

Are We Convinced Now?

The Book of Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 10:1-18
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I'm reading then Hebrews 10 from verse 1 to verse 18.

1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come--In the volume of the book it is written of Me--To do Your will, O God.' " 8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. 15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

And that is the word of God.

Well, the title for this evening's sermon is this, "Are We Convinced Now?" Are we convinced now? Well, those, as it were, joining this series when we've reached chapter 10 of it, you'll realize we've had a fair few chapters that have already passed us by and we're nearing the end of this particular book in the New Testament. But we've actually reached the end of a section here and that section, were I to take you back to chapter 4, verse 14, I would say began there and a bit of math, we work out that's been the bulk of this book actually has been this central section with a few digressions which the writer by inspiration is able to indulge in. And what has been happening in that central section is to prove to us again and again and again the supremacy, the superiority, the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and the writer is now kind of bringing to an end that part, this relentless logic. That's why we have the title are we convinced now, that we've gone through those sermons and looked at those passages, you would have seen the same relentless logic again and again.

And he was having to apply that to these people because and again is some rather lengthy explanation if we were going to go into it in any great detail, but they had gone backwards. They had gone backwards. They had once believed and believing in Jesus Christ, what he did on the cross was sufficient for the salvation of their soul, that God would remember their lawless deeds no more. They're trusting in him. But then some other ideas began to fill their minds, other ideas come, the devil never sleeps, and these people began to say, "Well, wait a minute. Ah, maybe, maybe we've got to do other things as well. Maybe," and this is where it gets a little technical, "we should do some of the things they did in the Old Testament, sacrifices, different things which the high priest of that day descended from Moses' brother Aaron's line, all the animals that they would offer, perhaps we should do that again. Perhaps we should observe special days which the people regarded as important days in the word of God in the Old Testament. And maybe we need to repeat these ourselves now in order to be in good standing with God." And the writer is saying, "No. No, do not do this! If you remove Jesus Christ, there's nobody else. He's the supreme sacrifice. He is the only sacrifice you need. To go backwards from Him is actually to dismiss Him. It's to belittle Him. It's to say, 'I don't think He's got as much value as I thought so we'd better go back and offer some blood of bulls and goats and other creatures and perhaps go back to the temple,'" which was so important in those days, and before that what was called the tabernacle, special tent which the people of that day carried around the desert in their desert wanderings with Moses, and they'd worship God there, and right they were to do it because God had instructed them to do this, "according to the pattern that I've shown you." But the writer is now saying but it's all changed. Now that Jesus Christ has come, that has all changed and it's finished with and it's over and you don't need to rely on any of those things because you should rely entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed not to rely entirely upon him is in effect not to rely upon him at all and that would not please God.

So he is trying to show them it is not logical. It's not logical, in fact, it's plain wrong, in fact, it's spiritually dangerous, it's reckless, you're destroying yourselves on this. And so this is what he's bringing to a conclusion here before he then, if you like, takes that truth and then begins to apply it to our everyday situation, and to these people here, the reason, in one sense, they were withdrawing was that they were facing persecution and it felt

perhaps a way out of persecution if they got closer to the Jewish religion and doing these sacrifices and observing these feasts, they could sort of merge with the crowd and not attract attention and maybe escape persecution. So much of what the writer is going to say is, "No, pull yourselves together." After he finishes this section, "No, put yourselves together. Don't do that. That's backwards and there's no hope in that." And yet he draws examples from the Old Testament to show that those people had the faith but these people needed to have faith in, well, if you haven't seen God, an invisible God surely who has promised us a place that to our senses is invisible but we are to believe to be real, heaven. And so without following Christ nor heaven, you need to keep following him and nobody else.

