

Hebrews 10:1-18
May 8, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

I bet everyone in this room has experienced debt at some level at some point in your life, whether it's a mortgage, or student loan, a car note, or credit card debt. Most Americans carry debt, which means most of us have some kind of debt if we represent the norm.

Q: How do you feel having debt to pay? [Stressed? Bondage? Extra Weight?]

Suppose your phone rings tomorrow morning, and it's your banker. He says, "You're not going to believe this, but we just rec'd a wire payment that wiped out all of your debt! I don't know what connections you have, but you are one fortunate person to be truly financially free. It gets even better. This individual sent us a note and asked us to send him the bill anytime you incur any future debt. I hope this call made your day!"

Q: How would you process this phenomenal gift? What would go through your mind? [Who would do that for me? Who has so many resources that they are willing to take responsibility for any potential debt in the future?]

Transition: We not only carry financial debt, but our sins created a debt that none of us could ever pay! There is no way we could remove this debt through good works. There are no amount of sacrifices we can present to wipe our debt away. When God recognized that the old sacrificial system could only cover sin, but not remove it, He sent His Son, Jesus, to be the *perfect once-for-all sacrifice* that declared us as spiritually "debt free!"

The writer of Hebrews will present why the sacrifice of Jesus is superior to the Old Covenant sacrifices. I especially hope that each of us can deepen our appreciation of being spiritually debt free BY understanding the BENEFITS we gained through Christ's sacrifice.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 10:1-10]

V.1:

- The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

V.2:

- If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

V.3:

- But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins,

V.4:

- because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

V.5:

- Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;

V.6:

- with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

V.7:

- Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.’

V.8:

- First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made).

V.9:

- Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second.

V.10:

- And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1: What does the writer mean by “law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming?” [The sacrificial system was a type or picture of the work our Lord would accomplish on the cross.]

Q v.1: Why were the Old Covenant sacrifices inferior? [Sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year could not make perfect those who draw near to worship]

Q v.4: If you look in v.4, the writer states his position on animal sacrifices more forcefully. What does he say? [It’s “*impossible* for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”]

Observation: The annual Day of Atonement did not accomplish “remission of sin” but only “reminder of sin.” The annual repetition of the ceremony was evidence that the previous year’s sacrifices had not done the job. True, the nation’s sins were *covered*; but they were not *cleansed*. Nor did the people have God’s inward witness of forgiveness and acceptance.

Q v.5-9: This section of Scripture is a quote of Psalm 40:6-8. Who is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant sacrifice? [Jesus]

Q v.7: So when the psalmist said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God,’ what is he alluding to? [Christ came to earth to die on a cross, i.e. be our sacrifice “once-for-all”]

Q v.9: If God is not pleased with “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings,” then what is God pleased with? [No amount of sacrifices could substitute for obedience. X-Ref: Psalm 51:16-17]

Q: So based on these first ten verses, can you tag a BENEFIT that Christ's sacrifice brought about that could not be achieved under the old sacrificial system? [Christ's sacrifice REMOVES our sin once-for-all]

Ultimate Message to Hebrew Christians: Why go back to a covenant that has been taken away? Why go back to sacrifices that are inferior?

[Read Heb 10:11-18]

V.11:

- Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

V.12:

- But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

V.13:

- Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool,

V.14:

- because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

V.15:

- The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

V.16:

- “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

V.17:

- Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

V.18:

- And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.11: We see a recurring theme in this grouping of verses. Priests could offer sacrifices “again and again” and it could never “x?” [Take away the sins!]

Q v.13-18: In contrast, when Jesus became a one-time sacrifice, he ushered in the New Covenant. What are the BENEFITS that came with this New Covenant?

- Our enemies will become Jesus's footstool
- He made us “perfect forever” while making us holy
- The Law was written on the hearts and minds of all people
- God will no longer “remember” (or hold against) our sins and lawless acts
- Since our sins are forgiven once and for all, there is no need for more sacrifices!

Q: Just to be clear, how do we know *personally* know that we have this perfect standing before God? [The witness of the Holy Spirit through His Word. Once we transferred our trust to Christ alone for forgiveness and salvation, we are sealed by His Holy Spirit and protected.]

