

One Sacrifice That Makes Perfect Those Who Draw Near:

An Interpretive Essay On Hebrews 10:1-18

Mason Manville

NT520

Feb 22, 2023

Introduction

The Epistle written to the Hebrews is a letter showing the supremacy of Christ. The author of the book continues to point out to his intended readers that Christ is greater than all of the heroes of the Old Testament. He is greater than heavenly angels, greater than Abraham, and superior to Moses. He also highlights the fact that Jesus Christ, in His role as priest, was greater than the Aaronic High Priest and offered a better sacrifice. The topic of Jesus' offering a greater sacrifice in His role as priest will be the topic of this essay.

The text that will be focused upon for this essay will be Hebrews chapter 10, verses 1 through 18. In this section of scripture, the author of Hebrews explains that Christ's death on the cross was the true sacrifice for sins that the offering in the Temple and Tabernacle pointed to the entire time. He explains how the Levitical sacrificial system itself demonstrated its deficiency in actually taking away sins. The system pointed out the need for a final, perfect, true, once for all sacrifice for sins. This will be shown by going through portions of the text, taking care to properly explain the terms being used and the concepts being described by the inspired author. After a proper amount of exegesis of the text itself is finished, then the author will summarize the theological concepts that can be learned from the text, and a few points of practical application of these doctrines will be given. All portions of Scripture that will be directly quoted in this essay will be from the ESV translation.

As stated earlier, the book of Hebrews is focused on showing the supremacy of Christ over the types and shadows of the Old Testament. Chapter 1 focuses on Christ being greater than the angels. Chapter 2 explains that Christ is the founder of salvation. Chapter 3 shows that Christ is greater than Moses, the Lawgiver. Halfway through chapter 4 is where the author of Hebrews begins his argument that Jesus is the superior High Priest. He continues his argument through

half of chapter 5, taking a break to warn against apostasy and declare that God keeps His promises, and then picks it back up in 6:19. From this verse through arguably 10:25 the author of Hebrews focuses on the concepts of priests, the Tabernacle/Temple, and sacrifices in relation to Jesus's work on the cross. Chapter 7 focuses on Christ in relation to Melchizedek. Chapter 8 then speaks about Christ as the better High Priest of a better New Covenant. Chapter 9 speaks on the earthly Most Holy place and the use of blood in redemption. Then Chapter 10 focuses specifically on Christ's sacrifice and faithful assurance in the His sacrifice. It is towards the tail end of this argument that this essay will focus its attention on. There are many details that are being glossed over for the sake of time and space, but the relevant verses from these chapters will be referenced when appropriate.

Exegesis

Tabernacle, Priest, and Sacrifices

Now before any work can be done with the text at hand, it is necessary to explain some of the concepts that the author of Hebrews assumes that his original audience, first century Jewish Christians, understands well. The first idea to address is that of the Priest. In Exodus, God instructs Moses to build the Tabernacle, where God's presence could dwell in the midst of His covenant people and the people could offer sacrifices to God. There were several sections that divided up the Tabernacle and each section had specific regulations. For this essay's purposes, it is only important to note that the section in which God's presence resided, the Most Holy Place, was only to be entered by the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement, and only after sacrifices to "cover" the priest's sins were made. This Most Holy place housed the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat atop it. It was from above the Mercy Seat that God's presence would meet with His people. Moses built the Tabernacle according to the pattern God had shown

him on Mount Siani. The Tabernacle was a copy of the true heavenly realities that God had shown to Moses. This idea of the earthly Tabernacle/Temple, the priesthood, and sacrifices being built after the pattern of the heavenly realities will continue to come up.

The next concept to unpack is that of a priest. Priests in the Old Testament were the representatives of the people before God. They would be set apart from their kinsman for the purpose of standing in the place of the people of Israel before God in the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. They were held to the strictest standards of moral and ritual purity because they drew near to the holy God of the universe. The Priests and Levites were to guard the Tabernacle, offer prayers and supplications for the nation, and offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. Among the priests there was one who had the most dangerous job of all, the High Priest.

Before talking about the High Priest and the unique sacrifice he was meant to offer, it would be beneficial to quickly describe what Old Testament Sacrifices entailed. The first half of the book of Leviticus outlines the proper procedures that God required for sacrifices. Sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament were bloody affairs. The death of an innocent animal was required for all of them. While there were offerings that did not require blood in themselves, such as the grain offering, they were always to be offered with another offering that did require blood to be spilled.

