

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. ¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Introduction

The opening words of Hebrews 9.1, “even the first covenant had regulations for worship,” suggest the idea of regulations for worship now in the second or new and better covenant. But the point here is not worship as we might think of it along the lines of the elements of corporate worship for the people of God. Instead, worship here deals with the most important requirement for any person who would enter into the presence of God, namely, the shedding of blood in the killing of a sacrifice. No one enters the presence of God in the old covenant or new **without taking blood** (9.7). To make his point clear, the author gives us a picture of old covenant tabernacle worship at its core. He presents it as an illustration of the work of Christ, an act of worship, by which He opened the way of worship for His people. In worship and this is our title, Jesus obtained eternal redemption. He did this in order to bring us with Him into the presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary. There are two things to deal with in this text because it gives another contrast between things old and new: 1) what the old form of worship accomplished and 2) what the new form of worship accomplished.

1A. What the old form of worship accomplished

We have a description of the accomplishment of old covenant tabernacle worship in 9.1-10. The author paints a picture in stages by first placing the physical structure of the tabernacle on the canvas, after that he sets the picture in motion, and finally, he gives some interpretation.

1) The still picture

In the first five verses, we have a description of the old tabernacle (literally a tent) that amounts to a sketch because he says at the end of verse 5, **of these things we cannot now speak in detail**. The first section of the tent is the holy place and we have a picture of only three things in it, a lampstand, a table, and bread on the table: ² **For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place** (9.2; the altar of incense was also in the holy place but the author leaves it out of view until he completes the picture he intends to give). A first curtain separated the holy place from the courtyard. A second curtain separated the second section, the holy of holies from the holy place. The holy of holies or most holy place has two things in it that first meet the eye, an altar and a wooden box, the ark of the covenant (about 4 feet long, 2 feet high, and 2 feet wide). The picture now has the curtain open so you can see the altar of incense (of the holy place) as part of the most holy place. The altar was for burning incense and the top of the wooden box was the mercy seat where the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animal. Three things are out of view inside the ark of the

covenant: a golden jar of manna, Aaron's staff, and the tablets of the covenant, ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna (Ex. 16.32-34), and Aaron's staff that budded (Num. 17, Aaron's blossomed and bore fruit), and the tablets of the covenant (Ex. 25.16). ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail (9.3-5). The cherubim of glory pinpoint the place where God manifested His glory above the mercy seat, as He said, **There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel** (Ex. 25.22).

2) The motion picture

Now the author wants us to visualize the central action (the worship) of the priests and high priest in the place he sketched for us: **the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people** (9.6-7). For clarification, the action is for "unintentional" sins (v. 7). That is, there is no sacrifice for those who abide in flagrant rebellion against the Lord of the covenant. What then unfolds before our eyes? What unfolds is amazing and awesome. Because of the use of blood within the tent, we first watch the killing of a spotless animal. Then, the priests open the first curtain and enter the holy place to do their work, which includes burning incense daily (Ex. 30.7-10). But once a year, the high priest opens the second curtain, allows the sweet smelling incense to fill the holy of holies, takes the blood of the innocent victim with him, and sprinkles the blood on the mercy seat that covers the law. This takes place in the presence of God who manifests Himself above the mercy seat between the cherubim. The author transports us there to see and to smell what God sees and smells when the blood of an innocent victim covers man's law breaking with His mercy in His presence.

3) The interpretation of the main event

The Holy Spirit's teaching through the regulations of the former worship give us both something negative and something positive (what it did not accomplish and what it did accomplish): ⁸ **By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing** ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation (9.8-10).

a) The negative

While the first remained the second was not yet; the way into the holy places was not yet opened. This is truly a remarkable statement. He is telling us that even though the priests entered the holy place daily and the high priest entered the most holy place yearly, it is actually the case that no one entered into the holy places: **the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing** (9.8). That is the Holy Spirit's teaching. It is the truth because what the priests entered was not the real tabernacle but a symbol of the present age of fulfillment and reality. What the priests did was **symbolic for the present age** (9.9a).

