THE ONE SACRIFICE THAT MAKES US PERFECT FOREVER

Hebrews 8:1–10:18

Key Verse: 10:14

“For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

Do you want to grow? At the beginning of a new year people make new year resolutions. Whether it’s diet, exercise, finances, habits or relationships, so many people strive hard to improve. It’s good. But it can also be dangerously misleading. In today’s passage we learn that Jesus has already done something for us, and we can’t add to it or improve on it at all; we just need to accept it. And as we do, God does something amazing in our lives.

In chapter 7 we learned about Jesus’ superior priesthood. Through his resurrection Jesus is our high priest forever. He always lives to intercede for us. And his prayers really work. Being fully human, he deeply understands us (2:17; 4:15). Being holy and blameless, he truly meets our need (7:26). Through his faithful intercessory prayers our Lord Jesus, our Great High Priest, is able to save us completely. It’s amazing! But Jewish Christians found it hard to let go of the old and embrace the new. So in chapters 8–10 the author goes on to show how much better Jesus is than the Old Testament system. Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant (7:22; 8:6; 9:15). The old priesthood, temple worship and sacrificial system were only a shadow and copy of what Jesus came to do (8:5a; 10:1). The author especially focuses on where Jesus is now (8:1,2; 9:11,24; 10:12), and the sacrifice he made for us (9:12,14,26b; 10:10,12,14). Why is what Jesus did so much better? How can we really accept it? What happens to us when we do? May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

Read 8:1. Here the author describes Jesus with some familiar words: Jesus is sitting at God’s right hand. But it says here “the throne of the Majesty in heaven.” This is the description of a king. God is our King, “the Majesty in heaven,” the one with all the power and glory, the one we should be loyal to, the one to whom we should give our deepest respect. Jesus sitting at the right hand of his majestic throne means that not only is Jesus our high priest, but he also shares God’s kingly rule. We need to realize that Jesus is always praying for us as our high priest, but we also need to realize that Jesus is our King.

In the rest of chapter 8 the author explains why Jesus is so much better. Jesus is serving in the sanctuary of the true tabernacle in heaven (2). But there’s more. Read verse 6. We learn several things here. First of all, Jesus has received a superior ministry. Why is his ministry so much better? Were there big numbers of disciplined people? Not necessarily. It says his ministry is superior because it’s based on a new covenant. And why is this new covenant better than the old one? It’s because it’s established on better promises.

What was the old covenant? It was what God told the Israelites when he brought them out of slavery in Egypt. God promised to do great things for them if they would obey him fully and keep his covenant. But they couldn’t do it. Honestly, the Old Testament shows how they failed again and again. So God came up with a new covenant. Look at verses 7–13. Here the author quotes from the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34. In those verses God made one of the most famous promises in the Bible. After much struggle God promised to make a new covenant with his people. This covenant would be based not on their performance but on God’s forgiveness. God’s forgiveness would change their hearts. Through his forgiveness they would stop their superficial, outward religion and have God’s laws in their minds and hearts. Through his forgiveness they would have a clear identity and a personal knowledge of God. The greatest promise of the new covenant is that God forgives all our wickedness and remembers our sins no more. This great promise is fulfilled in the new covenant in Jesus. At the Last Supper our Lord Jesus took the cup and said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt26:28). This new covenant in Jesus made the old one obsolete and outdated (13). All we need to do is believe that Jesus shed his blood to forgive all my sins.

In 9:1–7 the author briefly summarizes the system of worship God set up under the first covenant in the earthly tabernacle. It was the place where God dwelt among his people. It mentions how people commit sins “in ignorance.” What is this ignorance? It’s ignorance of how holy God is. God is most holy. This Holy God cannot tolerate or condone sin. If we’re really going to come to this God, we can’t come recklessly or at random. Something has to be done about our sins. Our sins need to be atoned for. This was why God appointed the priests to carry on their ministry regularly in the outer room of the tabernacle.

What was their ministry? It was to keep the lampstand burning, reminding people of God’s presence among them. It was to bring consecrate bread there every day, reminding people of how God sustains our lives. It was to carry out ceremonial washings to remind people of how we need God’s cleansing all the time. It was to receive all the people’s offerings of food and drink, expressing their regular thanks to God. The Holy Place was active every day.

And then there was a very special ministry. Read verse 7. This was the high priest’s ministry, only once a year, to atone for his people’s sins so that God could dwell among them. What did it mean? Read verse 8. What is the way into the Most Holy Place that was not yet disclosed? It was what Jesus did for us. Hebrews 6:19,20a says, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.” Hebrews 10:19,20 says, “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body…” The Holy God is not trying to stay far away from us; he wants us to come to him closely through Jesus.

The author explains more. Read 9:9,10. This was the main problem with this old system of worship. People made gifts and sacrifices and received ceremonial washings, but it was all external. People’s consciences were not cleared. It means they still felt guilty for their sins, even though they were giving to God and worshiping God. God wanted to bring about a new order. We saw it in the description of the new covenant from Jeremiah 31. God wanted a world in which everybody knows his forgiveness, everybody is close to him, from the least to the greatest, everybody really knows him. What a world! It’s like a dream!