The High Priest, as stated before, once a year had to enter into the Most Holy Place in order to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. The High Priest was only to come from the descendants of Aaron. They were to wear God-given specially designed and made garments while performing their duties as High Priest. Each of the different pieces of this elaborate and ornate outfit had typological significance, but two aspects ought to be singled out. First, the priest was to wear a breastplate that was inlaid with twelve stones on its front, each with the

name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The breastplate was connected to the High Priest via two clasps on his shoulders that each had one stone inlaid into it. These two stones had the names of the twelve tribes written on them as well, half on each stone. This was to represent the fact that the Priest was the representative of the entire nation of Israel before God. He bore all of their names on them when he came into the Most Holy Place. The next detail of the priestly garment that should be highlighted is the gold head plate that was fastened upon the turban worn by the High Priest. On the plate were engraved the words “Holy To The LORD.” This was to show that the Priest was meant to be set apart and purified to perform his duties before God. The Aaronic-Levitical priests were not truly Holy to the Lord, as will be explained in the passage of this essay’s focus. These garments were meant to show the High Priest’s need for an alien or external righteousness, a righteousness not inherent in the Priest himself.

On the Day of Atonement, one of the special feast days of Israel, the Priest entered into the Most Holy Place to offer a special sacrifice. This holiday was to show Israel their need for the removal of the guilt and penalty of sin year after year. “[The Day of Atonement] can be regarded as the primary example of what an act of atonement should be.”¹ In the ceremony, the High Priest would first sacrifice a bull for his own sins, then would take two goats. One goat he would place his hand upon and “impart” the sins of Israel upon it and send it into the wilderness. The other goat would be sacrificed, and a portion of its blood would be brought into the Most Holy Place and the Priest would sprinkle the blood upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark. This was the only time the Priest was permitted to enter into the direct presence of God on Earth. This festival was observed year after year, and yet the guilt of sin remained on the people.

Verses 1-4

¹ Barnabas Lindars, “The Sacrifice of Jesus,” in *The Theology Of The Letter To The Hebrews*, ed. J. D. G. Dunn, New Testament Theology (University of Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 84.

Chapter ten opens with the claim that the “sacrifices that are offered continually” are incapable of truly sanctifying those who offer them. The fact that these sacrifices are made day by day and year by year show they are ineffective in meeting their desired end. If they were actually capable of making perfect the people who offered the animal sacrifices, they would have ceased. There would be no need to continually make sacrifices of bulls and goats to God for sin because “the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins [.]” (Heb. 10:2)

Bulls and goats were not truly appropriate substitutes to pay the blood guilt of sin that the offer had. Their blood could not clear the guilt of their sins. In fact, the daily sacrifices, the feasts, and the Day of Atonement in particular remind the people of Israel year after year that they had sinned and stood guilty before a just God. Hundreds of thousands of animals were killed during the time period of the Tabernacle and two Temples, and not once did their deaths truly rescue the worshiper from the guilt of their sin.

But these sacrifices were never really meant to be able to take away the guilt of sins. As the author of Hebrews points out in the first verse of this chapter, these sacrifices were “a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities[.]” (Heb. 10:1) They were the pattern that pointed to the need for a future heavenly reality. As Richard Phillips points out in *Reformed Expository Commentary*, “The shadow is the outline cast back behind the person. In a similar way, the reality in Christ cast its shadow back into the old dispensation, but only in a bare sketch.”² These ineffective animal sacrifices showed the need for a perfect substitutionary sacrifice to take away the guilt of sin.

Verses 5-10

² Richard Phillips, “A Great Conclusion,” in *Hebrews*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006), 333.

The author of Hebrews argues that Christ, the better High Priest of the New Covenant (Heb. 8), offered himself as the perfect sacrifice. The author quotes Psalm 40:6-8; in this Psalm, the psalmist writes that God “in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure”. Rather, what God desires is someone to do His will. After quoting Psalm 40, the author begins to unpack his inspired understanding of the text and its implications in light of Christ. He states that sacrifices and burnt offerings are offered according to the Law, but the statement that follows about doing the will of God states that it “does away with the first in order to establish the second.” (Heb. 10:9) Meaning that doing the will of God voids the need for sacrifices and burnt offerings.

This is not the first location in the book of Hebrews where the author states that the second or new iteration of something makes obsolete the previous. For example, in chapter 8, the Old Covenant is said to have faults built in, so there needs to be a second covenant built upon better promises. The author of Hebrews states that “Christ has obtained a ministry that is much more excellent than the old, as the covenant he mediates is better,” (Heb. 8:6) and that “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” (Heb. 8:13) The author explains that the sacrifice that Christ offered makes obsolete the Mosaic sacrifices.

