

Hebrews 10:1-18

Introduction

Returning again to the subject of the atonement, because it is a jewel with many facets. Going to continue with a comparison between Old Testament and New Testament, because essential to grasp that the Old Testament sacrificial system is like a foil or background which shows up the glory and wonder of the Cross.

Old Testament Sacrifices – their inadequacy and their purpose

The Old Testament sacrifices, as detailed in Exodus, Numbers and Leviticus, were only pale copies of Christ's glorious atonement. Mere outline or silhouette of the truth, without the reality and substance. Year by year these sacrifices were offered, over and over again, every day and every year. Every day in the Temple, a lamb was brought in the morning and the evening as a burnt offering. Then with that was a meat offering, drink offering, offering of incense, the burnt, peace, guilt and trespass offerings. These were at special times. Then the supreme offering was made on the Day of Atonement (around September). This was one comprehensive act of atonement for all sin and all uncleanness. Goats and bulls were offered for the priest's own sins and that of the people.

This went on year by year, a kind of priestly treadmill of sacrifices. There was no end to it all. There was a never ending stream of sinners, of sacrifices and of blood. It's effect? **Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins** (Hebrews 10:11). It removed some ceremonial uncleanness, but did not really cleanse conscience deeply from sin, nor affect real access into God's holy presence. In a sense it was a constant remembrance of sin. Like a medicine bottle – if it is efficacious, a man can say, "That is what cured me", but if it is ineffective, the bottle is just a reminder of his illness and the uselessness of the recommended cure.

Why was the sacrificial system devised? God was teaching His people by repetition certain essential truths about Himself and about them. Firstly, it demonstrated the helplessness of the sinner. It was not by good works, but by sacrificial blood that sin can be put away. Only by God's way can sin be dealt with. Thus it showed the seriousness of sin. Sin and death are inseparable, for God had married them together. Each animal sacrifice reminded that the wages of sin is death. Then, the sacrificial system demonstrated substitution, God's way of dealing with sin. The offerer laid his hands on the head of the animal without spot or blemish, identifying himself with the animal which would then die in his place. Innocent animal dies in the place of the guilty sinner. Hands on head indicates transfer of sin onto the animal which is the substitute.

These lessons are still important for us. We are helpless sinners, and only God's method can deal with our sin. Since the wages of sin is death, deliverance can only come by another dying in our place. But were Old Testament sinners not forgiven?

Presumably, when they repented, and on the grounds of Christ's sacrifice to which these animal sacrifices pointed forward.

### The glory of Christ's once for all finished atonement

By way of contrast, we are pointed to Calvary. **Christ was offered to bear the sins of many** (Hebrews 9:28). **Through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all** (Hebrews 10:10). **He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever** (Hebrews 10:12). **For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified** (Hebrews 10:14).

Unlike the animal used in sacrifice, Christ came voluntarily in obedience to the will of God. He came to do God's will. He offered the perfect sacrifice forever. The sum total of all men's sins was dealt with in this one outward act. Man's inner sins, inner evil motives, all rebellion, all disobedience, blasphemy, lies, selfishness – all were made to light on His head, all placed on Him. He bore, utterly and completely, the penalty for them. God's wrath fell on Him. Debts were paid to the utmost farthing. Complete work of atonement forever. If earth went on another 1000 years, and another 1000 years after that – His sacrifice would still make atonement for all the sins committed – one sacrifice for sins forever. Eternity itself will require no more than the Son of God accomplished on Calvary. Sin has been finally and fully dealt with, and God requires no more.

All the world's sins were placed on Christ, not one was left out. And His sacrifice is effective forever. Since His work was entirely effective, the offering is unrepeatable. Perfection cannot be improved on. There is sufficiency in the Cross for all men. **The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all** (Isaiah 53:6). On Calvary all our sins, past, present and future were gathered up by the Father and laid on Christ and punished in Christ.

As evidence of the effectiveness of His work, He has been raised by the Father, welcomed back into heaven, and is now seated there. The Old Testament priests were always standing – He is now sitting.

Digress for a moment to consider the bearing this all has on Roman Catholicism. In the Mass, there is continual repetition of Calvary, as if the atonement is not finished. It is repeated daily by certain appointed persons. But according to Hebrews the sacrifice *is* finished, once for all. Similarly, penance is undercut – the various practices and penalties that sinners undergo are not necessary. Christ has done it all, the work is complete. The need for purgatory, between heaven and hell, is undercut. There is no need for a place where the last remnants of sin will be purged by fire – because Christ's sacrifice was sufficient. Christ has suffered. "It is enough". God says "Thou, O Christ, art all I want".

So with us, we need to remember that we cannot add anything to Calvary as a basis of acceptance. It is not the Cross *plus* works, church attendance, bible reading, enough prayer, deeper repentance. All important, but not to put them in the place of Christ. His work is done. We cannot supplement His gold with our dross, or add to the matchless robes of Christ with the rags of our poor effort. There is nothing we have to do but to accept Him and thank Him.

### Blessed results of His atonement

- (a) Exaltation of Christ. He is **sat down on the right hand of God** (Hebrews 10:12), in a place of authority, power and majesty. Jesus is the king come home in victory and glory, enthroned as Lord of glory. Participating in the power which belongs to God. The highest glory, administrator of the universe. His pierced hands now carry the sceptre of the universe. King of kings, Lord of lords. Waiting for His enemies to submit. Nothing can stop the appointed end, when Christ will be supreme in the universe.
- (b) Men brought into the right relationship with God. **He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified** (Hebrews 10:14). This what the Old Testament sacrifices could not do. Christ's atonement cleanses the conscience, lifts the load of sin, gives boldness and joy in God's presence, gives a secure standing with God, no condemnation, full access to the Father.
- (c) The Holy Spirit. **Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us** (Hebrews 10:15). The Holy Spirit assures us through scripture that we believers in the new covenant have been forgiven. He writes God's law on our hearts. The whole Trinity is seen in this passage: Salvation depends on the will of the Father (v9), the work of the Son (v12), and the witness of the Spirit (v15).

### Conclusion

Old Testament sacrifices made the point that men cannot save themselves, that sin leads to death, and that salvation can be brought about by substitution. There we see the whole scheme of redemption through Christ. It is impertinence and irrelevance to hope to save ourselves through our prayers and our churchgoing. The efficiency of the atonement is as great today as for ever. One sacrifice for sins – forever. Take the free gift of salvation, be saved forever and completely.