

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Mark 10:41–45
Background Scripture: Hebrews 9:23–10:25

Hebrews 9:23–28

23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Hebrews 10:1–4, 11–14, 19–25

1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Key Text

Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.—Hebrews 9:24

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify how a person enters the holiest place.
2. Explain why Christ had to die only once.
3. Recruit an accountability partner for mutual encouragement in love and good works.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Grandma's House
- B. Lesson Context

I. Absolute Necessity (Hebrews 9:23–28)

- A. Better Sacrifice (v. 23)
- B. Better Tabernacle (v. 24)
- C. Better Priest (vv. 25–28)

Once or Twice? Ready or Not?

II. Weak Sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1–4)

- A. Repetition (vv. 1–2)
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- A. Christ's Service (vv. 11–12)
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Faithful in Assembling

Conclusion

- A. One Sacrifice
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Judaism *Joo-duh-izz-um* or *Joo-day-izz-um*.

Nehemiah *Nee-huh-my-uh*.

Introduction

A. Grandma's House

My grandmother kept a very tidy house. The floors were always spotless, and the carpets were free of stains. She exemplified the philosophy, "A place for everything, and everything in its place."

I also knew her as a wonderful playmate. She would chase my sister and me around outside. She would play with us in the pool or the mud, teaching us to experience the world with our hands.

But we couldn't enter her house while we were dirty. She had a shower outside by her pool, where we would wash off before going inside. We had to put on clean clothes and shoes. We knew Grandma loved us, but she needed to preserve her home. Her front door separated the earthy outside world from her pristine abode. Her threshold was a barrier that uncleanness could not cross. Sound familiar?

B. Lesson Context

The book of Hebrews clarifies the relationship between the old and new covenants. Its original intended audience seems to have been Christians of Jewish heritage who were in danger of slipping back into Judaism. To address this issue, the unnamed author demonstrates how the regulations of the Law of Moses pointed to Christ and His work.

After identifying Christ as the high priest of the new covenant (Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 8:1–13), the author summarized the regulations for worship under the old covenant (9:1–7) and how those practices were not permanent (9:8–10). They have been superseded by the one-time sacrifice of Christ, the ultimate high priest (9:11–22). These details set the stage for the outstanding summary presented in chapters 9 and 10, the focus of today's text.

I. Absolute Necessity **(Hebrews 9:23–28)**

A. Better Sacrifice (v. 23)

23. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The word *therefore* indicates that the writer is moving from establishing facts of Christ's blood atonement—the "What's so?"—to exploring the implications of those facts—the "So what?" The phrase *patterns of things in the heavens* refers to things of earth with counterparts in Heaven. The need to use animal blood to purify various elements of the old covenant worship structures seems clear in Leviticus 16:15–19. But the second half of the verse at hand tells us that the *necessary* also applies to *the heavenly things themselves*. But if nothing sinful has come into contact with those heavenly things, why the need for purification?

Some students see a "lesser to the greater" logical argument as the solution. Such an argument says that if something is true for a thing of lesser importance, it must also be true for a thing of greater importance. The next verse provides insight into the author's assertion regarding the need to purify the heavenly things.

What Do You Think?

What "necessary" actions do you need to take now that Christ has completed His own "necessary" actions?

Digging Deeper

Would *justification* and *sanctification* be two good categories for your responses? Why, or why not?

B. Better Tabernacle (v. 24)

24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

The word *for* implies that what follows explains or expands on the previous statement. Mortal high priests enter into a sanctuary made by human hands (contrast Acts 7:48). Christ, on the other hand, entered *into heaven itself* at His ascension. There, He performed His priestly duties in the heavenly tabernacle, not in the replica on earth (see Hebrews 9:12). The author emphasizes a distinctive feature of Christ's heavenly ministry. The present tense *now* points to Christ's ongoing role in interceding for believers (see Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). Contrary to mortal priests who repeatedly offer sacrifices, Christ's single sacrifice has eternally settled the sin debt (see 7:27; 10:10). In this role, Jesus stands directly before God, without any veil separating Him from the Father, conducting His priestly duties on our behalf.