So my first heading this evening is this: Scripture is to meet our needs. Scripture is to meet our needs, and that's the entirety of Scripture but, in a sense, what we have in this passage here and I don't intend overly to repeat things which in the sermon series we've been looking at at some considerable length, but that's the work of the Bible, to convince us and to go on convincing us, to tell us something and then maybe tell it again slightly differently, slightly different angle, but to bring together a body of truth to prove to us certainly vital things. So while it is an ancient text, it is, it's thousands of years old and the Old Testament thousands of years old, nevertheless it still speaks to us today. It was always intended to speak to us today. When God first gave these things to Moses or whoever else it was, intended for us to be able to read it too, then there would be a book and these were to be written in that book. All generations, all people. Some of the language maybe a little obscure to us, some of the illustrations may have to be carefully thought through for our present technology and the age that we live in and countries that we have now rather than the ancient empires and ancient countries of that day. But it's telling us truth and not just any old truth. It's not just saying things for the sake of saying things which may be true but really hardly impact us, for it's telling us things that are important, the most important things about who we are and about who God is, and about how we can know this God and how we can love him and serve him.

So it is trying to convince us, persuade us of God's reality, yes, God's power, yes, the redemption, the salvation, the forgiveness of sin that this holy and wise and glorious God can bring to sinners. So it's not just an abstract book or just a random collection of books. It's got a variety of things but it's not accidental and we can read in here that, for instance in verse 17 where the writer says by inspiration, "then He adds," God add, God decides there's more to be said. "I want to say something more here." Not our choice to add to this book, it's God's choice, "I will add something here. This is My prerogative to speak and to have these things written that I want to have written." So he's the writer although people, he used the writer. He's the one who has the authority to act. He is the one who has the authority to bring in another epistle here and Paul was moved to write the second letter to the Corinthians or whatever else it might be, and then God had the authority at the end of the book of Revelation to say, "That's it. There is no more. That is the completion, that is the fulfillment. I have said all that I'm going to say. And there is this book and the Holy Spirit will help you understand this book."

So he designed it, edited it, proofread it. He caused it to be written, caused it to be published, keeps it, preserves it so we still have it today despite the best efforts of man to try and destroy it, and it is ever there for us to perform the functions that one of Paul's letters to a younger man who was a son in the faith, Timothy, in the second letter to that young man, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 he writes this, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." That's what Scripture is given to do. It's there to teach us, it reproves us, it corrects us, it has doctrine, things that God would have us know about himself. And in a sense, in this passage here, it's interesting as is much of the book of Hebrews, this letter written to the Hebrew background people, as it were, and it has its title, its name, because a lot of it is quoted from the Old Testament. That's why we have it in italics here, and that's actually quotation from the Old Testament. And it is prophecy. It is prophecy. It is speaking about things which will come to pass. It speaks, that's what Scripture does. It's something given way before the event but will then come true and which will show there is a God of power, a God of wisdom. He is a God who works on a huge time scale that he can be talking about things hundreds of years before they come to pass. You think of all the events in history that could have gone against a prophecy being fulfilled, accidents, we'd call them events that happened, but God foresaw all of them and would bring to pass exactly what he intended.

And it is the Holy Spirit we see in verse 15, "But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before," and then a quotation from the Old Testament. So the Holy Spirit was speaking. All Scripture in that way is given by inspiration of God. It's the Holy Spirit who is working in the holy men of God who were moved by the Spirit to write these things and to main quotations. Psalm 40 which we read a moment ago, a portion of Psalm 40 is repeated here, and that is from verses 6 or 8 of Psalm 40, it's verses 5 and 7 of Hebrews 10. But what is this? "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; but a body You have prepared for me." And you'll notice that the writer in verse 5 says that these words are, "when He came into the world." When he came into the world, and the "He" is the Lord Jesus Christ. And the words of Psalm 40, this portion here that is quoted, are his words, his words in anticipation of the day when he would come into the world, words spoken hundreds of years before but which were as the words of the Lord Jesus Christ before he was born in Bethlehem, speaking about the fact that one day he would have a body and he would come into the world, and that his body was all tied up with the whole issue of sacrifice and offering.

