

"A BETTER SACRIFICE"

I. Introduction

- A. This passage's evaluation of the Old Testament sacrificial system helps us to see that there is only one cure for our guilt-plagued consciences.
 - 1. There is nothing that we can offer to God to make up for how we have offended him.
 - 2. No amount of good deeds, no devotion to religious activities, no promise of self-reform, no act of self-denial could ever atone for our sin.
 - 3. We need the blood of a better sacrifice, the sacrifice that was offered up at one point in time by Jesus Christ.
- B. As we study this passage tonight, we will consider three things that it teaches us about this better sacrifice.
 - 1. First, it is an effective sacrifice.
 - 2. Second, it is a necessary sacrifice.
 - 3. And third, it is a final sacrifice.

II. An Effective Sacrifice (1-14)

- A. We begin by looking at verses 1 through 14, where we see that Jesus' sacrifice was an effective sacrifice.
 - 1. The writer sets Jesus' sacrifice in contrast to the sacrifices that were offered under the Mosaic law.
 - 2. One of the things that is interesting about the book of Hebrews is that it talks about the tabernacle instead of the temple, even though

the temple was still standing when this letter was written.

3. The tabernacle had been out of use since the reign of Solomon, when it was replaced by the temple that Solomon erected in Jerusalem.
 4. The reason why the writer of Hebrews talks about the tabernacle is because he wants Christians to see that we have the same kind of pilgrim identity that the people of Israel had during their wilderness wanderings.
 5. He wants us to know that while God pitches his tent with us throughout the days of our pilgrimage, we are still strangers and exiles on earth.
 6. We are still waiting to enter into our heavenly inheritance.
- B. In verses 1 through 5, the writer mentions several things about the tabernacle's design and furnishings.
1. He points out that the sanctuary was divided into two sections: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.
 2. After mentioning the lampstand, the showbread, the altar of incense, and the ark, the writer says, "Of these things we cannot now speak in detail."
 3. This statement implies that there is spiritual meaning even in the way the sanctuary was constructed, though this is not going to be developed in this passage.
 4. Israel's priests performed their regular duties in the first section of the sanctuary, the Holy Place, and the high priest entered into the Most Holy Place once per year on the day of atonement.
 5. Special mention is made of the fact that the high priest did not enter the inner sanctuary without taking blood.

6. In the Bible, blood is a metaphor that refers to a sacrificial death.
 7. This is made clear in Leviticus 17:11, where the Lord says, “the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”
 8. The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices symbolized the Lord’s provision of atonement for sin through the death of a substitute.
- C. In verse 8, the writer explains that the Holy Spirit used the tabernacle and its ministry to teach that the way into God’s presence had not yet been fully revealed.
1. The tabernacle pointed to a better time to come, a time when access to God’s presence would be open to all of his people.
 2. That time arrived when Jesus died on the cross, a fact that was underscored by the tearing of the curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place.
 3. This signified the removal of the first section of the sanctuary and the opening up of a way of access to fellowship with God.
- D. The writer also explains that the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices was not able to perfect the conscience of the worshipper.
1. Those sacrifices only provided ceremonial cleansing, not true spiritual cleansing.
 2. The guilt of our sin is the barrier that prevents us from having fellowship with God.
 3. The only way we can be cleansed of that guilt is through the death of a substitute.

4. This is the point that the writer makes in verses 11 through 14 when he talks about Jesus' high priestly ministry.
 5. Jesus did not bring the blood of bulls and goats into a manmade sanctuary.
 6. He brought his own blood into the true heavenly sanctuary.
 7. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he offered himself up as a sacrifice without blemish, as one who perfectly fulfilled God's law.
 8. Because he did this, he is able to do what the Old Testament sacrifices could not do.
 9. He is able to purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.
- E. Take careful note of that phrase at the end of verse 14: Christ's blood purifies "our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."
1. This tells us that in our fallen condition all of our works, even our good works, are "dead works."
 2. They are corrupted by our sin and are thus unacceptable to God.
 3. This is why we are in such desperate need of Jesus.
 4. Apart from Christ, we cannot serve God.
 5. Even our best works are as filthy rags in God's sight.
 6. But when our consciences have been cleansed by Christ's blood, we can serve God.
 7. When we have acceptance with God on the basis of Jesus' blood and righteousness, we do not offer our service to the Lord in order to earn his favor but in order to express our love and gratitude.

