

New Covenant Final Sacrifice

Once there was a young man, a teenager whose mother was away, and found himself with time on his hands. Restless, he went to the family library and looked for a book. His mother was a devout and godly Christian, and he picked up one of her Christian books.

While reading this book, he came across the phrase, 'the finished work of Christ'. It struck him. Why use that phrase? He had been in church his whole life, and had heard the words "atoning work of Christ" "blood of Christ", "propitiatory work of Christ". But he hadn't heard the phrase "finished work of Christ". Just then, he was reminded of the words of Jesus on the Cross, "It is finished". It now all came home to him – the work of salvation was accomplished. He said to himself, "If the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?" The answer was, accept and receive this gift, and he fell to his knees and received Christ. That is how J. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, received Christ as Saviour.

I wonder how many people are like Hudson Taylor was: religious, but unsaved. Aware of all the theology, but never having truly appropriated the finished work of Christ. One of the ways I know that there are many people like that is because some people are very uncomfortable with our church's requirement that you give your testimony of salvation to become a member. Now when you think about it, it's hardly a strange thing for a church to ask you to give an account that you are a Christian.

The real discomfort that people have, besides just giving up your pride and letting other people into your life, is that many people have never experienced an 'it-is-finished' moment, like Hudson Taylor. They are religious, and they have chosen the Christian religion as their religion of choice, and they come to church. But they have never come to a moment where that once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus has been applied to them, and they could say, "that was the day, when I knew that as far as my sins were concerned, "it was finished"." Theirs is a religion is a cultural Christianity – I wasn't born a Hindu, a Moslem, a Jew, I was in church as a child, I do think there's a God, so of course, I'm a Christian. No, maybe you're a theist, maybe you're part of Christendom, but that doesn't make you a Christian.

What makes you a Christian is reception of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah. The theme of Jesus as the final sacrifice is what takes up Hebrews 10:1-18. This is actually the conclusion of the whole first part of Hebrews, the theological section. For ten chapters, he has been proving that Jesus is the Finisher of the Faith: He is the Final King greater than the angels, He is the Final Prophet through whom God has spoken, and He is the final priest. He is greater than Aaron and Levi, the immortal and eternal priest according to Melchizedek, who operates under the new covenant, in the true tabernacle, and presents the final offering.

So, one more time, he gives us the contrast between the old and the new, the temporary and the final.

I. The Partial Sacrifices Under Moses

Hebrews 10:1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year. 4 For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure.

Now notice five imperfections of the old sacrifice. First, they were only symbols, but not the reality.

The sacrifices of the law were shadows, but not the actual image that cast the shadows. If you have ever looked at your own shadow or someone else's, you know that shadows have a resemblance to the real thing. But depending on the time of day, the length of the shadow, it can also be a bit distorting.

Plato imagined some men born in a cave, who are chained, and can see nothing but a blank wall directly ahead of them. Behind them is a fire, and as objects pass in front of the fire, they project shadows onto the wall. The chained men give names to the different shadows they see. For those men, those shadows are all they know of reality. The shadows are their reality. Plato then imagined some of those men freed from the cave, who now come to see the world outside the cave. They see the true forms of the shadows they saw on the wall. They see that the real, colourful, 3D form of the two dimensional shadows they were looking at.

Our writer says that the sacrificial system was like looking at that cave wall, and you called those shadows *atonement*, and *offering*, and *substitution*, but you were looking at a very imperfect outline of the one who would fulfill all this: Messiah.

The second imperfection of the old sacrifices is also in verse 1. can never with these same sacrifices... make those who approach perfect. These sacrifices were **incomplete**. Verse 1 tells us that these sacrifices could never make the approaching worshipper perfect. Perfect in what way? First, as it says in verse 4 – they could never take away sin. The Old Testament sacrifices did not have true atoning power. Does that mean that the Old Testament believers were not having their sins forgiven? Not exactly. They were, but the animal sacrifices were not themselves what did it. They were like an I.O.U. Years ago, when countries were still on the gold standard, a R50 note or a \$50 note was actually an I.O.U for that amount of gold. You could in theory go and request that exact amount of gold. But because people didn't want to carry that gold around, the pieces of paper called cash represented that gold.

The animal sacrifices were rather like that. There was a bank vault of atonement in which God was going to deposit the infinite worth of His Son. But until that time came, the animal sacrifices were a kind of cash stand-in. From God's side, they represented the death and cost of His Son which He would accept. From man's side, they represented costly, sacrificial faith in Yahweh's mercy and grace. But in themselves, they were like pieces of paper. Just animal carcasses.

They also couldn't make the worshipper perfect in conscience. That leads us to the third imperfection.

