

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. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? <sup>3</sup> But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. <sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. <sup>7</sup> 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.'" <sup>8</sup> 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), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will."

## Introduction

The text before us today (Heb. 10.1-9a) is an example of recapitulation. That just means, for short, that it is a recap of things the author has been saying. It is like the recap of today's news at the end of the *News Hour* on PBS. Only our author's way of recapping includes new information and new twists on old information. When we read these verses, we do well to ask ourselves, "So what is the new twist here that the writer seeks to press home while reviewing?" The theme of sacrifice is not new, but the twist he gives to it is surely new: new here is the straightforward statement that God does not desire sacrifices and offerings. Surprisingly, it gives us this positive theme: "Proclaiming God's Delight in the Sacrifice of Christ." We will develop it in two points: the reasons for the proclamation and the content of the proclamation.

### 1A. The reasons for the proclamation

The proclamation comes to us in a remarkable way from the lips of Christ using the words of a Psalm. Notably, Christ used the Psalm because of the ineffectual character of the OT shadows: **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.** <sup>2</sup> **Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?** <sup>3</sup> **But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year.** <sup>4</sup> **For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.** <sup>5</sup> **Consequently...**

The word "consequently" (v. 5) indicates that verses 1-4 give some reasons for the proclamation that we have in verses 5-9a. These reasons come together in a single point, namely, that the sacrifices of the old system were ineffectual. The reasons involve review.

#### 1) The first reason

The sacrifices of the Law were "but shadows." They could do nothing substantial because they were mere copies of that which is real: the good things to come in Christ: **the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities** (10.1a). They were not the real sacrifice. They did not actually deal with sin. OT saints did not live, as we do, in the good times, in the time of "good things."

#### 2) The second reason

As copies, the shadow-sacrifices could not bring a single worshiper to perfection: the same repetitive sacrifices **can never... make perfect those who draw near** (10.1b). From the parallel that exists between 10.1b and 2, there is at least one precise meaning to "perfection." Focus is on the elimination of the consciousness of sin in some perfect, complete, and decisive way. This also shapes the way we should understand cleansing. Accordingly, we have the following question in verse 2: **Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?**

The answer is yes. If the sacrificial offerings cleansed the worshipers and removed the consciousness of sin, then they would have ceased to be offered. The fact that the priests continued to make these offerings is a confirmation of the fact that they did not make people perfect. They did not make sinners perfect because they did not cleanse the heart or remove the

consciousness of sin. What they did do is remind of sin; they kept the consciousness of sin repeatedly before them: **But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year** (10.3). They learned that the sacrifices for sin (for forgiveness) did not solve the problem of sin.

Consider the OT perspective on forgiveness: blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, to whom the Lord does not impute sin (Ps. 32.1-2). OT saints had, and knew they had, forgiveness in some basic and meaningful sense. Let's try to flesh this out by thinking about it objectively and subjectively. Objectively, they received ceremonial cleansing that opened the way to fellowship with the people of God. If unclean for some reason, they were excluded, but when cleansed and forgiven, they were included in the fellowship of the covenant community. Subjectively, there is a joy of salvation that the Psalmist documents (**Psalm 51:7-12 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.**). Presumably, such joy comes by a sense of forgiveness and restoration to fellowship. Therefore, even though they only had copies and not the real sacrifice, those of faith in the OT did have forgiveness by faith in the promise contained in those sacrifices. God ordained them for "forgiveness," as we read in Leviticus 4.26, for example (**And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven**). However, the repetition showed that the sacrifices did not actually deal with sin or its punishment. Instead, they kept repeating the claims of the law against sinners, the claim of punishment, and the claim of death.

How is this different from the recognition of our sins that we express in the NT sacrament of communion? The sacrifice of Christ reminds us of our sin every time we celebrate the sacrament, but it reminds us of our sin as something dealt with once and for all by Christ's voluntary and deadly self-sacrifice. The precise point has to focus the fact that though OT saints had "forgiveness" (in quotes), the repetition of the sacrifices revealed to them that the actual removal of their sin had *not* been accomplished. To some degree, they were conscious of the fact that though they could rejoice in the Lord's forgiveness, *the punishment of their sins had not been executed*. If it had, then they would not have to keep killing "innocent" animals in their place. They knew (subjectively), or at least the lesson was clearly taught (objectively), that justice had not been served; the sin remained, the defilement remained, the guilt remained, and the punishment for their sins continued to hang over their heads. Knowing their sin and hearing the promise of God in these sacrifices, by faith, they looked forward to the day when what remained undone would finally be accomplished.

### 3) The third reason

The sacrifices of the old system were a reminder of sin because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin; that is impossible: **For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins** (Heb. 10.4).

In summary: the law and the sacrificial system embedded within it could not bring OT worshipers to perfection (the actual cancellation of their sins). The animal sacrifices were ineffectual. They did not constitute an actual remedy for sin; that was something the Law and its sacrifices could not do. Lurking in this impossibility is the necessary requirement of a human being, a representative man who must die in the place of sinners (cf. effectually, 9.12).