The sacrifice that Christ offered, the fulfillment of the will of God and dying as a willing substitutionary sacrifice in the place of sinners, did what Hebrews mentioned the blood of animals could never do. They were shadows that pointed forward to the heavenly reality of Christ's sacrifice.

Verses 11-18

Is never could; it made perfect in the sight of God those who draw near, it took away the sins and the guilt of sin. Therefore, animal sacrifices are no longer needed. As the author of

The author Hebrews seeks to drive his argument home by continuing to show the ineffectiveness of the Aaronic priesthood and its sacrifices. The priests in the Temple or Tabernacle had to daily stand and perform their sacrificial duties. They offered the same sacrifices over and over again because the blood of goats and bulls could not truly remove the guilt of sin. This was not the case with Christ and His sacrificial work.

When Christ performed His duty as a High Priest, offering the atoning sacrifice of His body, He sat. He sat down because His work was completed. His sacrifice was successful to accomplish the end of taking away the guilt of sin. With His one offering, says the author, Christ “perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Heb. 10:14) There was no longer a need for further sacrifices.

The author of Hebrews goes on to quote from Jerimiah chapter 31. In this quotation the prophet Jerimiah declares that God will have a new covenant with His people. Under this covenant, the Law of God will be written upon their hearts, and God will “remember their lawless deeds no more.” Because of the completed sacrifice of Jesus, God will no longer remember the sins of His people. The passage ends with a verse that completes the discussion of Christ’s sacrifice and ought to bring great joy and comfort to sinners. Verse 18 states simply that “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” Since Christ has earned forgiveness for sins there is no need for any other sacrifices for sin. Christ’s sacrifice accomplished the goal of taking away sins and making perfect in the sight of God those who draw near to Him.

Theological Implications

Jesus Christ, High Priest of the New Covenant

As referenced multiple times above, Christ is the High Priest of the New Covenant. He accomplished part of the duties of a priest by offering up an acceptable sacrifice for sins, His own body, blood, and life. With that portion of His priesthood being completed He no longer has to stand and offer any more sacrifice, but offering sacrifices was not the only duty of a priest. They were also meant to offer prayers and supplications on behalf of the people of God. This Christ is currently doing. He is constantly offering up prayers at the right hand of the Father in the true heavenly Most Holy place. Christians have a High Priest who both sympathizes with our temptations and trials, but who also is able to offer perfect prayers on their behalf to the Father. The priesthood of Christ is eternal. There is no need for a successor to come after and replace Jesus. So, believers can rest in the fact that their perfect and eternal priest is fulfilling the obligations of a priest on their behalf.

Completed Sacrificial Work (He Sat Down)

The next theological implication that is drawn from this text is the fact that Christ's sacrifice was and is perfect. It does not require a sequel or a reboot. It completed the end that it desired to obtain perfectly. Christ's sacrifice upon the cross truly earned the atonement needed for sinners. Or as John Owen wrote in his commentary on Hebrews "This is Christ's unalterable state and condition. Christ sat down, never to offer sacrifice anymore."³ It is foolish, therefore, to try and add to the completed work of Christ. So, rites like Catholic Masses that seek to re-sacrifice Christ must be opposed.

A Sanctifying Sacrifice

³ John Owen, "Chapter 10," in *Hebrews*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, Illinois/ Nottingham, England: Crossway Books, n.d.), 210.

Part of this perfect completed sacrifice of Christ is the fact that it truly sanctifies those who draw near. To be sanctified is to be set apart, cleansed, and made holy. So, when the author of Hebrews writes that Christ's sacrifice did what the animal sacrifices of the Levitical priest could not do, make perfect those who draw near or offer them, believers can trust that they truly have been made perfect. They are made perfect in the eyes of God in terms of their justification. They are perfect when it comes to the guilt and penalty of sins. But the author does say that Christ's sacrifice has made perfect "those that are being sanctified." With these theological implications drawn from the text in mind, it is time to discuss some tangible applications of the text.

Application

Draw Near

Since Christ has made atonement for the sins of believers and has made them perfect in the eyes of God believers are able to draw near to God. The relationship between God and mankind has been repaired in the God-Man Christ Jesus. As a priest, He represents Christians before the throne of God in the true heavenly Most Holy Place and He has torn the dividing curtain down. Men and women may draw near to their God with reverent confidence. They can draw near to God through prayer, through reading His Word, and through the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Believers are able to draw near to God and bring their prayers before Him. Because of the union with Christ that believers have they are in fact already there in the heavenly Most Holy Place in Christ. That statement should be a comfort to God's people. They are able to have a right and personal relationship with their God because of the sacrificial work of Christ. So draw near to God, saints.

