

The Sanctifying Effectiveness of the Cross (Heb. 10.9b-18)

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He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. ¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ¹⁶ "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," ¹⁷ then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." ¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Introduction

We noted last time that our author has an interesting way of reviewing. Instead of simply recapping with summary highlights, he includes new information and new twists on old information. He has new twists here and there that he seeks to press home while reviewing. This happens again in our text for this morning (Heb. 10.9b-18) that ends with repetition of the quote from the book of Jeremiah (chapter 31). He already quoted it in Hebrews 8.8-12. The quote from Jeremiah ends the "doctrinal" section of the book and opens the door to the practical section. Before we get there (to the practical section), we can draw out some broad and general implications that accord with the details that are coming; that move in that same direction. There is a trajectory to the doctrinal section (1.1-10.18) that leads us in thought to the practical section (10.19-13.25). These large sections of the book do not exist in isolation from one another. The idea of doctrinal/practical is not to be exaggerated (it is not doctrinal versus practical). The practical section contains doctrine, but it has an emphasis on exhortation; the doctrinal section contains exhortation, but it has emphasis on instruction. It is a matter of emphasis.

So, what is the new twist in this final section of review? The new twist here is the sanctifying effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ. To shorten a bit, my title is "The sanctifying effectiveness of the cross." Attention to sanctification is an appropriate way to open the door to the details of the sanctified life that make up chapters 10-13. Two points stand out regarding the theme of sanctification: it is a fact of the past and a reality in the present.

1A. Sanctification is a fact of the past

The unity of verses 9-10 indicates that sanctification is a fact of the past put in place by the covenantal obedience of the Lord Jesus: "**Behold, I have come to do your will.**" **He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.** ¹⁰ **And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.** "By that will" refers to the obedience of Christ in His coming to do the will of God by offering His body once for all (10.10). Recall, that this is the sacrifice in which God delights. God takes delight in the combination of self-sacrifice and obedience. In other words, the phrases at the end of verse 10 explain the phrase "by that will" at the beginning of verse 10: the sanctifying will of Christ is His sacrifice, the offering of His body once for all.

Thus, by the offering of His body in covenant obedience to the Father, **we have been sanctified** (10.10). To be sanctified is to be made holy, set apart unto holiness, set apart to God for service. The way this is framed is peculiar, so, to guide our thinking, we should ask a series of questions.

1) "How are we to understand the tense of the verb?"

Initially, we can lock into our main point that sanctification is a fact of the past. But just how far back into the past does this take us? We ask this question because there are a number of options available to us here. Is reference being made to some moment in the history of the

readers of the book that points to some similar moment in our histories as readers today? If this is the reference point of the sanctification, then the moment in view is the beginning of the Christian life when God calls us from darkness to light and from alienation into fellowship. God's call takes us from the sphere of sin and moves us into the sphere of holiness. Thus, the church is literally made up of "called ones" (called out ones); the very word "church" is built on the word "to call." Accordingly, Peter tells us that God takes us from being "not the people of God" in order that we may be "a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2.9-10). The church of "called out ones" is holy, an international family *set apart* to serve God. The theological or doctrinal term for this is definitive sanctification: that point when God releases a sinner from the bondage of sin; it is the moment when redemption is applied and we are "set free" from sin for a new life of holiness. The work of God that forms a holy people is decisive and definitive.

2) But does our author have definitive sanctification in mind?

Study of the context will show us that the answer is no. Actually, the sanctification in view took place before we were even born. 10.14 points back to the cross: (**For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified**). In this verse, we have a different tense of the verb to sanctify. Here we have **being sanctified**, which is a present tense that speaks about sanctification as a process (this is called progressive sanctification). We will take that up in our second main point. For now, our interest is in the statement that people in this process are said to be perfected: **he has perfected ... those who are being sanctified**. Thus, some kind of sanctification pertains to the people who are being sanctified in the present: they have *already been* perfected. They have already been sanctified! But it cannot be definitive sanctification, which is the break with sin that begins the *process* of holiness because this past perfecting (completed, perfected sanctification) is **for all time**. It is neither definitive nor progressive sanctification.

3) So, when did the sanctification of verse 10 take place?

"**A single offering**" produced this perfected sanctification **for all time** (10.14). It occurred **through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all** (10.10). Therefore, it must have happened when Jesus died on the cross.

4) In what sense, could our sanctification be something perfected on the cross?