C. Better Priest (vv. 25–28)

25. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others.

This verse compares how Jesus' service differs from mortal high priests. The Law of Moses prescribes an annual Day of Atonement for addressing the people's sins (Leviticus 16:29–30; 23:26–32). Two goats were chosen, one for sacrifice to atone for sins and one for release into the wilderness as a scapegoat to carry off sins (16:7–10, 20–22). On the Day of Atonement and

only on that day, *the high priest* would enter the Holy of Holies to set these procedures in motion (16:2, 34). This backdrop sets the stage for a great contrast, next.

26. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Hebrews 7:27 makes much the same point that we see here. Both passages emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' self-sacrifice. Rather than suffering *often*, His sacrifice was one-time only. That's one reason it is superior to the sacrifices of mortal high priests. If His sacrifice were only as effective as that of animals, He would have had to die repeatedly *since the foundation of the world*. The apostle Paul makes the same point: Christ's sacrificial death marks the transition from one era of history to another (1 Corinthians 10:11).

27–28. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

The death sentence that all humans labor under was pronounced in Genesis 3:19. The writer's phrase *once to die* refers to physical death. There are some notable exceptions in that a handful of people in the Bible died twice physically: those whom Christ raised from the dead during His earthly ministry died again later. Contrary to humans, who were *appointed* to die once, Jesus voluntarily sacrificed His life to settle the debt of sin. His death was a conscious act of self-sacrifice (see John 10:15–17).

The phrase *after this* sets the possibility of another death as a result of *the judgment* to come. No one will be exempt from this evaluation: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). The result will be an eternal separation of forgiven sinners from unforgiven sinners (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; etc.). Some students propose that the two verses before us mean a person is judged immediately after death; others disagree. The author does not specify when the judgment occurs. The emphasis is on the fact that our "once" death sentence stands in parallel with Christ's *once offered* sacrifice *to bear the sins of many* (Isaiah 53:12). His return then will not be for paying for sins again, but for bringing in the promised salvation (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13).

What Do You Think?

What actions would you take if you knew this was your last day on earth?

Digging Deeper

How would or should those actions differ from your daily routine, if at all?

Once or Twice? Ready or Not?

An evangelist from yesteryear had a ready response when someone would ask him when his birthday was. He would respond with the simple question, "Which one?" After the then-confused person asked, "You've been born more than once?" the evangelist would reply, "Yes. If you're born once, you die twice; if you're born twice, you die once." This then served as a lead-in to discussing the need to be born again (John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23) as the only way to escape the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

We live under Christ's directive of the great commission of Matthew 28:19–20. This directive brings the challenge to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh

you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Time is short—death can come at any time to anyone. I know that I need to adopt a greater sense of urgency in that regard. Do you?

—R. L. N

II. Weak Sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1–4)

A. Repetition (vv. 1–2)

1. For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

The author of Hebrews continues to compare and contrast the realities of the old covenant with those of the new covenant. Having shown the superiority of Christ’s priesthood, the author explains the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice to animal sacrifices.

The phrase *the law* refers to the Law of Moses in this context, not law in general. Nothing was wrong with the Law of Moses regarding what it was intended to achieve (Romans 3:20; 7:7; etc.). Its holy value is in the facts that (1) God was its ultimate author and (2) *as a shadow of good things to come*, the law points to certain future greater realities (compare Hebrews 8:5; 9:11). Those who accepted the first fact while missing the second fact were in danger of putting an unrealistic burden on others (Acts 15:1–35; Galatians 3:1–6; etc.).

The New Testament authors recognize the law’s limited and distinct role in God’s plan. The law was a temporary guardian meant to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:23–25). The law’s limited role means that it cannot *make the comers thereunto perfect* since no one has kept the law perfectly (Romans 3:9–20)—no one, that is, except for Christ.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain the concept of *foreshadowing* to someone in as few words as possible?

