

JESUS IS THE PERFECT SACRIFICE ONCE FOR ALL

Hebrews 9:23-10:18

Key Verse: 10:14

“For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

In 8:1-9:22 we learned that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. The core of this covenant is that God forgives all our sins and remembers them no more. Though we may remember, God remembers no more! This covenant was put into effect through Jesus’ death and its power source is Christ’s blood which cleanses our consciences and enables us to serve the living God. This is really great news! However, when we hear that Christ died for us and forgives all our sins, questions may arise in our hearts: how can his death, which happened in one corner of the world be effective for people of the whole world? How can his death, which happened 2,000 years ago, still be effective even today? We are living in a high tech society which ancient people could not even imagine. We are highly civilized people living in a postmodern era. The gospel seems to be outdated; an old, old story. Do we still need the gospel? In today’s passage we find the answers to all these questions. As Goethe said, though civilization has developed, the nature of human beings is always the same. Though we are living as civilized people in a high tech society, we still suffer from the power of sin and death. People feel guilt, shame, condemnation, despair and meaninglessness. People are anxious, fearful and insecure. Even believers fall into doubt and uncertainty because they lack confidence in the gospel. Though they enjoy worshipping God on Sundays and experience freedom, in their daily lives they fall back under the power of sin and suffer from a guilty conscience and behave shamefully just like unbelievers do. We really need the power of Christ’s blood which cleanses us from a guilty conscience and enables us to serve the living God. In order to help us understand the power of Christ’s sacrifice, the author introduces the phrase “once for all.” These words appeared in 7:27 and 9:12. In this passage the author uses “once for all” repeatedly, seven times (9:26,27,28; 10:2,10,12,14) to focus on the meaning and power of Christ’s sacrifice. Let’s think about the efficacy of Christ’s death.

First, the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice once for all (9:23-28). Christ’s death on the cross is the most amazing event in human history. Though it happened once in history, its effect is eternal. In 9:23-28 the author explains

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how Christ's sacrifice once for all transcends space, time and judgment. **In the first place, Christ's death transcends space (23-24).** It was necessary for the earthly tabernacle to be purified with the blood of animals. But the heavenly tabernacle required a better sacrifice (23). So Jesus entered as high priest into the heavenly sanctuary and presented himself as an offering before God on our behalf. Thus he entered into a superior place by a superior sacrifice. What is the significance of Jesus entering the heavenly tabernacle? The earthly sanctuary required a certain space. Exodus chapters 25-27 described the earthly tabernacle. The entire tent was 45 feet long, 15 feet wide and 15 feet high. The Most Holy Place was contained inside of this and was a cube, 15 feet wide, long and high. The entire structure was designed to be disassembled, moved and reassembled quickly according to God's command. Numbers 9:17-23 portray the beautiful way in which God led his people through the tabernacle. When the cloud, which represented his presence, stayed over the tabernacle, the Israelites remained where they were. When the cloud lifted and began to move, the Israelites quickly disassembled the tabernacle and moved with the cloud. When the cloud stopped again, they stopped and set up the tabernacle. In this way God trained them to follow him and he led them as a shepherd through the wilderness. God is living and dynamic; he was never confined to the earthly tabernacle (Ac7: 48-49). This tabernacle became the temple. Though the temple was important, God clearly said that as long as the Israelites honored him he would dwell there. But if they worshiped idols, he would destroy the temple and scatter them as punishment (1Ki 9:3-9). When they became idol worshipers, the temple was completely destroyed in A.D. 70. But Jesus himself became the temple. Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead and entered the heavenly sanctuary. Through Jesus we can receive the forgiveness of sins and come to God. Now we don't need a visible temple. Here the main point is that Christ's sacrifice transcends space. Jesus taught the Samaritan woman that the place of worship was not important, but that we must worship God in the Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:21-24). So we don't need to go to Jerusalem in order to receive forgiveness of sins and to worship God. We just need to come to Jesus who serves in the heavenly tabernacle.