This is a marvelous point so probing a bit further is a most worthwhile way to stretch our minds. Let us consider this in general and in particular.

a) In general

The cross perfected our sanctification in the sense that it accomplished it, making it certain in the mind of God, so certain that it is as if it is already the case. His love, wisdom, and power stand behind what Jesus obtained on the cross for his people. His sacrifice is the one and only sacrifice in which God took great delight; His delight in the death of Christ is our sanctification.

This sanctification is the result of redemption: set free from sin we are put on the path of holiness. Sanctification is the corollary of redemption. Jesus secured our redemption by His death on the cross; on the cross, He made it certain that we would be freed from our bondage in sin (Heb. 9.12 "by His own blood...He secured eternal redemption"). Being set free from sin is a separation from sin; it is a break with sin and the beginning of a new and holy life. The sanctification was secured; rendered certain on the cross: the break with sin at conversion is an outflow of the cross that set the sinner apart from the world. As an accomplishment and thus as a certainty for the future, our sanctification was perfected at the point in time when Jesus died.

b) In particular

We still need to refine the point somewhat further. How could our sanctification be perfected on the cross? To answer this question, we have to hone in on some issues of the history of redemption from 10.9 and 18: **He abolishes the first in order to establish the second... "I will remember their**

sins and their lawless deeds no more." ¹⁸ **Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.** Clearly, reference here is to the historical redemptive shift from the OT to the NT since the "first" is the Mosaic covenant and the "second" is the new covenant. Verse 18 is not so clear because "forgetting" the sins and lawless deeds of God's covenant people is not something His people experience, say, one by one in history across time (at the time when God called them individually to Himself). In other words, God's act of remembering no more is the subject and it happened when the OT sacrifices came to an end in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross: **Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin** (10.18). Once forgiveness entered the picture, at that point in time the offerings for sin ended. In fact, God ended them in order to establish the new covenant by the final sacrifice of Christ once and for all time. Hence, the marked contrast to the OT priest that stood **daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.** ¹² **But ... Christ ... offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins** (10.11-12).

Here is the point for us to wrestle with: the forgiveness in view is an action of God toward His covenant people (those who are one with Christ in terms of the eternal covenant, Heb. 2.11-13). This forgiveness became a fact of history when Jesus died on the cross. His death made the new covenant effective: a covenant **takes effect** like a will "**only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive**" (Heb. 9.17). Thus, the OT sacrifices were ineffectual because they did not take away a single sin. Therefore, God was not pleased with any OT sacrifice, which means that those sacrifices did not please Him, appease His wrath, or satisfy His immutable justice. So, when our writer states that a complete and perfect sanctification of God's covenant people occurred *when* Jesus died, he is telling us that the covenant people were made holy by the blotting out of their sins by the sacrifice that did please God, appease His wrath, and satisfy His immutable justice. The punishment was executed fully and perfectly on the cross; it was so perfect and so complete that His covenant people were **perfected for all time... by a single offering** (10.14). Consequently, the preacher to the Hebrews describes Christians as those who **by that will** (by the obedience of Christ in His coming to do the will of God)... *have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (10.10). Sanctification is a fact of the past; now, let us consider it as a reality in the present.

2A. Sanctification is a reality in the present

In the middle of our text, the writer gives us some insight into "the time between," which is the time between the comings of Christ: **when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,** ¹³ **waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.** ¹⁴ **For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified** (10.12-14). There are two observations to make about sanctification here.

1) First, sanctification occurs while Jesus waits

Interestingly, this is a time of waiting, not just on our part, but Christ waits **until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet** (10.14). As He waits in this way with regard to His enemies, His people are **being sanctified** (10.14). In other words, sanctification is not only a fact of the past; it is also a reality in the present. This is a reality for us as well because we are one with the readers of the book of Hebrews in that we also live in the time between.

2) Second, sanctification as a process is secure

Eternal release was secured (on the cross, Jesus secured **eternal redemption**, 9.12); so, the break from sin must involve the holy perfection of heaven. If holiness was secured for us on the cross, if the break with sin was secured at conversion for holiness, and if the glory of holiness of heaven is secure, then the sanctifying process of the time in between is also secure. The Christian journey in the time between must follow a certain and secure path of holiness even though it takes place in the presence of enemies, His and ours. This is an outstanding perspective.