## 2A. The content of the proclamation

Because the sacrifices were ineffectual, therefore (**Consequently**, v. 5), Christ said some things about them when He came into the world. With the words of Psalm 40 on His lips, our Lord proclaims the striking fact that God did not desire animal sacrifice: **<sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> 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), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will" (10.5-9a). His words express the fact that God took no pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings (v. 8b). He took no pleasure in the OT sacrifices because they were but shadows, regular reminders of sin, and they not only did not but they could not take away sin; they were not *the* remedy; they were ineffectual.

At this point, we face two problems.

1) First problem: God commanded what He does not desire

How square this displeasure with the fact that God ordained them giving them significance (they were matters of divine command)? He commanded them as copies of the reality to come, so, they had significance as gospel signs, promises, and prophecies. He delighted in them as promises of the gospel by which believers in the OT found forgiveness. But the sacrifices themselves and the system itself was not something in which God took delight. In other words, the blood of animals did not satisfy God, appease His justice, or take away a single sin.

Jesus came into the world with a specific purpose: to be the sacrifice in which God would take delight as the prophet Isaiah tells us: **it pleased the Lord to bruise Him** (Isa. 53.10). God gave Him a body in the incarnation so that He could be the sacrifice of sacrifices. This is a matter of covenant between the Father and the Son. The Son came in the incarnation assuming human nature in order to do the will of the Father: **Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book... Behold, I have come to do your will** (5-9a). The repetition underscores the point of our Lord's submission to the will of God in the terms of the eternal covenant of redemption.

2) Second problem: the "quote" from the Psalms seems inaccurate

There is a textual problem in verse 5 that, upon investigation, takes us to something important. It is the difference between Psalm 40 and our author's citation of it in the phrase in Hebrews 10.5: **a body have you prepared for me**. In the Psalm, we read **you have given me an open ear** (40.6). Hebrews has body instead of ear. This is a figure of speech called synecdoche in which a part is used for the whole (as *hand* for *sailor*; cf. "all hands on deck," which gives quite a picture if taken literally and shows why we shouldn't take it literally).

It is easy to see how one moves in thought from ears to the body in the interpretation of Psalm 40. The thought begins with the fact that we have ears; it is the body that has ears. But there is more to the use of ears because ears are for hearing, harkening, and obeying. By the ear, we receive instruction and guidance for obedient actions of the body (representing the whole person). Therefore, "ears for obedience" represent the "obedient hearing" of the Lord Jesus that involved *the giving of His body in obedience* unto death on the cross. In what then did God delight? He delighted in the inseparable combination of obedience and sacrifice in the work of Christ. Hence, the declaration of God's displeasure in sacrifice is a powerful proclamation of His delight in the sacrifice of Christ.

## Applications

This text is a recap of the author's teaching thus far in the book (the recap continues down to 10.18). It is recapitulation with a twist, with new information that tweaks what has been said about sacrifice. God does not desire it. In the OT, He said so through David and He said so through the greater David, Christ. Instead, He desires the sacrifice of Christ at the end of the pathway of obedience. This is the single sacrifice (offered effectively once for all) in which God delights. His delight in Christ is our salvation. From this some applications naturally flow.

1) Follow in His steps

Seeing what does not please God regarding sacrifice, points you to the sacrifice of Christ and how He presented Himself in service to God for you: with a full heart of submissive obedience. This tells you something important about gratefully and thankfully following in His steps. It gladdens God's heart when you willingly submit to His will. Do not be like King Saul

who presented sacrifice to God (1 Sam. 13:9, offered the burnt offering) in direct disobedience to God's will; he then excused himself: (1 Sam. 13:11-13, <sup>11</sup> Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, <sup>12</sup> I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." <sup>13</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you). There is no excuse for disobedience, especially, for doing so in the name of God and out of pious devotion ("I am seeking God's blessing and I have to exert myself heroically to do it"). Sacrifice that pleases God begins with submission to His will (a hard lesson for us to learn!).

## 2) Humble yourself before God

Furthermore, outward things do not impress the Lord. He takes pleasure in the true sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart: <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. <sup>16</sup> For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps. 51.15-17). Worship that pleases God is in spirit and truth (Jn. 4.23). Instead of thousands of rams, the Lord told Israel what pleased Him: justice, kindness, and humility: <sup>6</sup> "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" <sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6.6-8). A submissive humble spirit must be consistent: it must be shown before men if it is to be true before God: <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness [your yieldedness, your submissiveness] be known to everyone...[this includes your relationship to your pastor, as our writer like Paul makes clear: Heb. 13.7, 17] What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you (Phi. 4.5, 9).

## 3) Present your bodies as living sacrifices to God

Paul says in Romans: I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (12.1). What is more worthwhile in living than to know and glorify God? Who is more worthy of worship and praise than the triune God? So, present yourself in worship as a living sacrifice *for* obedience and your body as an instrument of righteousness (Rom. 6.13, Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness). Thus, following the footsteps of our Lord, you will make this proclamation in prayer: "I come and go day by day on my spiritual journey *in the body* with one key thing in mind: to do your will O God."

May we fall down before the majesty of our God in full submission and true humility; may the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see our sins and to see them in the forgiving light of the cross; may we then bow before the footstool of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus, to seek His blessing, but most of all may His love be our soul's chief treasure so that our lives show forth His praise, to the triune God be all glory forever, amen.