In the second place, Christ's death transcends time (25-26). When Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary, he offered the sacrifice of himself. He did not offer himself again and again, the way the earthly high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with animal's blood (25). Otherwise Christ

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would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world (26a). But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself (26b). Here **“the culmination of the ages”** is brought about through Jesus’ coming into the world and his death on the cross. The purpose of Jesus’ sacrifice is to do away with sin. Here the phrase “once for all” is important. It comes from the Greek word *“hapax”* (ἅπαξ) or *“ephapax”* (ἐφάπαξ). This means “a single occurrence to the exclusion of any other similar occurrence; once and for all, once and never again.” Jesus’ coming and death on the cross happened once in history, and will never happen again. Yet it effects eternally the past, the present and the future. Christ’s coming and death on the cross is not merely an historical event like the Civil War or men walking on the moon. Its effect is not merely linear. The Eternal God acted in time and space and it impacts all eternity (see diagram).

The French Theologian Oscar Cullman (1902-1999), explains in his book *“Christ and Time”*¹ that the Biblical view of time is linear, not cyclical. This differentiates Christianity from Hellenism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and many other religions. The cyclical view of time has no beginning or end, but can be represented by a circle and fosters the idea of reincarnation: Those who do good will be regenerated into something better in the next life cycle based on cause and effect. But those who make a mistake may come back as a cockroach. This view produces fatalism and meaninglessness. On the other hand, the linear viewpoint has a definite beginning and a definite end. This history can be represented by an upward sloping line in which God is at work according to his plan from the beginning to the end. Jesus entered into this history at the midpoint and died on the cross for our sins. That is why world history is divided into two parts: B.C. and A.D. Moreover, anyone’s personal history changes when Jesus comes into their lives. Jesus is the focal point of world history as well as each person’s life. To sum up, Christ’s one sacrifice has an eternal effect on the past, present and future. Christ died once for all and solved the problem of sin completely and eternally. Christ defeated the power of death through his resurrection and lives forever as our high priest. That is why Christ’s sacrifice transcends time. Now we can understand why Jesus’ death 2,000 years ago is still effective today.

¹ Cullman, Oscar. *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1950.), pp. 58-59.

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In the third place, Christ's sacrifice transcends judgment (27-28).

In order to understand verses 27-28 we need to understand the principle of the representative. When God made a covenant of works with Adam, he dealt with him as a representative of the whole human race. So, when this one man Adam sinned, the consequence was death for all men (Ro 5:12,18; 6:23a). As a result, all people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment (27). In the same way, Christ is a representative through whom God made a new covenant of grace with mankind. But the result is quite the reverse. Just as people die once and face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many (28a). Christ's first coming was for the purpose of bearing our sins. But his second coming will bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (28b). Here "salvation" means the full salvation of believers, that is the promised eternal redemption and eternal inheritance (9:12,15). We have these already, but not fully. When we are in the body, we still suffer from our sinful nature. But when Jesus comes again our lowly and perishable bodies will be transformed into glorious and imperishable bodies like that of Jesus (1Co 15:42-44; Php 3:21). To the unbelievers, Jesus' second coming is a day of judgment and condemnation. But for believers it is the day of salvation, the day of victory and glory. We look forward to his coming, not with a fearful expectation of judgment, but with the anticipation of salvation.

According to verse 27, we are destined to die once and after that to face judgment. No matter what we do, we cannot avoid this destiny. It comes to all, whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, powerful or weak. Everyone comes into this world naked and departs empty-handed. If death is the end of everything, that may be okay. But it is not. After death comes judgment. We all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ that each one of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2Cor 5:10). Judgment is not a small matter. It is eternal condemnation and there is no hope of getting out of it. This is the destiny of mankind. When we think about this destiny, everything seems to be meaningless and we despair. Due to despair, people become hedonistic and commit many kinds of crimes. How can we avoid this terrible destiny? Jesus said, **"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life"** (Jn 5:24). When we believe Jesus as our personal Savior, from that moment we cross over from death to life and can be exempt from God's judgment. Though our bodies die, we live forever with Jesus (Jn 11:25-26).

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Jesus' sacrifice transcends God's judgment. Though we have the final victory, while living in this world we still struggle with the power of sin and death in practical life. Oscar Cullman expressed this truth through the analogy of D-Day and V-Day. When the allied forces landed at Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, they fought and won the decisive battle of World War II. However, some fighting still remained from that day until the final victory was declared on V-Day. We are living in between D-Day and V-Day. So we struggle in our daily lives, but we have assurance of final victory. When we think about Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which transcends space, time and judgment, we can have assurance of our salvation and come to God freely anytime, anyplace by depending on the blood of Jesus. Thank you Jesus!