The third imperfection of these sacrifices is that they were repetitive/ **incessant**. Verse 2 asks the question, For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

If they had done their job with finality, then Israel would have had one Day of Atonement, and never to be repeated. If you have paid off your house, the bank doesn't keep debiting your account. But with every debit is the knowledge that they still, in reality, own your house, and that you stand in debt to them. Repetitive sacrifices say, the sin debt is not yet paid in full. It has been covered for another year, but not cleansed. We've received another reprieve, our I.O.U has been accepted for another year, but the debt remains.

The leads to the fourth imperfection of the Levitical sacrifices. They actually irritated and **inflamed** the guilty conscience. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year.

These sacrifices were supposed to deal with sin, and with its consequent guilt in the conscience. But since they were commanded to be offered repeatedly, your conscience could never really rest. It is rather like those of you who have some kind of chronic medication. You take that medication to feel

better, to deal with a condition. But the fact that you have to take it every day becomes a daily reminder of your body's weakness and frail condition. Each time you take it, it witnesses against you that your body is not perfect and not working perfectly.

In fact, Paul tells us that our sinful natures react sinfully to this.

5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. (Rom. 7:5)

8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. 9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death. (Rom. 7:8-10)

Paul is at pains to say that there was nothing wrong with the Law. The problem is rebellious human nature. Once the rebel nature knows the rules, it is provoked to break them. Once it knows authority, it wants rebellion. So it was with the animal sacrifices. In themselves, they were necessary pointers to God's holiness and God's mercy. But the sin nature was reminded of its guilt and could possibly respond with more sin, more rebellion. Like the people in Malachi, who said of the sacrifices, "13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the LORD. (Mal. 1:13)"

God knows what our natures need. We need complete forgiveness, eternal security, combined with a deep love for the things of God. It is interesting that this word for reminder is the same word used for the Lord's Supper - do this in remembrance of me. The difference is, our reminder, every time we partake, is that our sins are completely forgiven.

The fifth imperfection of the old sacrifices was this: they were **ineffectual** - they did not satisfy the justice of God. In verses 5 and 6, and again in verse 8, he quotes from Psalm 40.

5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure.

This is significant, because Psalm 40 is written by David right in the middle of the time of the Law and the Tabernacle sacrifice. But already, 1000 years before Messiah Jesus comes, David can see through the shadows. The animal sacrifices and the food offerings were not really what God desired. He didn't ultimately have pleasure in bulls and goats and sheep having their throats slit, and their blood sprinkled, their skin and innards disposed of, their fat burnt and so on. During Passover, it was estimated that some 300 000 lambs were killed, so much that the blood being thrown at the altar and drained away ran into the brook Cidron and coloured it red during those days. Was this what pleased God? Indeed, it would be odd that an infinite God would at all be pleased with these. But Israel should have known, because in Psalm 50, God said clearly: 7 "Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I *am* God, your God! 8 I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices Or your burnt offerings, *Which are* continually before Me. 9 I will not take a bull from your house, *Nor* goats out of your folds. 10 For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, *And* the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine. 12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness. 13 Will I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of goats? 14 Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High. (Ps. 50:7-14)

In other words, Israel, I don't call for those sacrifices because they mean so much to me; I call for those sacrifices because they mean so much to you! You are the agricultural society that needs birds, bulls, goats to survive. I don't. I already own them all. I have no needs. I call on you to do those things because it represents real faith and trust in Me, real sacrificial love and trust in Me, your provider.

And actually, the idea that the sacrifice God really wanted was obedience is said by Samuel, by Isaiah, by Hosea.

Shadows, not reality. Ineffectual. Repetitive. Irritating to the conscience. Unsatisfying to God.

Now you may not be tempted or even able to return to the animal sacrifices of Israel. But there are plenty of religious substitutes that are just like them: shadows, ineffectual, repetitive, irritating, unsatisfying. Some think that superstitiously pleading the blood of Jesus over everything will keep bad luck off their path. Some come to church not to worship but to make sure they have brought their weekly sacrifice, and hopefully square accounts with God. Some treat their quiet time as their means of acceptance with God.

But you know it is one of the weak and beggarly forms, when it irritates instead of calms the conscience, when gives no assurance of forgiveness and satisfaction with God, when instead of illuminating you in Him, it just gives you more shadows.

And so one more time, the writer is now going to give you the contrast: the better, the superior, the true, the fuller.

II. The Perfect Sacrifice of Messiah

To show that the offering of Messiah replaces all sacrifices, our writer quotes from Psalm 40. Now Psalm 40 is perhaps not the first place we would have gone to show that Messiah is the final and perfect offering. Turn there to see the whole context.

Psalm 40:1 <To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.> I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. 2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, *And* established my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth-- Praise to our God; Many will see *it* and fear, And will trust in the LORD. 4 Blessed *is* that man who makes the LORD his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O LORD my God, *are* Your wonderful works *Which* You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; *If* I would declare and speak *of them*, They are more than can be numbered. 6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law *is* within my heart." 9 I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know. (Ps. 40:1-9)

Why did he take us there? Three reasons.

