

Hebrews - A Letter Addressed to Modern-Day Christians

Part 15

Hebrews 10:1-18

Hebrews 10:1 [NIV] *“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.”*

The worship that took place was designed to bring humans into the presence of God, but this it could only do in a very limited way.

As we have already seen the presence of an ordinary human being was barred by an unrevealing curtain between them and the mercy seat over which God would meet with them.

Only a high priest and only once a year could draw near to God’s presence.

The endless personal sacrifices made day after day, month after month, year after year by people seeking God’s presence did not accomplish what was desired.

These sacrifices may have given the person making them a “feel good” attitude of mind but did not change their character, did not cause them to become mature or perfect spiritual, nor did it give them peace of mind. It did not take the load of guilt from a person’s conscience.

There was always left in the conscience of the person making the sacrifice the question, ‘*have I done enough to please my Creator God?*’

Hebrews 10:2-4 [NIV] *“If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. **But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**”*

All that these ritual sacrifices could accomplish was to remind the person making them of their need for inner cleansing because of their sins generated by a rebellious heart and mind.

A different and far more superior sacrifice was needed.

Human beings do **not** like to be totally dependent on others, this is part of the rebellious nature that we have.

Bringing to God as a sacrifice what we have accomplished by our own efforts appeases this built-in desire to be independent of others, especially independent of our Creator.

We see this attitude of mind illustrated in the sacrifices made by Cain and Abel, at the very beginning of human history.

Genesis 4:1-6 [NIV] *“Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now **Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.** In the course of time **Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.** The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, **but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour.** So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?”*

Both Cain and Abel desired to make an offering to please their Creator.

God was still very real to this first generation of humans, they had **not** yet drifted far away from God as most have today.

But their approach to God was very different, one was acceptable to God, the other was not.

The same is true today of the many complex religions in the world, but all today can be divided into either a Cain or an Abel approach to our Creator God.

Cain “worked the soil”, and it was the “fruit” of this personal hard work that he offered to God.

Most religions today have this attitude of Cain in their approach to their God.

People **offer money**, the result of their personal toil, or they do things, **attend worship services**, or go to church now and again, **expecting this to please God, and find favour in His eyes.**

People do other charitable work that gives them the “*feel good*” factor and believe this will make God feel good about them.

Other people go through various religious practices, from lighting candles to flogging themselves with whips or walking on hot coals.

All of the above are done in the attitude of Cain that was not accepted by God.

Charitable works and the offering of money to support churches and good works are beneficial but **not** the pathway to God’s presence and favour.

Abel’s approach to God was different, what he offered was not the result of his own labour but what God had bountifully provided for him.

Abel’s offering looked towards what God would do for all humanity in the future.

Abel’s offering was showing faith and trust in God’s provision for His cleansing of sin.

Hebrews 11:4 [NIV] “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”

Abel’s example is there in scripture for us to follow today.

Any other approach to God will leave us still estranged from God, not pleasing God.

Hebrews 11:6 [NIV] “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Without this faith in what God has done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His Son, we cannot approach or please God.

James 2:14-26 [NIV] “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? **Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he**

does and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Faith does lead us to do charitable acts of work to benefit other human beings.

But charitable works cannot lead us to faith and access to God’s presence and favour, or a freedom from the penalty of sin that leads to a peace of mind.

Animal sacrifices could not take away the sins of those under the Old Covenant, nor can our personal sacrifices take away the penalty of our sins.

Good works only count with God when they follow faith in what He has done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:5-10 [NIV] *“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am, it is written about me in the scroll, I have come to do your will, O God.’” First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was superior and differed from those under the Old Covenant in many ways.

1 The body of Jesus Christ is the new tabernacle in which God brought His presence to human beings.

John 14:9 [NIV] *“Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*

Jesus Christ is God coming into the world of physical human beings.

2 The Old Covenant sacrifices cleansed a person’s physical body from ceremonial uncleanness that was regulated by the sacrificial laws.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, cleanses our hearts and minds, and opens them up for God to re-create in them a new, God-like righteous person.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Only this change of mind and heart is pleasing to God.

Only the inner cleansing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ can bring about this new being, our being born again as a different person.

This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, God in us.