It's quite bold language, isn't it? Given the importance of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament to say sacrifice and offering you did not desire, when burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin, you had no pleasure. But none by comparison with what the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice was going to bring, that when he has a body, when he comes into the world, the Son of God, but he was also now fully human, then that body was going to suffer, he's going to die, that sacrifice is going to make all the other sacrifices seem as nothing by comparison. Yes, God required them for that day but, in effect, had no pleasure in them until his Son came and he took away the sin of his people.

He is the one and he says, "In the volume of the book it is written of Me. All through the Old Testament it speaks about Me and now I have come to do Your will." And that is, as we might almost think, the threshold of being born of a virgin, born there under the law, born in Bethlehem, and already as we see in Scripture, prophecy. It's written there and it's there, in effect, to startle us and make us think, "Well, that is remarkable. How could this be?" Well, it can be because of the God that God is.

So we find Christ written of there. We also find that other quotation is actually from a prophet in the Old Testament called Jeremiah, and from the 31st chapter of that particular book of prophecy, verses 33 to 34 quoted here in verses 16 and 17. This, well, he'd actually quoted it earlier in this letter but it talks about, and we talked about it quite a bit, what we call the new covenant, the new agreement, the new set of promises and pledges that God establishes with his people. They used to be established upon the blood of goats, the blood of bulls and the blood of calves and creatures that couldn't be morally responsible for the actions of human beings. God allowed it to be a substitute at that time until his own Son would come. And then what greater blessings come with the new covenant, this new agreement that "sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." They're gone. They are finished. They are out of sight.

And the detail of this, this chapter here, I'm not going to explain every verse. We can get very technical and very involved in all the different parts of it, but really it's the contrast that's being drawn all along the way. And there in verse 1 it talks about the law, "the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things," not the actual substance of those things. And the law here refers to all of the sacrifices, all the things of the temple and at the tabernacle when that was standing, that the worshiper, and it was right, to be in fellowship with God would have to offer. And each time and he's thinking here of the annual sacrifice year by year on the Day of Atonement, a special, very special day in the calendar. Very special because the high priest on that day would enter into the innermost part of the temple, the tabernacle before it, which was called the Most Holy Place, and there offer only once a year, bring blood and sprinkle it on what's called the mercy seat, a sort of golden great sort of block there, a box covered over in gold with angels made of wroughts and gold-work, and this great block of gold upon which the angels were made and resting upon this big case, this big box. Blood had to be sprinkled on that.

That was a very special day because that atoned for all the sin of the people that they hadn't confessed, that was there somewhere in the community, things that people didn't even realize that they had done. And God thereby would say, "I pardon that sin for another year." For another year. It would have to be repeated next year. And the writer was saying, "Well, that was the law. That's how that functioned. Every year more sacrifices for sin. The Day of Atonement would come around, the high priest enters the Most Holy Place. Another year and they would heave a sigh of relief that God sort of obliterated us, not destroyed us, God has forgiven our sin for another year." And that was all for another year and the writer is now saying, "Well, that was a shadow. That was like the outline but not the substance. The real thing was the coming of Christ. That was the good thing to come."

These are the good things that he was going to bring because we don't have to wait another year to find out are we still in good standing with God. We don't have to be in a state of suspense and some anxiety, some worry. "Will God receive us again? Will this be sufficient?" Now God is saying, "My Son is sufficient and He pays for all that sin and you don't have to come and offer something else year by year. My Son has ended all of that need for sacrifice. You no longer need to trouble yourself and your conscience about sin and being reminded of that. You now look to My Son, one offering, taken away your sin once and forever."

So Christ's sacrifice and we looked at this a while back and did get very technical, but with the furniture within the tabernacle and within the temple. Special lampstands and indeed the ark of the covenant, this chest which had the 10 Commandments in it amongst other things and all the altars that were needed for the sacrifices finished, belonged to the law. No need for sacrifices now of that kind because the Son of God has now completely and utterly completed all of that. His one offering having such value, such power, such all-sufficiency that there is no other offering that is needed. Indeed it would be quite wrong to even try and offer one.