8. Only Jesus' sacrifice is effective in purifying us from our guilt.

III. A Necessary Sacrifice (15-24)

- A. We turn now to verses 15 through 24, where we see that Christ's sacrifice was a necessary sacrifice.
 1. The writer makes this point by employing one Greek word in two different senses.
 2. In the ESV, this word is translated in verses 16 and 17 as "will" (in the sense of a last will and testament) and as "covenant" elsewhere in the passage.
 3. In verses 16-17, the writer is using the concept of a last will and testament to illustrate why it was necessary for Christ to die.
 4. If somebody bequeaths something to you in their will, you do not get what they left you until they die.
 5. A will only goes into effect once the testator has died.
 6. In the same way, God's people could not receive the blessings promised in the new covenant until the death of our Savior took place.
- B. The writer makes the same point by the other way in which he employs the term "covenant" in this section.
 1. He explains that biblical covenants were often ratified by using blood sacrifices to illustrate the consequences of breaking the covenant.
 2. We see this in the covenant that God set up with Abraham in Genesis 15, where God appeared in a theophany and passed through the pieces of the animals that Abraham had slaughtered.

3. That kind of ceremony was sometimes used in the ancient world as a way for the parties in a covenant to bind themselves to the terms of their covenant.
 4. The participants in such ceremonies were saying, 'May I become like these animals if I fail to do what this covenant requires.'
 5. The remarkable thing about the ceremony in Genesis 15 is that God is the only one who passed through the pieces of the slaughtered animals.
 6. In doing this, God was showing both Abraham and those who share Abraham's faith that he will bear the full responsibility for ensuring that this covenant is kept.
- C. The covenant that the writer cites to show why it was necessary for Christ to die is the Mosaic covenant, which he refers to as "the first covenant" in verse 18.
1. When that covenant was made at Sinai, animals were sacrificed and their blood was sprinkled on both the people and the covenant documents.
 2. This was done in order to emphasize that the punishment for covenant-breaking would be death.
 3. This was reflective of the penalty for covenant-breaking under the covenant that God set up with Adam in the garden, the covenant of works.
 4. Every one of us has broken that covenant, which means that every one of us is under the sanction of death.
 5. This is another reason why it was necessary for Jesus to die.
 6. The only way our transgressions can be forgiven is if a death occurs that redeems us from those transgressions.

7. As the writer puts it in verse 22, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

D. The Bible’s emphasis on blood strikes many people as offensive.

1. But the only reason why they take offense at it is because they have lost their sense of sin.

2. The point of the Bible’s blood sacrifices is not to depict a bloodthirsty deity.

3. The point is to show that God is just and that he cannot allow evil to go unpunished.

4. It is a good thing that the universe is governed by a just God.

5. Were it not, then the universe would either be hopelessly unjust or utterly meaningless.

6. God’s perfect justice requires that sin be punished with death.

7. This is why Jesus had to die.

8. The only way we can be saved from God’s wrath is if Jesus appears before God on our behalf.

IV. A Final Sacrifice (25-28)

A. This brings us to verses 25 through 28, where we see that Jesus’ sacrifice is a final sacrifice.

1. The writer says that Jesus did not come “to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own.”

2. Instead, Jesus “appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

3. This is why we reject the Roman Catholic teaching that the celebration of the Mass is a continuation of Christ's sacrifice.
 4. Jesus' sacrifice was offered at one moment in history.
 5. It can never be offered again.
 6. This is what makes Jesus' sacrifice better than the sacrifices that were offered under the Old Covenant.
 7. Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient to deal with our guilt once and for all.
- B. The writer says that through Jesus' death on the cross, he "put away sin" for all who look to him in faith.
1. Consider what that means for you as a Christian.
 2. Despite the fact that you continue to break God's law, your guilt has been removed forever.
 3. While the sins that you commit as a believer displease your heavenly Father, those sins never bring you under God's wrath or condemnation.
 4. Jesus extinguished God's wrath for you by fully bearing the punishment that your sins deserved.
 5. God is not unjust.
 6. He cannot require that a penalty be paid twice.
 7. Once the penalty has been paid, the debt is settled.
 8. That is what Christ accomplished for us when he offered himself up in our place.
 9. He put away sin.

- C. The writer further underscores this point by noting that death is an unrepeatable event.
 - 1. He says that “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”
 - 2. Notice what this tells us about the finality of death.
 - 3. There are no second chances after you die.
 - 4. After death comes judgment.
 - 5. This was as true for Jesus as it is for us.
 - 6. Jesus died once, and then God vindicated him by raising him from the dead.
 - 7. And on the day when he returns, all who are waiting for him will share in that vindication.

V. Conclusion

- A. This passage should help us to see how precious Christ is to us.
- B. In the words of the Puritan Thomas Brooks: “A Christian should wear Christ in his bosom as a flower of delight, for he is a whole paradise of delight. He that minds not Christ more than his sin, can never be thankful and fruitful as he should.” [*Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices*, 143n24]
- C. You should always mind Jesus more than you mind your sin.
- D. Remember that his blood, and his blood alone, is sufficient to cleanse you from all of your guilt.