LOOK:

You are spiritually debt free! Christ's once-for-all sacrifice removed our sins permanently. Are we living freely to serve Christ who bought us at a great price? Do we understand that our life is not our own and that the only reason we're here is to serve God with the purpose He's given us?

Ask the Lord to show you daily what His will is for you.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 312–314). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE SUPERIOR SACRIFICE

Hebrews 10

A teenage boy, whose mother was away on a visit, found himself with time on his hands. He decided to read a book from the family library. His mother was a devout Christian, so the boy knew there would be a sermon at the beginning and an application at the end of the book, but there would also be some interesting stories in between.

While reading the book, he came across the phrase “the finished work of Christ.” It struck him with unusual power. “The finished work of Christ.”

“Why does the author use this expression?” he asked himself. “Why not say the atoning or the propitiatory work of Christ?” (You see, he knew all the biblical terms. He just did not know the Saviour!) Then the words, “It is finished,” flashed into his mind, and he realized afresh that the work of salvation was accomplished.

“If the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?” He knew the answer and fell to his knees to receive the Saviour and full forgiveness of sins. That is how J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, was saved.

The tenth chapter of Hebrews emphasizes the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in contrast with the imperfect sacrifices that were offered under the Old Covenant. Our Lord's superior priesthood belongs to a better order—Melchizedek's and not Aaron's. It functions on the basis of a better covenant—the New Covenant—and in a better sanctuary, in heaven. But all of this depends on the better sacrifice, which is the theme of this chapter.

The writer presented three benefits that explain why the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Covenant sacrifices.

Christ's Sacrifice Takes Away Sin (Heb. 10:1–10)

Sin, of course, is man's greatest problem. No matter what kind of religion a man has, if it cannot deal with sin, it is of no value. By nature, man is a sinner; and by choice, he proves that his nature is sinful. It has well been said, “We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.”

The need for a better sacrifice (vv. 1–4). Why were the Old Covenant sacrifices inferior? After all, they were ordained by the Lord; and they were in force for hundreds of years. While it is true that at times the Jewish people permitted these sacrifices to become empty rituals (Isa. 1:11–15), it is also true that many sincere people brought their offerings to God and were blessed.

The very *nature* of the Old Covenant sacrifices made them inferior. The Law was only “a shadow of good things to come” and not the reality itself. The sacrificial system was a type or picture of the work our Lord would accomplish on the cross. This meant that the system was temporary, and therefore could accomplish nothing permanent. The very repetition of the

sacrifices day after day, and the Day of Atonement year after year, pointed out the entire system's weakness.

Animal sacrifices could never completely deal with human guilt. God did promise forgiveness to believing worshipers (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35), but this was a judicial forgiveness and not the removal of guilt from people's hearts. People lacked that inward witness of full and final forgiveness. They could not claim, "I have no more consciousness of sins." If those worshipers had been "once purged [from guilt of sin]" they would never again have had to offer another sacrifice.

So the annual Day of Atonement did not accomplish "remission of sin" but only "reminder of sin." The annual repetition of the ceremony was evidence that the previous year's sacrifices had not done the job. True, the nation's sins were *covered*; but they were not *cleansed*. Nor did the people have God's inward witness of forgiveness and acceptance.

Yes, there was a desperate need for a better sacrifice because the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sins. It could cover sin and postpone judgment; but it could never effect a once-and-for-all redemption. Only the better sacrifice of the Son of God could do that.

The provision of the better sacrifice (vv. 5–9). It was God who provided the sacrifice and not man. The quotation is from Psalm 40:6–8, and it is applied to Jesus Christ in His incarnation ("when He cometh into the world"). The quotation makes it clear that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant sacrifices.

The word *sacrifice* refers to any of the animal sacrifices. *Offering* covers the meal offerings and the drink offerings. The burnt offering and sin offering are mentioned (Heb. 10:5, 8). The trespass offering would be covered in the word *sacrifice* (Heb. 10:5). Each of these offerings typified the sacrifice of Christ and revealed some aspect of His work on the cross (see Lev. 1–7).