Digging Deeper

How would your explanations to unbelievers and new Christians differ? Why?

2. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

The word *for* introduces a logical conclusion to the current argument regarding the limitations of the Law of Moses. Were the Law of Moses to have been God’s “final word” to humanity, God would not have settled the sin issue *once* and for all. The animal sacrifices would need to continue forever. And since such sacrifices would need to be repeated indefinitely, they do not have the power to perfect God’s people. Paul makes a similar argument about the law in Galatians 3:21, where he denies that righteousness comes through the law because God did not give a law capable of imparting eternal life.

B. Reminder (vv. 3–4)

3. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

Instead of freeing the people from their guilt, the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses had the opposite effect: they reminded the people of their *sins every year*. The sacrifices highlighted sinfulness rather than fixing the problem of sinful hearts (again, Romans 3:20).

What Do You Think?

In what ways could your congregation regularly and appropriately remind its members of the reality of sin?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to remind yourself of individual sins? of corporate sins?

4. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

This verse highlights the main limitation of animal sacrifices. Given that God commanded the animal sacrifices, it may seem strange that the author of Hebrews denies that they *take away sins*. After all, do not Leviticus 16:10 and Numbers 29:11 say that the two goats make “atonement”? But notice again their temporary nature. It’s “wash, rinse, repeat” indefinitely.

III. Perfect Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:11–14)

A. Christ’s Service (vv. 11–12)

11. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

The author continues to draw together the threads of the argument. He does so here by first describing the duties of *every priest*. Under the old covenant, a priest’s work was never done. He would perform the same rituals and sacrifices repetitively. The blood offerings he would make were categorized in various ways: the sin offering (Leviticus 4:1–35; 6:24–30); the trespass offering (5:14–6:7); the burnt offering (1:3–17); and the peace offering (3:1–17). The bloodless offerings were the grain offering (2:1–16) and the drink offering (23:13). None of these rituals or sacrifices could ultimately remove the people’s sins. The contrast comes next.

12. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

By contrast, Christ’s priestly service required only a single offering: himself. He offered this sacrifice one time for the sins of humanity. At that point, His duties were completed, and He took His rightful seat at God’s *right hand*. The writer of Hebrews draws on Psalm 110:1 to affirm Jesus in this position. By the time we get to this point in the book of Hebrews, the writer has already pointed to this psalm three times (Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1). The use here implies that the Son’s sacrifice is completely satisfactory, never needing to be repeated. He will remain seated until His second appearing (9:28; a notable exception is Acts 7:55–56).

B. Christ’s Rest (vv. 13–14)

13. From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

This verse continues the quotation of Psalm 110:1. The idea seems to be one of rest now that Christ's work on the cross is completed. He offers no more sacrifices. Instead, He occupies a seat of honor while His Father works to make every knee bow to Christ and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:9–10).

14. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

This verse concludes the argument that the author has been making. The numerous animal sacrifices of the old covenant have given way to Christ's *one offering*. This is the offering by which people may be *perfected*, not by the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses. The people being perfected by Christ are also referred to as *them that are sanctified*. To be sanctified is to be made holy or set apart, and there are two aspects to this.

IV. Implications (Hebrews 10:19–25)

A. Reasons (vv. 19–21)

19. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Our last section sketches the implications of Jesus' priestly work. According to Leviticus 16, only the high priest could enter the most holy place, the dwelling place of God's presence in the tabernacle and temple. This access was only allowed once a year. Because Jesus' sacrifice completely satisfied the penalty for sin that we owed, we can each have access to God that was unthinkable before (compare Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 4:16; 9:8, 12, 25). Regarding the *boldness* (confidence) that we now have *to enter into the holiest*, see also 10:35; and 1 John 5:14.

20. By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

The *new and living way* distinguishes the new covenant from the old one. This way is "new" because it was inaccessible before Christ offered himself as a sacrifice. This way is also "living," which means it gives life to those who follow it.

