

Hebrews Chapter Ten

In chapter ten we learn that the followers of Jesus Christ have a better hope than what was possible under the Law of Moses. The law required an endless cycle of animal sacrifices yet it could never cleanse the conscience from sin. The coming of Jesus made sanctification possible through the offering of His body. As verse 19 indicates, we can now enter the Most Holy Place through Him.

The insufficiency of animal sacrifices (verses 1-4)

The Law of Moses was only a shadow, not the substance or image. The sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses could never make anyone perfect. The writer uses a very logical argument in verse two. The argument is that if perfection, the forgiveness of sins, could have come through animal sacrifices these sacrifices would have ceased. Since sins would have been forgiven and the conscience cleansed, there would have been no reason to continue the sacrifices. As the writer says, “once purified, would have no more consciousness of sins”.

But, we know that it was not possible that the blood of bulls or goats could take away sins. The people under the Law of Moses were required to remember their sins once a year on the Day of Atonement. On this day, the high priest went into the Most Holy Place to offer sacrifice for his own sins and then the sins of the people. In essence, the blood of the sacrifices covered the sins and transgressions of the people, but did not cleanse their conscience. This thought is foreshadowed in Old Testament writings (Isaiah 1:11; Micah 6:6-8).

Christ died as a result of the will of God (verses 5-10)

The Old Testament quotation found in verses 5-7 comes from Psalm 40:6-8 and the quote is repeated in verse eight. This passage shows that Christ took away the first law in order to establish the second. Under this second law (the Law of Christ) we can be sanctified. This has been made possible through the offering of the body of Christ once for all. The Old Testament quotation is similar to those found in Isaiah 1 and Micah 6 in that animal sacrifices are diminished while the birth of Jesus is foreshadowed.

Christ's death perfects the sanctified (verses 11-18)

After demonstrating that sanctification is possible through the sacrifice of Jesus, the writer goes on to explain that we can also be perfected. Daily sacrifices were made under the Law of Moses. Reference to these can be found in Numbers 28:3-8. These daily sacrifices were accompanied by weekly, monthly, and yearly sacrifices (described in Numbers chapters 28 and 29). But, even this multitude of sacrifice could never take away sins.

Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins forever and sat down at the right hand of God. We find now a single sacrifice in the place of the multitude of sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses. This one sacrifice, however, is able to sanctify and make us perfect! Jesus is pictured as sitting at the right hand of God until His enemies are defeated, a reference to His second coming.

The Holy Spirit is pictured as witnessing to the new law of Christ. The Old Testament quotation in verses 16 and 17 is from Jeremiah 31:33-34. The blood of Christ can cleanse our conscience; we have no more need of sacrifice. Our sins and lawless

deeds are remembered no more. This is in contrast to the yearly remembering of sins under the Law of Moses.

Hold fast (verses 19-25)

We are instructed to utilize the boldness found through Christ to enter the Holiest place. We no longer have need of an earthly high priest, since Christ Himself has entered in for us. We can likewise enter the Most Holy Place through His blood.

This is described as a new and living way, the way of His flesh. Since we have a High Priest we are instructed to draw near to God (James 4:8) in full assurance of faith. We should not be afraid to approach God. This is made possible because our hearts have been sprinkled by the blood of Christ and our bodies washed with pure water, a reference to our baptism and receipt of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the heart is specifically mentioned. This is not a reference to the organ that pumps our blood, but rather to the conscience, which can now be cleansed through the blood of Christ.

As a result of these actions we are instructed to hold fast our confession without wavering. We can be assured of success because Jesus is faithful. We are to consider one another to stir up love and good works. We are told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but rather to exhort each other as we see the Day approaching. This is quite possibly a reference to the second coming of Christ. The absolute necessity of gathering together in the assembly is emphasized in these verses.