John 3:1-8 [NIV] *“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, **no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**” “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “**I tell you the truth, no-one can***

enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Only through faith in Jesus Christ's sacrifice will the presence of the Holy Spirit begin His work of creating a child of God in us.

3 Only the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, can bring eternal redemption. This eternal freedom from the penalty of death.

John 14:6 [NIV] *"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."*

Jesus Christ is the only true way to eternal life with God the Father.

John 17:3 [NIV] *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

The Greek word translated "know" refers to an intimate spiritual relationship with God, the physical counterpart is the relationship between a husband and wife.

4 The sacrifice of Jesus Christ enables a person to leave a life that leads to eternal death and become a servant of the living God.

Romans 6:1-14 [NIV] *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. **Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."***

It is only through our relating to and accepting in faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a substitute for our own deserved death that we can start to live a new life of a servant of God instead of a servant of sin.

What Jesus did puts human beings right with God but also enables human beings to stay right with God.

The act of Jesus Christ brings to human beings the love of God in a way that takes away their terror of God's wrath.

The presence of the resurrected Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit enables human beings to also fulfil the will of God in their lives.

5 The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was voluntary, an animal dies as a sacrifice because it is forced to do so by a human being.

John 10:14-18 [NIV] *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. **The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.**”*

Jesus Christ chose to die, a sacrificial animal has its life taken from it.

Jesus Christ gave His life in an act of love.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Remember that Jesus Christ was and is also God as the only Son of God.

John 15:13-14 [NIV] *“Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”*

Jesus Christ sacrificed His life for us to become His friends.

6 The sacrifice of Jesus was spontaneous, an act of love because God is love.

1 John 4:16 [NIV] *“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. **God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.**”*

God is love.

The Greek word translated “love” is “*agapé*” meaning a spontaneous love irrespective of the rights or response of the person receiving that love, a sacrificial love where the selfish desires are sacrificed in order to show this love to others.

1 John 3:16-19 [NIV] *“This is how we know what love is: **Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.** If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence”*

We are to follow this example that Jesus Christ showed if we are to remain in God’s presence.

We pay our debts to a tradesman because we have to by law.

We give a gift to our loved ones because we want to.

It is **not** law but love that lies behind the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

7 The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was rational.

The animal sacrificed did **not** know what was happening or what it was doing, it did **not** think or reason.

Jesus Christ at all times knew what He was doing.

Jesus Christ died, not as an ignorant victim caught up in circumstances over which He had no control and did not understand.

Jesus Christ died open-eyed and knowing where He had come from, where He was going and what He was doing.

Luke 9:22, 26, 44-45 [NIV] *“And he said, **‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’** ... **‘If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.’** ... **‘Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: **The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.**’** But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.”*

8 The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was moral.

Animal sacrifices were mechanical, a ritual carried out in a prescribed way.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was made through the eternal Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 9:14 [NIV] *“**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!**”*

This sacrifice was not legal mechanism at work, it was the Holy Spirit at work in and through Jesus Christ the Son of Man.

The act of Jesus Christ on the cross was **not** done because of any prescribed ritual law, it was done because the will of Jesus Christ obeyed the will of God for the sake of all humanity.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the choice He made because of the love for human beings He had created.

Hebrews 10:11 [NIV] *“**Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.**”*

The religious duties of the Old Covenant priests never came to an end because the sacrifices they made could never deal permanently with the problem of sin.

Hebrews 10:12-14 [NIV] *“**But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.**”*

“*This priest*” refers to Jesus Christ an eternal Priest appointed by God the Father and confirmed with an oath.

The life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was beyond value because of Who He was, being far above the value of all humanity that He created.

John 1:1-4, 14 [NIV] *“**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.**” ... **‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.’**”*

Jesus created all things.

Colossians 1:15-17 [NIV] *“**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**”*

Jesus created all things and also sustains all things.

This is the One who became a human being to enable Him to shed blood for the New Covenant to be ratified.

Hebrews 10:15-18 [NIV] *“The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.”*

This ratified New Covenant deals with the source of all sin, the heart and minds of rebellious human beings.

This is the **only** way in which sin can be finally dealt with. By being atoned by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ and then being a thing of the past as it is forgiven and forgotten by God the Father.