So Scripture is there to meet our need and there it meets it at the deepest point. How can I know my sins are forgiven? How can I have peace with God? How can this holy God who is wise and knows my heart and can read my thoughts and intentions, how can I know I have peace with him? How when I go from this world into the next world when I meet him, can I know that that will be a happy and not a wretched encounter? And the writer is telling us you look at the Son of God, you believe in him, and where there is remission of all sin. There there is no longer an offering for sin, no longer any need for you to be anxious about that, concerned about that. You are to trust in him. He's now in heaven. He sat at the right hand of God. He is not going to have to offer himself again, come back into the world, die on a cross again, do any of that once more. He's now waiting for all his enemies to be made his footstool, the last enemy, of course, is actually death itself which he will destroy by his coming once and for all.

So Scripture answers our deepest need. It is this man, the one it talks about there in verse 12. This man, him, he is the one that brings peace to the soul. He is the one by his ministry and the works he did and the works he still does at the right hand of God, risen in triumph and glory. He is the one. And so I suppose the writer could ask of us are we convinced now? Are we convinced now? Do we see if that makes sense actually? In fact, the whole Bible only makes sense if you read it as speaking all about the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we convinced about that, that Scripture is given there to meet not our curiosity but to give us facts and information and to actually answer our deepest soul's need to know that our sins are atoned for and we can have peace with the God of heaven and earth.

Following on from that, second heading: peace to the conscience. Peace to the conscience. That's what the writer is saying here to the people, that beforehand there wasn't. There was always a consciousness of sin, always an awareness of a barrier

between the worshiper and God. That was not permanently erased, not totally once for all taken away. And so they felt incomplete and in need of something more. It might have been tempting, much like the people who he's writing to here, much like any of us, to fall back on works to try to please God, to fall back on doing things, that God wants us to do things and that the doing of the things is what will actually make up for some insufficiency that we feel for some guilt within the conscience. Well, God does require of us good works, he would call of us there to love each other and to love him heart, soul, strength and mind, to be observant of the 10 Commandments and all that follows from that. But not as a way of establishing a relationship with him because that we can never do, we can never do enough by way of works to please a perfect God. We have to be perfect ourselves and we're not and that's why we have a Savior that's given for our sin.

But we can actually fail somehow to draw the conclusions we should from this completed sacrifice and it would be almost like the old covenant worshiper, there's a consciousness of sin, and feel ourselves under a cloud of guilt. Feeling guilty, if you like, even when we've done, if you will, nothing wrong, and even feeling guilty if we don't feel guilty. It almost becomes a way of life to feel guilty. The writer writes, doesn't he, about having what it describes here as a weak conscience, a conscience that is somewhat just oversensitized, a little overactive in that area and we'll always be imagining things that haven't actually been done by them or things that they haven't really even thought, but that somehow a guilt continues to stick upon them and they don't have peace of mind at all.

It's curious, conscience is a curious thing because it's not a perfect thing at all. It's been influenced by the fall, it has, but it's also influenced by other things and there are times in which we might actually be able to read the word of God and feel that we are able to have a clear conscience because that's what gives peace, doesn't it? A clear conscience, have a clear conscience about who one is and one's standing before God and all of these things. In the letter that Paul wrote to the Romans and reading there in chapter 2, he writes about the conscience in verses 13 and 15. The context of it, I haven't time to explain now, but he writes this, "(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)." The conscience either accusing or excusing, saying, no, there is no case to answer here. You have not done wrong. Therefore you can be exonerated and you can actually step back from feeling guilty on that.

So Paul is writing about that kind of situation which is something he himself actually experienced. Now remember, Paul had been responsible for the deaths of many people. He consented at the death of the man called Stephen in the New Testament and stood for God. And Paul had been partly responsible for seeing the man stoned to death. He had much upon his conscience, in one sense, many things that he could feel guilty about and yet what do we find him saying, well, the man who is plagued or the man who's living under a cloud and the man who knows he's forgiven of God. In Acts 23 concerning here before some accusers we read in verses 1 and 2, "Then Paul, looking earnestly at the

council, said, 'Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.' And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth." They could see, he didn't think that Paul had any reason to say and so with a clear conscience Paul said that.

