

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 10:1-18**

To better understand why Jesus's offering was superior to the old sacrifices.

Read the Text:

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. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 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.'" 8 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), 9 then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," 17 then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." 18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. (Heb. 10:1-18, ESV)

Study the Text:**More Old Testament Evidence**

Hebrews 10 belongs to the same overarching argument that Hebrews 9 began, but they accomplish different purposes. Whereas Hebrews 9 explained how Christ was able to enter into the heavenly sanctuary to inaugurate the new covenant, Hebrews 10 explains why his sacrifice was superior to all of the old covenant sacrifices. To say it differently, Hebrews 9 is about Jesus "entering," and Hebrews 10 is about Jesus "offering." In the first 18 verses of this chapter, there are, once again, a couple of Old Testament quotations

that anchor the new covenant firmly in the Old Testament. Moreover, the text further distinguishes between the sacrifices of the old covenant and the final sacrifice of Christ in the new covenant.

The Imperfection of the Old

Chapter 10 provides several ways the old covenant is imperfect. It is a “shadow of the good things to come” (Heb. 10:1), but it cannot do what the new covenant can do. Below is a brief breakdown of some of these imperfections.

IT CANNOT PERFECT

Verse 1 states that because these old sacrifices were only “shadows,” they had to be repeatedly made every year, and even then it could not “perfect those who draw near.” This becomes obvious by virtue of the fact that they had to be repeatedly offered, as verse 2 queries: “Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?” In other words, if the old sacrifices were able to perfect us, the need for repeated sacrifices would cease because we would have been purified. The idea of “consciousness” in verse 2 conveys the idea of a “persisting notion.” The underlying Greek word, *συνείδησις* (*syneidēsis*), means “a present idea or an impression of inward reality.” This brings up an important reality. Sin is something that we consciously know exists. We are aware of our brokenness. The old covenant sacrifices did not erase this. They only reminded the worshipper of their persistent problem.

IT CAN ONLY REMIND

Verse 3 emphasizes this: “But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.” The blood of sacrifice did not perfect the people of God (Heb. 10:4), but it did serve as a reminder of the costly reality of sin. Sin is *bloody*, both literally and figuratively. Where there is sin, there will be death, and not only death to the body, but often death to relationships, death to trust, and death to all that we hold dear. The sacrifices were a grim reminder of this.

A Foreshadowed Better Sacrifice

Verse 5 calls to mind yet another Psalm, this time from Psalm 40, and it is an intriguing Psalm to say the least. Keep in mind that during the time the Psalms were written, the sacrificial system was well established. It is interesting, then, that Psalm 40:6-8 predicts a future sacrifice that will not be like the sacrifices the old covenant calls for, but rather a human body. To understand this, however, a lot of work must be done, specifically with Psalm 40:6. Psalm 40:6 in the Hebrew Bible 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.” The idea of “giving an open ear” could mean at least a couple of things. Some scholars argue that the Psalmist is saying God has enabled him to hear and obey. Others argue that the literal Hebrew rendering, “you have dug out two ears for me,” conveys God’s creative power over the human body.

Either way, it is curious that when this Psalm is eventually translated into Greek in the Septuagint (LXX), this phrase is markedly different. Psalm 40:6 in the Septuagint, which is actually stylized as Psalm 39:7, says: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; a whole burnt offering and an offering concerning sin you did not require.” In the Greek version, it is not merely the ears that are being prepared to hear and obey, but rather the sacrifice of an entire body (cf. Rom. 12:1). It is this version that Hebrews is quoting.

The question is, “*Why?*” It is likely that this version is more Christologically suitable and therefore better for the case Hebrews is making. There are many Old Testament passages that take on new Christological meaning in the second century B.C., revealing that even a couple of centuries before Jesus was born, there was an anticipation that these verses still pointed to some future Messiah. When read this way, Psalm 40:6 shows that God was foreshadowing a future sacrifice of a human body, and that this human would “delight” to do God’s will because God’s law would be in his heart (Heb. 10:8; c.f. Ps. 40:8). Hebrews assumes that Jesus Christ is the one this Psalm is referring to, as evidenced by verse 10: “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” And that the law is written on the heart of the one Psalm 40 envisions alludes to the new covenant that Jeremiah spoke about in Jeremiah 31:33, which is incidentally quoted in Hebrews 10:16-17. This new covenant offering of the body of Jesus Christ, fully sufficient in the sight of God the Father, means “there is no longer any offering for sin” (Heb. 10:18).

Verses 11 through 14 additionally speak of the benefits of Jesus’s offering. The former sacrifices had to be offered “repeatedly” (Heb. 10:11). The former priests “stood daily at his service” (Heb. 10:11), because the work was never finished. Recall the various furniture pieces in the Tabernacle. Did you ever notice that no chairs were included? There’s an altar, a lamp, a table, but nowhere to sit. That’s because the priests were not permitted to sit; they worked constantly. It is significant, then, that verse 12 says that after Jesus made his offering, “he sat down at the right hand of the Father.” His sacrifice has done what no other sacrifice could do: “For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:13).

What About Now?

The major takeaway of this passage is the superiority of Jesus’s sacrifice over all of the old covenant sacrifices. The old sacrifices only remind us of our sin; Jesus’s sacrifice fully forgives us of our sin. He has done what no other priest could do, and he has finished his work and is simply awaiting his second coming.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 10:1-2. Why could the law not make perfect those who practice it?

2. Read Hebrews 10:3-4. What did the sacrifices do for the people of God? What could they not do?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 10:5-7. What Psalm is quoted here? What phrase is different, and why?

2. Read Hebrews 10:8-9. What did Psalm 40:6-8 indicate about the old and new covenants?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 10:10-11. What does the body of Jesus offer us? What did the old priests do repeatedly?

2. Read Hebrews 10:12-13. What did Jesus do after he made his offering? What is waiting for?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 10:14-16. What has his single offering accomplished? To what Old Testament verse does the Holy Spirit bear witness?

2. Read Hebrews 10:17-18. What verse is quoted? What does this kind of forgiveness mean for sacrifice?

Discuss the Text!

Session 22 Discussion: Forgiven

Hebrews 10 makes it clear that Jesus Christ's offering of his body has purchased eternal forgiveness for those who follow him (Heb. 10:14). Yet, it is difficult to embrace this forgiveness. Talk as a group about how the forgiveness of Christ changes us, and the unique struggles you face to accept it.

1. Icebreaker: What is something you have to do repeatedly because the work is never truly finished? Imagine if you could have someone do that work for you, and it would never have to be done again? Would you do it?
2. In what ways do you sometimes live as though Christ's sacrifice were insufficient and something still needs to be added?
3. Are you able to treat others as "forgiven" who have been forgiven by the Lord? If you struggle to do that, why do you struggle to do that?
4. What is the difference between the Holy Spirit's conviction, which leads us to repentance, and the condemning guilt that causes us to doubt whether we have truly been forgiven?
5. How should we feel when we sin, knowing the price that was paid for our forgiveness?
6. Kid Talk: Make a pretend bill on a piece of paper and write **PAID IN FULL** across it. Imagine you ordered a meal but did not have enough money to pay for it. Then your father paid the entire bill, and the restaurant stamped it "PAID IN FULL." Would the restaurant ask you to pay the same bill again tomorrow? Why not? How is that like Jesus giving his life once to pay completely for our sins?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus's bodily sacrifice was foreshadowed in Psalm 40:6.
2. Jesus's sacrifice was sufficient to pay for our sin in a way no other sacrifice has been.