By His self-sacrifice, Jesus has *consecrated* a path for us *through the veil of his flesh*. When His body was torn to death by nails on the cross, the curtain in the temple was torn at the same time (Matthew 27:51). The link becomes more evident if the veil is understood not as a barrier but as the threshold that separated the Holy of Holies from the outer world. Similarly, Christ's body broken on our behalf is the door that leads into God's presence (John 14:6).

21. And having an high priest over the house of God.

The author provides a statement of fact that gives the reason for the imperative of the next verse. Before we go there, however, we take a minute to examine the designation *the house of God*. That was a title for the Jerusalem temple, especially after the return from Babylonian exile (examples: Ezra 3:8; Nehemiah 11:11). But the author of Hebrews uses the designation to refer to people who constitute the church (Hebrews 3:6).

B. Exhortation (vv. 22–25)

22. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

This is the resulting imperative; this is what we are to do *with a true heart in full assurance of faith*—an imperative echoed in various ways elsewhere (Romans 8:15–17; Galatians 4:6; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 6:11; 1 John 5:13). The imagery of *hearts sprinkled* and *bodies washed* may have its basis in Ezekiel 36:25. See also the image of sprinkled blood in Hebrews 12:24 and cleansing in 9:14. The inner cleansing of the heart is matched also by the outer cleansing *with pure water*, which most likely refers to baptism.

The Greek word translated *conscience* occurs 30 times in the New Testament. The word occurs in a positive sense (example: Acts 23:1), in a “weak” sense (example: 1 Corinthians 8:7), and in a decidedly negative sense (example: Romans 2:15). Our conscience was given to us by God to be a moral guide, but humans are adept at modifying their conscience toward *evil* (1 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15).

23. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)

The verb *hold fast* denotes consistency in adhering to the professed faith. The ability of God’s people to be faithful is based on God’s faithfulness to uphold His promises. His faithfulness is beyond question (1 Corinthians 1:9; Hebrews 3:6).

24–25. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

These two verses are logically connected. Think about it: wouldn’t it be almost impossible to encourage *one another ... unto love and to good works* unless we are in the habit of *assembling of ourselves together*? That’s the context of supporting each other (Acts 2:42–47).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to ensure you are still gathering with other believers during life’s busy season?

Digging Deeper

How will you ensure that those gatherings are opportunities for encouragement and accountability?

Faithful in Assembling

Pete was an older man who only had one leg. He used crutches and a wheelchair but was at church every Sunday. Harriett was a friend’s grandmother who taught the junior girls’ class. At times, she let us take turns teaching the class. I hope she lived long enough to hear that many of us followed her example by teaching children at our churches. Bill taught the high school Sunday school class every week. He made us laugh, and we loved him.

You may be thinking, *But things were different back then. After all, don’t we now have the option of attending church virtually through the live streaming of our services?* Pete, Harriett, and Bill were just some of the people I knew growing up in our church. They were faithful in meeting with other Christians every week. Their love and encouragement spurred me and

others on to lives of service for God. Who is someone whose service in the church encouraged you? How will you be an encouragement in your congregation?

—L. J. N

Conclusion

A. One Sacrifice

Most people in the ancient Greco-Roman world believed that their gods were remote and cared little for them. Some Jewish people of the time between the Testaments also viewed God as distant, so they developed (imagined) elaborate systems of angels to bridge the gap between God and humanity. It is easy for us to believe that God is distant. His silence can lead us to think He doesn't care about us.

But such a belief is proven false when we consider the actions of Jesus, our great high priest. He put on flesh and came to earth to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins—those aren't the actions of a "distant" God!

The next time you feel distant from God, perhaps the best question to ask yourself is: *Which of us moved?*

B. Prayer

Father, thank You for giving us a faithful high priest, Your Son, Jesus. Give us the courage to approach You with the boldness Jesus purchased for us. We pray in His name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus opened the Holy of Holies to us.