Furthermore, on the negative side of things, in the old, the priests offered gifts and sacrifices that did not perfect the conscience (9.9). Their work only dealt with food, drink, washings, and regulations for the body until the time of reformation (9.10). The old system of law and sacrifice was an external legal system. The sense in which it did not perfect the conscience was in its externals in and of themselves.

b) The positive

However, that structure was not empty nor was the experience of the people empty. The writer tells us that the tabernacle was a symbol of what is now present (v. 8). That is, the former tabernacle with its shadows was a parable, an enacted parable, of the promises. OT believers had justification in Christ in anticipation of what was to come. Particularly anticipated was the cross in the Day of Atonement. The lived or acted out parable included gifts and sacrifices that pointed

to man's need of forgiveness, but OT saints did not have a fully satisfied consciences by the externals of the law. Coupled with the promises and by faith, they had an experience like ours in that they knew the forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God. Still, it was something less than what we experience. Their consciences were put at rest by God's grace but not fully and completely because they saw the promise of reconciliation with God dimly through the external shadows. On the other hand, our experience has some of what they had in that we long for completion but its ground is the completed and accomplished work of Christ.

The completeness we have is in a secured redemption, so, we turn now to what the new form of tabernacle worship accomplished.

2A. What the new form of worship accomplished

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (9.11-12).

The new form of worship accomplished an efficacious redemption, which means that what Christ did on the cross secured the salvation of everyone for whom He died. It means that His death secured or obtained eternal redemption (deliverance from sin, redemption by the payment of a ransom) for the people for whom Jesus gave His life. The term efficacious accents the saving power of Christ that cannot be thwarted, that accomplishes the saving of all for whom He died.

Note that key language in the definition of efficacious redemption comes from Hebrews 9.12. Does limited atonement, or efficacious redemption, surface in 9.12? A number of points support an affirmative answer.

1B. First, the redemption is an actuality

The text speaks of an actual redemption, the payment of a price that *delivers* a slave to sin and death from his slavery: Jesus **secured...redemption**. He obtained it just as the payment of a ransom *redeemed* each one for whom it was paid. In Exodus, we have background context for this redemption from death. **When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the LORD when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them (Ex 30.12).** The ransom was an offering to the Lord (Ex. 30.14) that was for the sinner: **for his life** by sparing him from a plague judgment. It was the payment of money for atonement (hence, it is atonement money, 30.15). This payment was an **offering to make atonement** (Ex. 30.15) and the context in Exodus is the annual Day of Atonement that brings us full circle back to Hebrews 9:

You shall make an altar on which to burn incense...⁷And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning...he shall burn it...a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations...¹⁰ Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD" (Ex. 30.1-10).

Being **most holy** (30.10), the altar of incense was associated with the holy of holies, the place of the special presence of God. On it, the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice as a **sin offering of atonement** (30.10). Accordingly, the writer to the Hebrews informs us that the sacrifice of Christ (of Himself as the offering) obtained redemption. The redemption that Jesus obtained is an actuality and not merely a potentiality. In other words, it was not the case that He potentially obtained our redemption; He obtained it. Nor is it that He obtained a potentiality. Indeed, He obtained an actuality, the actuality of our redemption as an accomplishment.

Our high priest opened the second curtain, allowed the sweet smelling fragrance to fill the holy of holies, and in virtue of His death on the cross, He entered the presence of God in the heavenly tabernacle as our forerunner having secured eternal redemption for us. His blood, that is, His violent death as our substitute covered our law breaking so we have mercy in the presence of God who is most holy, who is the holy of holies beyond compare.

2B. Second, the redemption executes the *pactum salutis* (the pact of salvation)

In the context of the book of Hebrews, the writer refers us to the covenant with the Father that He came to execute in submission to the Father's will to save the Father's elect. Jesus has children that the Father gave Him (Heb. 2.1, **Behold, I and the children God has given me**). Jesus was covenantally faithful (Heb. 3.2, **faithful to him who appointed him**). Jesus voluntarily obeyed the eternal covenant to offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice (Heb. 10.5-7, **Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷ 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.'"**; thus, He **offered up himself**, Heb. 7.27). Can we think that such a transaction (a divine transaction in which Christ submits to the Father to fulfill the covenant for the saving of the Father's elect) takes place without making the redemption of His elect certain?