But this is what Jesus came to do. Read 9:11,12. We see three main things here. Jesus our Great High Priest went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle in heaven. Jesus our Great High Priest entered not with animal blood, but with his own blood. Jesus our Great High Priest obtained our eternal redemption. What is this “eternal redemption”? “Redemption” means being bought back. Jesus redeemed us from our sins through his own blood. And it wasn’t a temporary thing; he did it for all eternity. For all eternity we now belong to God because of the blood of Jesus.

The author goes on to explain why the blood of Jesus is so much better. Look at verse 13. Animal’s blood only made people outwardly, ceremonially clean. But Jesus’ blood goes way deeper. Read verse 14. Jesus’ blood is so much better because he, “through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God.” It means through the Holy Spirit he lived a sinless life. He was the true sinless and pure Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn1:29). His blood shed on the cross was the perfect payment for all our sins to be forgiven. The blood of Christ can truly cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death. Romans 3:25a says, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.” His blood truly cleanses only those who believe in it. When we receive his blood by faith, we can truly begin to serve the living God—not outwardly, not superficially, not with a guilty conscience, but from our hearts. We serve God through faith in his blood.

The author goes on to summarize the ministry of our Great High Priest Jesus. Read verse 15. The main word here is “mediator.” Being a mediator is a really hard job. It means resolving a conflict between people. People’s conflicts can be as hard and insurmountable as an iron curtain. Differing ideas and hurt feelings can make resolution seem utterly impossible. But in this case, the mediation is between the Holy God and sinful people. It may be even more insurmountable. God is angry with us due to our sins, and due to our sinfulness we are rebellious to God. But to carry out his ministry as a mediator, Christ died as a ransom. Only through his death as a ransom sacrifice could the new covenant between God and us be possible. Through his death he set us free from all our sins. Through his death we can now receive our promised eternal inheritance, our true home in heaven.

In verses 16–22 the author explains why blood needed to be shed. First of all, a covenant or will was sealed in blood, showing how serious it was—a life had to be given. In fact, in God’s eyes, for any sin to be forgiven justly, a life must be given. Sin is that serious. Blood represents life (Lev17:11). God confirmed the first covenant with his people through the animals’ blood. In fact, the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies also had to be sprinkled with blood. But Christ’s shed blood is a better sacrifice that can even purify heaven itself (23). There’s an even greater power in the shed blood of Jesus. Read verses 25,26. Christ’s blood needed to be shed only once. As the popular ad says, “One And Done.” Hebrews emphasizes that Christ died and shed his blood “once for all” (7:27; 9:12,26,28; 10:10). For our forgiveness nothing else needs to be done. Because of his shed blood our forgiveness is complete, perfect, eternal.

Jewish Christians were still stuck on observing many Old Testament laws. So in 10:1–4 the author tells us that these laws are only shadows of the good things to come in Jesus; they can never make us perfect; they can never cleanse us of our guilt; they can only remind us of our sins. Then he goes on to tell us how Christ put an end to these repeated sacrifices. In verses 5–7 he quotes from the prophecy of David in Psalm 40:6–8 and applies it to Jesus. God doesn’t want endless sacrifices and offerings from people; he wants a willing relationship. He wants people who really want to obey his will. Jesus came to fulfill this prophecy, to put an end to the old system, to really do God’s will, willingly. Read verse 10.

In contrast, the author again emphasizes the futility of what earthly priests do (11). Read verses 12,13. Again he mentions how Jesus is at the right hand of God. He’s waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool (Ps110:1). It happens partially as people repent and receive Jesus’ forgiveness; it will happen fully when Jesus comes again (9:28).

Finally, the author summarizes the greatest impact of what Jesus our mediator and Great High Priest has done. Read verse 14. Jesus has made us perfect forever. What does it mean? It refers to his eternal redemption (9:12). He’s given us God’s forgiveness (8:12). To explain, the author again quotes from Jeremiah 31. Read verses 15–18. God makes us perfect by writing his laws on our minds and hearts. God makes us perfect by not even remembering our sins and lawless acts anymore. God makes us perfect by clothing us with the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ro13:14; Gal3:27).

But although we’ve already been “made perfect forever,” we are also “being made holy” at the same time. We’ve been justified freely by his grace (Ro3:24), but we’re also being sanctified day by day. How can we be made holy? It seems harder than chiseling a statue out of stone. Holy means to be different, set apart for God. We have many human ideas about holiness. But in light of today’s passage, real holiness doesn’t come from keeping laws or outward rituals or sacrifices. Real holiness is inward. Holiness starts when our guilty conscience is cleansed. Holiness continues as God writes his laws on our minds and hearts. Holiness grows as we really want to do God’s will, as our Lord Jesus did. Holiness goes deeper and deeper in us the more we depend not on what we do, but on what Jesus did for us. The more we believe and depend on the blood of Jesus shed for my sin, the more holy we become. There’s no other way for us to be made holy.

Read 10:14 again. Praise God for Jesus our Great High Priest who made us perfect forever by his one sacrifice. May God help us really believe in what Jesus has done for us. May God make us more and more holy as we learn more and more to rely on what Jesus has already done for us on the cross.