Second, the blessings we receive through Christ's once for all sacrifice (10:1-18). In verses 1-4 we find the limitation of the animal sacrifice in drawing near to worship God. In verses 5-10 we can see Jesus' attitude toward God in sacrificing himself. In verses 11-18 we discover the blessings we receive through Christ's sacrifice. Verse 1 tells us that the law is only a shadow of the reality. It can never make perfect those who draw near to worship God. If it did, they would not have had to offer the same sacrifices again and again; they would have felt cleansed once for all (2). However, they continued to feel guilty for their sins. In fact, animal sacrifices serve to remind us of sin and never take away our sins (3-4). Here, the important thing is to draw near to God to worship. Why do we need to draw near to God? When we commit sin, intentionally or unintentionally, our consciences are stained with guilt and shame. We become fearful of God's judgment and fall into anxiety. We have no peace or real joy in our hearts. No matter what we do, we cannot escape this inner torment. It is because our sins are against God, though they may seem to be against others. That is why David confessed to God, "**Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight**" (Ps 51:4a). Unless we receive forgiveness from God we cannot solve the problem in our hearts. This is why we need to draw near to God. But God is not satisfied with animal sacrifices. To us this means that God is not satisfied with our good deeds such as giving to charity and serving the needy or other Christian activities. How then can God be satisfied?

Verses 5-10 tell us how Christ's sacrifice satisfied God. When Christ came into the world he said, "**Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you**

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were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will my God’” (5-7; Ps 40:6-8). These verses tell us Jesus’ motivation in coming into the world. It was to please God by offering himself as a sacrifice in obedience to God’s will. In the Levitical sacrificial system there were five kinds of offerings: sin, guilt, burnt, grain, and fellowship. Sin and guilt offerings were sacrifices of expiation. Burnt offerings and grain offerings were sacrifices for consecration. Fellowship offerings were sacrifices for communion, and included vow offerings, thank offerings and freewill offerings. These offerings were required by law for anyone to draw near to God. Though God prescribed these offerings, he was not really satisfied by them (8). Jesus knew God’s heart; what he really wanted was a perfect sacrifice which could satisfy his holy righteousness and justice. What can be a perfect sacrifice? It was Jesus himself. Jesus realized that he had to sacrifice himself for God to be pleased. It was God’s will. This meant that Jesus needed to put aside his heavenly glory and become flesh and to be despised and rejected by people, to suffer and be killed. Anyone who knows this will would try to escape it by any means. But Jesus, knowing all that would happen, voluntarily offered himself. He said, “**Here I am, I have come to do your will**” (9a). In this way he pleased God. He set aside the first covenant sacrifice and established the new covenant sacrifice according to God’s will (9b). “**And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**” (10). Christ’s sacrifice satisfies God’s righteousness and at the same time makes us holy. Romans 3:25b-26 say God “**...did this to demonstrate his righteousness... so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.**”

Verses 11-18 confirm the sufficiency of Christ’s one sacrifice for our sins. Earthly high priests offered the same sacrifices again and again, yet they never took away sins (11). But Jesus offered himself one time as a sacrifice for sins. Then he sat down at the right hand of God (12). What does this mean? First, he finished his mission and won the final victory over his enemies (13). When Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead, he defeated the power of sin and death which Satan held. Now he is waiting for the ultimate triumph over all that opposes his rule (1Co 15:24-25).

Second, his sacrifice for sins was complete and perfect (14-18). Let’s read verse 14: “**For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**” The author has already mentioned the efficacy of

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Christ's sacrifice in verse 10, saying, **"we have been made holy through the body of Jesus Christ once for all."** Here, in verse 14, he emphasizes that the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is eternal by using the word **"forever."** Christ's sacrifice once in history covers all who believe throughout eternity. Though Christ's sacrifice has made us perfect forever, we are **"being made holy"** by the work of the Holy Spirit. We are being sanctified with the conviction that Christ's sacrifice has made us perfect. This is not sinless perfection, but the reality of full acceptance by God by which we have access to God freely. In verses 15-17 the author again quotes Jeremiah 31, emphasizing the transformation of our minds and hearts and that our sins and lawless acts are remembered no more. This is the Holy Spirit's testimony, which is the final confirmation. The author concluded in verse 18, **"...where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary."** In other words, Christ's sacrifice once for all is sufficient to solve the sin problem eternally. Now we can draw near to God with full confidence, free from guilt, shame and fear. This is really a great blessing. Let's believe that Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is sufficient and complete and eternal. Let's come to God with this full confidence.