In other words, Jesus came to fulfill the covenant of redemption with respect to the people God chose for Himself and gave to Christ (Jn. 17.1-5). The agreement within the trinity in this pact of salvation included the voluntary sacrifice of Christ on the cross in order to realize that covenant. How could this possibly be *ineffectual*? He came to serve many by dying in their place as an actual substitution. If it is an actual substitution, then in the death of Christ an actual exchange took place: He gave His life for the many, and by that exchange, the many have His life. Thus, *in time, a person becomes a Christian by faith and receives newness of life because that life flows effectually to him from the efficacious death of Christ on the cross*. Christ as priest-king after the order of Melchizedek serves the people for whom He died. How can that service be anything less than doing the good *in* them He seeks *for* them in His death?

3B. Third, the redemption is eternal

In other words, when Jesus bore the punishment of the sins of His covenant people, that violent death made their actual deliverance from sin and death forever sure. Note that the beginning point here is not the point of conversion in the life of a sinner, such that he has deliverance (salvation) from that point forward eternally. The eternal safety of truly converted sinners is part, but only part, of what this text describes. This text teaches that eternal safety of the covenant children of Christ is something He secured for them *on the cross*. The beginning point of this salvation is the cross, which guaranteed, once and for all eternally guaranteed the deliverance of the people that the Father gave to Christ.

Concluding applications

Central in the new form of worship is the objective fact that Jesus secured eternal redemption for us on the cross. A better hope and perfected conscience flow to the redeemed heart by the fact and knowledge of efficacious atonement. Moreover, the fact that efficacious redemption occurred in an act of worship raises its value to new heights. Three applications stand out.

1) This teaching of efficacious redemption is a striking call to worship

Because Jesus gave Himself to the cross for your salvation as an act of worship, then how can you have anything else in your heart than a flame burning like incense to worship God in His presence? If you know and absorb into your blood stream the fact that your prayers are now the incense that rises up to God as a sweet smelling fragrance (Rev. 3.8f), then you will find yourself drawing near to the throne of grace for sweet fellowship with the Lord of glory. Then, you will live your life to worship, honor, and praise, exalt, and glorify the Father who planned your redemption, the Son who executed it, and the Holy Spirit who applies it.

2) This teaching of efficacious redemption is a powerful call to practical service

Granted, your love is not efficacious in the way that His love is efficacious. However, you are to be determined and active in your love trusting His work, its efficacy and certainty. Based on the efficacy of redemption and by faith, you know that Jesus took your sins and bore the punishment for them in His own body on the tree. He did not do something for people in general and for you in general. He did not merely make a provision for a ransom on your behalf

and thus actually accomplish nothing. For practical application in line with the text, it does not help to frame Christ's example as a potentiality. What we have is actualization, action, work, and practical loving service. You need to follow Him by practical loving service and not mere potentiality. What sense does it make to follow Christ and potentially serve others? This would be more like serving in word but not deed contrary to 1 John 3.18, **little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.** The exhortation of our Lord loses its practical power, unless you understand that He is speaking of an efficacious ransom.

On another level, now, to a heightened degree, I can reason that if He gave His life *efficaciously* for sinners (for slaves to sin that would perish if He did not *actually secure* their release from sin by the ransom payment of His own life), then in loving gratitude to Him, in obedience to His *sovereign* command, and following His example *as the supreme model of determined, active, saving love*, how can I do any less than give myself away to Him in the service of His brothers and sisters bound to Him eternally by the covenant of redemption?

3) Finally, this doctrine is a motivating call to work at your salvation

Knowing of the fullness of His work on your behalf, you have the greatest motivation to work out your salvation in fear (that is, awe) at the fact that God is efficaciously at work in you. You will take up the means that He commands trusting the Lord to do the rest. You will abide in Him by prayer and Bible study waiting patiently on Him to bring forth fruit in your life.

You will take the steps that He requires (however you feel) and trust (patiently) that the Lord will do the rest. And do the rest He will because the work He did on the cross secured your eternal redemption. He made it certain (guaranteed it) on the cross in His suffering that you will make it through the suffering and battles of this world. In stages of growth in freedom from sin, you will arrive safely with Him in glory. So, be what you are: you know you will win the battle against sin so fight diligently with your head studying, your hands working, and your feet running for His honor and glory!

May we fall down before the majesty of our God in humble acknowledgement of our need of Jesus as our substitute in His death; may the Spirit teach us true thankfulness for the accomplishment that Christ secured for us by the ransom exchange of His life for ours; may He encourage us to live with love and serve with vigor because He came into the world to serve and give His life to obtain and thus guarantee our eternal redemption. To the triune God be all glory, amen.