First, we have in Psalm 40 a clear Old Testament statement that God wanted something more than animal sacrifice.

Notice the first word of verse 5: "therefore". What does the therefore connect to? The thought of verse 4 – sacrifices could not take away sin. Therefore, in other words, here is an explanation, this is the reason why Psalm 40 says, "sacrifice and offering you do not want".

Second, we have in Psalm 40 a description of something *replacing* animal sacrifice. He actually points to the very grammar of the psalm, showing that what Messiah says and does is what replaces the sacrifices that God does not want.

5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come-- In the volume of the book it is written of Me-- To do Your will, O God.'" 8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the law), 9 **then** He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

His emphasis is on the word *then* at the beginning of verse 9. In other words, as he reads the psalm he hears David say, “You don't really want animal sacrifices. So what do You want? Then I said, Behold I have come.” The *then* is the entrance of someone to replace what God does not want. Someone in Psalm 40 is speaking through David and over David. It is the Son of David: David's Son and David's Lord. In the psalms, often David prophesies of Messiah and Messiah's words come through David, as in Psalm 22, or in Psalm 2. Here David prophesies of Messiah presenting Himself as the one that replaces and fulfills those animal sacrifices.

Notice the new covenant language of Psalm 40: And Your law *is* within my heart." 9 I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know. (Ps. 40:9)

Messiah is going to bring in the new covenant where the law is written in the heart, proclaiming the good news, the gospel of righteousness.

Third, and this is what makes the sacrifice so valuable, Messiah states His desire to obey God. Perfect voluntary obedience to God's will is the greatest sacrifice. To give up a perfect life is to give up the most valuable thing of all. Here are these animals being forced, restrained. We read, “bind the sacrifice to the altar”. They are poor dumb creatures, led to an altar, not knowing that their throats are now to be slit.

Messiah knowingly, willingly, voluntarily says, “Lo, I come to do your will”. What made the life of Jesus a perfect substitute for sinners? The fact that He perfectly obeyed God, whereas we disobey God. When the perfectly obedient one stands in the place of disobedient ones, His life is counted as payment for our penalty.

In verse 5, the writer quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, where there is an extra phrase “a body you have prepared for me”, whereas the Hebrew Masoretic text reads “my ears you have opened”. Here, the Septuagint is filling an added dimension of the psalm for us: Messiah would take on flesh, and in His incarnation be perfectly obedient.

So what effect does this perfect final sacrifice of Jesus have?

The sacrifice finishes all atonement on the applicant. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Both verse 10 and verse 14 say that the offering of Jesus Christ has sanctified us and forever perfected us. Sanctified here does not mean the usual sanctification in Scripture, which is a progressive change into the image of Christ. Here the sanctification is a once-for-all setting apart by God, through God, and for God. When Christ's work is applied to you, God sets you apart from the world, and sets you apart for Himself.

The reason He can do that is because verse 14 says He has forever perfected us. Our sins have been completely dealt with: past, present, and future. In Christ, God regards us as perfect.

The sacrifice finishes the offering work of our High Priest. 11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. Priests who are on their feet are doing daily work and repeating those ineffectual sacrifices. Every day, they offered a morning burnt offering, a food offering, a drink offering, and the High Priest's food offering. There was a daily offering of incense. And then there was the evening sacrifice.

But Jesus is the only seated priest, because once He had died, risen and ascended, the work was done. He can now sit, waiting for the final consummation. He is still active as our intercessor, but He is not active as offering Himself.

The sacrifice has finalised the covenant between God and His people.

15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16 "This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 *then He adds*, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 18 Now where there is remission of these, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.

The writer says that the new covenant promise is that sins and lawless deeds are no longer counted against us; they are remitted. But if they are fully and finally remitted, then no continual offerings are being made. The New covenant promises full forgiveness, which means an end to sacrifice.

This is why the Gospel teaches that a man must be repent, turn and trust, be saved, be born from above, be converted. A once for all sacrifice does not slowly grow on you. It does not rub off on you by osmosis. You don't experience Christianation by coming to church every Sunday.

This once-for-all payment is either in the bank or it isn't. Right now, you either stand in debt to God, or you are debt-free. If you know you are debt-free, then you have a testimony: you could tell us when and how you came, like Hudson Taylor, to call on the name of the Lord to save you and apply that sacrifice to your life.

If you don't know that you are debt-free, why hover on the borders of faith? Why live in the netherworld between two opinions? Nail your colours to the mast: trust Christ in personal faith, and then use biblical language to describe what you've done. I believed. I am a believer. I have been saved. I've been justified. I have been set apart, that makes me a saint. I am forgiven, redeemed, washed, cleansed, perfected. I'm a new creation.

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins
and sinners plunged beneath that flood
lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day
And there may I, though vile as He,
Wash all my sins away.