The just live by faith (verses 26-39)

This section of the chapter discusses willful sin. Willful sin is a type of sin that can never be forgiven. It can only be committed by those who have received a knowledge

of the truth, in other words, only by Christians. As the writer says, “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins’ (verse 26).

In order to understand willful sin we need to look at other passages of scripture that refer to sin. Jesus said that in the last days many would be offended, betray one another and hate one another (Matthew 24:10). The prototypical example of the betrayer is Judas (Matthew 26:15). Judas committed a willful sin when he betrayed Jesus. Paul described the events of the last days as including the falling away. During this falling away period, the man of sin, otherwise known as the son of perdition would be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Paul also warned Timothy that those who reject faith and a good conscience have made a shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:9). Paul describes those who depart from the faith as giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. This would lead them to speak lies of hypocrisy, searing their conscience, forbidding people to marry and commanding people to abstain from meat (1 Timothy 4:1). Paul also condemned widows who cast off their faith (1 Timothy 5:12).

Further descriptions of willful sin are delivered by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 and also 2 Timothy 4:10. In these passages, he warns of Christians who will not endure sound doctrine. Because of their own desires they will select teachers who tell them what they want to hear. They turn away from the truth and believe fables. One of these Christians, Demas, is mentioned by name and charged with loving the present world.

The Apostle Peter also warned of willful sins. He describes those who are false teachers bringing heresies into the church. He goes further and states that they “deny the

Lord” (2 Peter 2:1). He warns Christians not to fall and be led away with the error of the wicked (2 Peter 3:17).

In similar fashion, the Apostle John warns of willful sin. He shows that those who go out from among Christians were not really Christians to begin with (1 John 2:19). So, from the words of Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John we are warned against committing willful sin. But, aren't all sins willful? Sins that we commit are generally willful sins. Sometimes we commit sin in ignorance and sometimes we fail to do things we should (sins of omission). The point to remember in all of this is that the writer of Hebrews is not using the term “willful sin” to describe the sin that many times Christians commit. As fragile humans we know that we sin from time to time. If we ask God's forgiveness of these sins the blood of Jesus cleanses us (1 John 1:9). The willful sin under consideration here is one that is never repented of, and one that causes the Christian to put Jesus to an open shame (Hebrews 6:6).

This topic has already been discussed by the writer in Hebrews 6:4-6. In this passage Christians are described as those who have been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. No one will deny that these individuals were saved at one time. However, they have fallen away and cannot be saved. The writer says it is impossible for them to be saved. How can this be? When a Christian sins is he or she doomed to damnation? As we have seen in the passages above, willful sins are those which are not repented of, and they are sins of such gravity that the one committing them is described as “crucifying again the Son of God” and “putting Him to an open shame”.

This does not describe the situation of a Christian who fails (sins) from time to time, but who also trusts in Jesus and repents of those sins.

If repentance is not forthcoming there is no more sacrifice for sins. Jesus is the last sacrifice that God will provide or accept. The results of no repentance are a fearful expectation of judgment and the fiery indignation of God (Revelation 14:9-10).

The writer of Hebrews calls attention to the fact that under the Law of Moses transgressors could be put to death (Numbers 35:30 and Deuteronomy 17:6). But, the one who tramples the Son of God underfoot, counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and insults the Spirit is worthy of even greater punishment than that (Mark 3:29).

We know the nature of God. We understand that it is a fearful thing to fall into His hands. The Old Testament quotations in verse 30 come from Deuteronomy 32:35-36. Since we know the nature of God, we are instructed to recall the former times, that is the time of our conversion to Christ. At this time we were illuminated. The Hebrew readers who were illuminated also endured persecutions. They suffered for Christ and were able to have compassion on others.

They are warned not to cast away their confidence which results in a great reward. We need endurance to do the will of God. If this is the way we live our lives then we will receive the promise. The Old Testament quotations in verses 37 and 38 come from Habakkuk 2:3-4. As the writer indicates, we are not of perdition, or turning back, we are of those who believe to the saving of our soul.