peter do? According to Matt. 16: "**And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."**" And probably the hardest rebuke recorded says to Peter: "**Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man**" (Matt. 16:22-23).

Only the obedience of the Son of God . . . not just a man . . . but in essence, God, could accomplish such a plan. And this is the point of the Book of Hebrews, particularly this passage.

God does not ultimately delight in the sacrifices of man! He delights in the sacrifice of the Son! Why? Because in that sacrifice we find a perfect, eternal, loving obedience. The obedience of Christ is the key to sacrifice! The perfect obedience of the ONE transferred to the disobedience of the many. Look at v. 14: **“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”** And here we find the heart of the gospel!

Today, as Christians, we are here because the blood of Christ is sufficient to save us. The law and its sacrifices under the OC are not. They can only: 1) Remind us of sin; 2) They are merely shadows; and 3) They cannot accomplish the will of God. What beautiful truths to help us this week as we think about our own sin, as we know that God is not accusing us. And to consider the great plan of God in sending the Son into this world. These truths also help us as we do our best to tell others of this great plan!