Hence, the fact that we are **not of the world** arouses the world's opposition and hatred (Jn. 17:14, **I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world**). Hence, the challenge is great and our need is intense. To meet this need as the great high priest, Jesus petitions the sanctification of the apostles and all who follow in their steps: **Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth (Jn. 17.17)**. People hate you and you do not protect yourself by angry responses, which do not achieve the righteousness of God (James 1.20). Thus, growth in holiness by abiding in God's word is where you are safe in your journey through the midst of enemies to the left and right. Your protection in the presence of your enemies is the Law of God on which you meditate day and night. In this you are to follow the example of our Lord.

Obedient to the will of God, Jesus had the law in His heart and He acted according to what is written; so states Psalm 40.6-7 (**⁶ Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. ⁷ Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: ⁸ I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."**). Thus, we have the peculiarity that our Lord's commitment to the Law included its abolition (**He abolishes the first in order to establish the second**, Heb. 9.b). But then, in its abolition, it is the standard that guides sanctification in the hearts of God's people as it was in our Lord's heart (**This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds**, 10.16). The antithesis of the Law with the gospel becomes synthesis. Sanctification is not only a fact of the past; it is also a fact that overarches our daily walk in the present.

Concluding Implications and Applications

We have some broad implications and applications to discuss that look back to some degree, but that pave the way for specific and sometimes difficult implications and applications yet to come in the book. The perseverance texts throughout the book need this context.

1) Recognize the certainty of your sanctification

You can view sanctification from different angles: accomplished, definitive, progressive, and final (eschatological). Meditate on these things. The accomplishment of your sanctification occurred at the cross in the death of your blameless Savior. Definitive sanctification is the point in your history when the break with sin occurred. It is the point in your history when God called you from bondage to freedom, from alienation to fellowship (1 Cor. 1.6), and from sin to holiness. When Jesus died on the cross, He set you apart for holiness; that was sanctification accomplished and secured. His death also sealed your definitive sanctification and God's call into fellowship. Moreover, by His death, Jesus made it certain that you will make progress in holy living in stages until you are glorified (as the song puts it: until you are saved to sin no more) and the sanctification is finalized forever.

2) Live out your perfection with confidence

If you grasp even part of this teaching, it will affect your life in the present. This is a dimension of the gospel that promises good things out in front of you because these good things flow with certainty from the death of Christ. The good things have come. You are on a pilgrimage journey from the wilderness of this world to your true home in heaven. On the way, you face trials and tribulations. Right there amidst them, live out your perfection with confidence. You have trying times like those of the Israelites: times of no water, no food, and no sense of victory with only a hard road immediately under your feet. You must guard yourself from a complaining spirit. Do not be like Israel in the wilderness. Do not complain and grumble with hardness of heart governed by the deceitfulness of sin. Fear sin's deceitfulness and lay hold of the promises of victory through the trials now weighing you down. With a confident and better hope take up the Law to learn its true spirit and intent at the feet of your heavenly king. He

promises to embed the law in your minds and hearts, so be like your Lord in your pursuit of the Law for understanding and application. Seek the true spirit of the Law from His instruction.

3) Present yourself to holiness

Be assured, you are on your way to perfection because you are already perfect in Christ! The battles in front of you with sin in your own life and in the lives of people all around cannot defeat you in any ultimate or final way. Therefore, present yourself to holiness: **(Romans 6:13-14** 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.** ¹⁴ **For sin will have no dominion over you).** There may be times when you do poorly in battle, but the victory is yours; you are more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus your great high priest and Sabbath king. The reality is that you are perfect in Him and that you will certainly attain perfection in glory. Now, in the time between, He has moved you from darkness to light by His call. So walk in the light and pursue the truth to live it. He has placed you on the pathway of holiness: you are holy, you are being made holy, and you will reach consummate holiness in heaven. So make holiness of life your goal. Keep your head studying, your hands working, and your feet running up the pathway of holiness. You cannot say, "I cannot do it." You might say the words, but they are false. You can make progress in the way of the holiness of the truth because of the cross and its power: you are holy, being made holy, and on your way to a glorious holy heaven.

May we fall down before the majesty of our God with true recognition of our sins and need of Christ; may we approach the throne of grace with confidence knowing that our Lord set us apart for holiness by enduring the punishment of our sins in His own body on the tree; in the battle with sin that presently challenges and encumbers us, may the Holy Spirit enable us to forge ahead through thick and thin to meaningful progress in sanctification; to the triune God be all glory, both now and forevermore, amen.