Then when we turn just turn a few more pages in the book of Romans to chapter 9, and verses 1 and 2 of that chapter. He says, "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart." Because of his care for his own sort of people from his background, the Jewish people and their failure to believe in God.

There are other instances too. 1 Corinthians 4:3 and 4, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord." Clear conscience and the Bible commends a clear conscience to us, to have a good conscience toward God.

So if we are living with, if you will, our false guilt, our sense of some failure there, some inadequacy there, with one hand, sure, we fall short of the glory of God. None of us, none of us can act towards God as we should. The inner life is always contrary. There are always things there to be repented of. And yet when all is said and done, the Apostle Paul himself knew the wickedness of his own heart and yet could still speak of having a clear conscience. In 2 Timothy 1:3, again, "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did." And in 1 Timothy 1:19 once more there, "having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck."

All the benefits of a clear conscience, a clear conscience before God and that we're forgiven and that, well, we trust that we're guilty of a great transgression and all the inner sins, of sins of imagining, sins of scheming, all these kinds of sins, sure enough, are not able to assent completely that we are without any reason without a clear conscience because the difficulty often is this, it's not God, in effect, who is making our conscience to feel very unhappy and very guilty, it's often other people. It's other people, other people, fearing what they think, fearing their words or their censures, or their disapproval which actually takes away the joy of our salvation and leaves us feeling troubled, feeling that we may have offended them or may have upset them in some way. And we can feel very wretched, very guilty even if we haven't actually done anything, even if, in a sense, it's not so much our difficulty but the person over there who has got an over-sensitive conscience and worrying too much about smaller things and getting in themselves into a little bit of a state. You talk about treading on eggshells around people and it can be like that. Some people are so quick to take offense and rather having to just be careful and not say the wrong thing here, or somehow inadvertently trigger up something and then just feel the frostiness and the displeasure and the mood that comes back. And you can live with that and feel guilty that you said something or you didn't say something, and then go trawling back over what you might and might not have done and lose a lot of peace of mind over that. Sometimes, of course, we may be at fault and we should put it right, say sorry, say sorry to somebody if there's something of the weight, something that is an

offense. Then we should say sorry. If that person has died and we have to leave that one with God.

And with those where we're worried about other people who are easily offended, just responding in the way that they do and saying something negative back to us, or in some way or other indicating to us their displeasure, well, perhaps it's for us to develop a stronger conscience, a clearer conscience to excuse ourselves and acquit ourselves of what it is we might have imagined has triggered off this response and able to accept how some people just do have a more scrupulous conscience on these things and are more easily offended on these things. Well, we're not to go out of our way to offend people or make their life difficult in any way. Where we can, we accommodate, what we can, we'll compromise, and we'll do that in the best sense of that word happily but we can't ourselves permit really for our own peace of mind, for our enjoyment a clear conscience before God, to hear other people's opinions, to, as it were, bring a bit of wreckage into our conscience and to bring disturbance and to bring loss of peace and loss of joy else, well, really that is a sad outcome and not one, I think, that God would have us to have to endure.

So are we convinced, are we convinced in the sacrifice of Christ? Are we convinced that that's the important thing? Is actually the verdict of heaven, not the verdict of other people? We can sometimes get it wrong way around. No, the other people, actually their verdict is the one that's dominating. That's the one that's determining my peace or taking it away from me. And that correction, that sort of rethinking it through is perhaps something that we need to ask God for help with to be able to rest more firmly and more fully upon the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and not to have to live, well, tip-toeing around people who are easily offended and that comes back to us there and really taking onboard their easily offended nature and wrecking our own consciences with guilt over that.

So are we convinced now? Well, the Bible will tell us look at the blood of Christ. Look at what heaven says and make that your first port of call. Make that the thing that you then fit everything together in, including where now consciences might be troubled and where we might be importing actually a difficulty that's not actually ours and other people's troubles and problems, as we say, become our own. And may the Lord give us wisdom in these delicate things and bless us in our onward pilgrimage.