The phrase, "a body hast Thou prepared Me" (Heb. 10:5), is not found in the original quotation. Psalm 40:6 reads, "Mine ears hast Thou opened." The writer of Hebrews was quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. How do we explain this variation? Some connect "Mine ears hast Thou opened" with Exodus 21:1–6, a passage that describes the actions of a master whose servant did not want to be set free. The master bored a hole through the ear lobe of the servant, which was a sign that the servant preferred to remain with his master. The idea is that our Lord was like a willing servant who had His ears bored.

The problem with that explanation is that only *one* ear was bored, while the verse (Ps. 40:6) speaks of *both* ears. Furthermore, the verb used in Exodus 21 means "to pierce," while the verb in Psalm 40:6 means "to dig." Our Lord was a servant, but it is not likely that the writer had this in mind. Probably "opened ears" signified a readiness to hear and obey the will of God (see Isa. 50:4–6). God gave His Son a prepared body that the Son might serve God and fulfill His will on earth. Our Lord often referred to this truth (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 17:4).

Of course, the same Holy Spirit who inspired Psalm 40 has the right to amplify and interpret His Word in Hebrews 10. "Opened ears" indicates a body ready for service.

Twice in this paragraph, the writer stated that God "had no pleasure" in the Old Covenant sacrifices (see Heb. 10:6, 8). This does not suggest that the old sacrifices were wrong, or that sincere worshipers received no benefit from obeying God's Law. It only means that God had no delight in sacrifices as such, apart from the obedient hearts of the worshipers. No amount of sacrifices could substitute for obedience (1 Sam. 15:22, Ps. 51:16–17; Isa. 1:11, 19; Jer. 6:19–20; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:20–21).

Jesus came to do the Father's will. This will is the New Covenant that has replaced the Old Covenant. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has taken away the first covenant

and established the second. The readers of this epistle called Hebrews would get the message: why go back to a covenant that has been taken away? Why go back to sacrifices that are inferior?

The effectiveness of the better sacrifice (v. 10). Believers have been set apart (“sanctified”) by the offering of Christ’s body once for all. No Old Covenant sacrifice could do that. An Old Covenant worshiper had to be purified from ceremonial defilement repeatedly. But a New Covenant saint is set apart finally and completely.

Christ’s Sacrifice Need Not Be Repeated (Heb. 10:11–18)

Again the writer contrasted the Old Covenant high priest with Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. The fact that Jesus *sat down* after He ascended to the Father is proof that His work was completed (Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1). The ministry of the priests in the tabernacle and temple was *never done* and *never different*: they offered the same sacrifices day after day. This constant repetition was proof that their sacrifices did not take away sins. What tens of thousands of animal sacrifices could not accomplish, Jesus accomplished with *one sacrifice forever!*

The phrase “sat down” refers us again to Psalm 110:1: “Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.” Christ is in the place of exaltation and victory. When He returns, He shall overcome every enemy and establish His righteous kingdom. Those who have trusted Him need not fear, for they have been “perfected forever” (Heb. 10:14). Believers are “complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). We have a perfect standing before God because of the finished work of Jesus Christ.

How do we know *personally* that we have this perfect standing before God? Because of the witness of the Holy Spirit through the Word (Heb. 10:15–18). The witness of the Spirit is based on the work of the Son and is given through the words of Scripture. The writer (Heb. 10:16–17) quoted Jeremiah 31:33–34, part of a passage he’d also quoted in Hebrews 8:7–12. The Old Covenant worshiper could not say that he had “no more consciousness of sins” (Heb. 10:2). But the New Covenant believer *can* say that his sins and iniquities are remembered *no more*. There is “no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:18) and no more remembrance of sin!

I once shared a conference with a fine Christian psychiatrist whose lectures were very true to the Word. “The trouble with psychiatry,” he told me, “is that it can only deal with symptoms. A psychiatrist can remove a patient’s *feelings* of guilt, but he cannot remove the guilt. It’s like a trucker loosening a fender on his truck so he won’t hear the motor knock. A patient can end up feeling better, but have *two* problems instead of one!”