The High Priest Loves His People

The High Priest of the New Covenant loves His people. He loves them so much that not only does He currently intercede before God on their behalf, but He offered up His own body, blood, and life, willingly, as a substitutionary sacrifice for their sins. None of the Aaronic High Priests throughout history can say that. Not a single one was able to make true atonement for his own sins, let alone the sins of anyone else, but that is not the case with Jesus Christ. Jesus, as the High Priest of the better New Covenant, loves His people and not only prays for them without ceasing, not only died in their place but also sends the gift of His own Spirit to dwell within them. The Spirit applies the loving sacrifice of Christ to believers, which makes them perfect in the sight of God, and also works the grace of sanctification in their lives.

No Further Sacrifice Needed, Rest From Your Works

Since Christ has died once for all for the forgiveness of sins “there is no longer any offering for sin” (Heb 10:18). There is no longer any guilt for sins or fear over their penalty for those who trust in Christ’s sacrifice. So, rejoice in the fact that you no longer need to labor in vain in attempts to atone for your own sins. There is no need to attempt to add to the already completed and perfect work of Christ, so instead rest in Christ’s work. Rest in the fact that those whom Christ died for are perfect in the eyes of God. The only way to obtain this blessed assurance and rest is to repent of one's sins, and trust in the person of Jesus Christ, and His work of atoning salvation upon the cross. As stated earlier, it is foolish to try and add to the completed work of Christ’s sacrifice. So, believers ought not attempt to make better what is already perfect, but instead rest from their dead works and place their faith upon Christ’s work.

Conclusion

The book of Hebrews teaches the supremacy of Christ above all. He is greater than any angel, superior to Moses, and He is a far better High Priest who offers better sacrifices. The

passage of focus for this essay teaches that the Tabernacle, the Levitical priesthood, and the sacrifices of the Old Testament were mere shadows that pointed to the true heavenly realities. They all pointed to the person and work of Jesus Christ. His work as High Priest accomplished the work that it was designed to do.

Hebrews 10 teaches that Christ's sacrifice was not like the Old Testament types and shadows, which were unable to remove sin and make the offers perfect. His sacrifice needed only to be offered once. His death on the cross removed the guilt and penalty of sins of all of those who draw near to Christ. He makes them perfect in the eyes of God. They no longer need to offer other sacrifices to atone for their sins, because Christ's sacrifice has made them perfect in the eyes of God. Because God's people, because of Christ's sacrifice, were made perfect in His eyes, they are now able to, by grace through faith, enter into "God's rest" (Heb 4:9).

Bibliography

Calvin, John. "Hebrews." In *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul The Apostle To the Hebrews*, translated by John Owen, Vol. 22. Calvin's Commentaries. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, n.d.

Dunnill, John. "The Necessity of Blood." In *Covenant and Sacrifices In The Letter To The Hebrews*, edited by Margaret Thrall, 227–34. Victoria, Australia: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Fisher, Jeff. "The Priesthood of Christ." In *A Christocentric Reading of Scripture: Johannes Oecolampadius on Hebrews*, edited by Herman Selderhuis, 29:135–74. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Publishing, 2016.

Hagen, Kenneth. "Huldrych Zwingli." In *Hebrews Commenting from Erasmus to Beze*, 39–42. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1981.

———. "Martin Luther." In *Hebrews Commenting from Erasmus to Beze*, 4–8. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1981.

Hamilton, Victor. "How To Build the Tabernacle." In *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, 477–90. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011.

Holmes, Stephen, and Howard Marshal. "The Soteriology of Hebrews." In *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, 229–53. Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.

Lindars, Barnabas. "The Sacrifice of Jesus." In *The Theology Of The Letter To The Hebrews*, edited by J. D. G. Dunn. New Testament Theology. University of Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. "The Pattern." In *A Merciful And Faithful High Priest*, 152–61. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2020.

Oswalt, John. "The Tabernacle: A Revelation of Yahweh's Purpose (25:1-40:38)." In *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, edited by Philip Comfort, 487–507. Carol Streams, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishing, 2008.

Owen, John. "Chapter 10." In *Hebrews*, edited by Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, 207–10. The Crossway Classic Commentaries. Wheaton, Illinois/ Nottingham, England: Crossway Books, n.d.

Phillips, Richard. "A Great Conclusion." In *Hebrews*, 343–57. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006.

———. "The Body of Christ." In *Hebrews*, 332–42. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006.

Sklar, Jay. "The Day Of Atonement." In *Leviticus An Introduction & Commentary*, edited by Firth David and Longman Tremper, 3:206–16. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, n.d.

Thompson, James. "The Ultimate Sacrifice in the Heavenly Sanctuary." In *Hebrews*, 178–200. Commentaries On The New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008.