When a sinner trusts Christ, his sins are all forgiven, the guilt is gone, and the matter is completely settled forever.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 803-804). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

d. The superior effect of the new priesthood (10:1–18)

This is the final subsection of the expository unit that began at 7:1. In chapter 7 the author argued for the superiority of Christ, as a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, over the Levitical priests. In 8:1–10:18 he argued the superiority of Christ’s priestly ministry which is based on a superior covenant (8:7–9:15) and entailed a superior sacrifice (9:16–28). Now he argued that the superior sacrifice perfects the New-Covenant worshiper.

10:1. By virtue of its anticipatory character, **the Law could never ... make perfect those who draw near to worship**. By “make perfect” the writer did not mean sinless perfection. As the following discussion shows, he was concerned with that definitive removal of guilt which makes free access to God possible for worshipers who trust in the sufficiency of the Cross.

10:2–4. The continuous sacrifices of the old order which are “repeated endlessly year after year” (v. 1) testify to the Law’s incapacity to “perfect” its **worshipers**. Far from enabling them to achieve a standing before God in which they **would no longer have felt guilty for their sins**, the yearly rituals (of the Day of Atonement) served as a kind of **annual reminder of sins**, since animal blood has no power **to take away sins**.

10:5–7. It was precisely for this reason that an Old Testament prophecy (Ps. 40:6–8) recorded the words of the One who would do what God really wanted. This psalm prophetically anticipated some of Christ’s words at his First Advent. The phrase **a body You prepared for Me** is one Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew expression “You have dug ears for Me.” The Greek translator whose version the author of Hebrews used (obviously translating with the help of the Holy Spirit), construed the Hebrew text as a kind of figure of speech (technically called synecdoche) in which a part is put for the whole. If God is to “dig out ears” He must “prepare a body.” This interpretation is both valid and correct as its quotation in Hebrews proves. In the “body” which He assumed in Incarnation, Christ could say that He had **come to** achieve what the Old-Covenant sacrifices never achieved, the perfecting of New-Covenant worshipers. In this sense He did God’s will.

10:8–10. The writer then expounded the text he had just quoted. In the words **He sets aside the first to establish the second** (v. 9), the author referred to the setting aside of the Old-Covenant sacrifices which did not ultimately satisfy God. What was established was God’s will, and it was **by that will** that **we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all** (*ephapax*; cf. 7:27; 9:12).

The words rendered “made holy” involve a single Greek word (*hēgiasmenoi*) often rendered “sanctify” (cf. 10:14, 29). Here it occurs in a tense that makes it plain, along with the rest of the statement, that the sanctification is an accomplished fact. Nowhere in Hebrews does the writer refer to the “progressive sanctification” of a believer’s life. Instead sanctification is for him a functional equivalent of the Pauline concept of justification. By the sanctification which is accomplished through the death of Christ, New-Covenant worshipers are perfected for guilt-free service to God (cf. 2:11).

10:11–14. The truth just stated is reinforced by a contrast with the Levitical priesthood. Levite priests could never sit down on the job since their sacrificial services were never completed. But Christ’s sitting **at the right hand of God** (cf. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2) is both a signal that His sacrifice was offered **for all time** and also that He can now confidently await final victory over **His enemies**. The words “for all time” (*eis to diēnekas*) are translated “forever” in verse 14 (see comments on 7:3). Thus by a single sacrifice (**one sacrifice**, 10:12, 14)—in contrast with the many sacrifices offered by the priests **day after day and again and again ... He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy**. The translation “are being made holy” sounds like a continuing process. But this ignores the force of the expression “made holy” in verse 10. A better rendering is, “them who are sanctified” (*tous hagiāzomenous*; cf. v. 29). “The sanctified” have a status in God’s presence that is “perfect” (cf. 11:40; 12:23) in the sense that they approach Him with the full acceptance gained through the death of Christ (cf. 10:19–22).

10:15–18. Reverting to his basic text on the benefits of the New Covenant (cf. 8:8–12), the author quoted a portion of it (in 10:16 he quoted Jer. 31:33; and in Heb. 10:17, Jer. 31:34) to

drive home his point. The text is a testimony given by God's **Holy Spirit**, and shows that final forgiveness, such as the New Covenant promised, meant that there was no further need for any **sacrifice for sin**. As the writer will shortly show, a person who turns from the one sufficient sacrifice of Christ has no real sacrifice to which he can turn (cf. Heb. 10:26).

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