

Hebrews 9:1-28 (Frank Binford Hole) 157937

Hebrews: Briefly Expounded, Hebrews 9 (9:1-28)

Chapter 8 ENDS with the ominous words, "ready to vanish away" (ch. 8:13). Thus it was that the Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, prepared the minds of the Jewish disciples for the disappearance of their venerated religious system, which came to pass within a very few years by the destruction of Jerusalem. The temple being destroyed, the priesthood slain, the sacrifices stopped, Judaism has become but the pale and bloodless shadow of its former self. And in itself, and at its best, it was only a shadow of good things to come.

Yet we must not underestimate the value of the shadows connected with the law. They had very great value until the moment came in which the realities typified were revealed; just as the moon is of much value until the sun rises. At the heart of this typical system lay the tabernacle and its furniture, and the first five verses of chapter 9 summarize the details connected with this. It was the sanctuary, where God placed the cloud which signifies His presence, but it was a worldly one. So also were all the ordinances of the divine service connected with it. Hence it was not the object of the writer to speak particularly of these details.

His object was rather to point out that the tabernacle was in two parts, the holy place, and then the holiest of all, and that while the priests of Aaron's line had full liberty to enter the former the latter was forbidden to them; into it they had no admittance at all. When once the divine glory had taken possession of the holiest no human foot trod there, with one exception. One man alone might enter, and he only once every year, and that under one stringent condition; he must approach, "not without blood" (ch. 9:7). If we turn to Lev. 16 and read it, we shall get all the details of that solemn occasion.

What did it all mean? It doubtless foreshadowed the fact that the blood of Christ is the only ground of approach to God, yet what the Holy Ghost was really saying in the whole arrangement was that in the old dispensation there was no real approach to God at all. The way in was not yet made manifest. We shall find the wonderful contrast to this when we reach the nineteenth verse of chapter 10. But as long as the first tabernacle had a standing before God the rule was no admittance.

We might say then that the law instituted the religion of the holy place, whereas the holiest of all characterizes Christianity. It was not that all Israelites had access to the holy place. We know they did not, as the sad case of Uzziah, king of Judah, recorded in 2 Chron. 26, shows. But the priests, who were the representatives of all Israel, had free access there. Still, even so, the real value of the whole thing lay in its typical significance, as we have seen.

This fact is again emphasized in verses 9 and 10, where the tabernacle is "a figure for the time then present," (ch. 9:9) and the gifts and sacrifices are but meats and drinks and divers washings; all of which were but ordinances of a fleshly type as opposed to anything of a spiritual nature. Out of this there flow, as a result, two things.

The first thing is, that these sacrifices could not make perfect the one who approached by their means. Here again we meet with that word perfect; and this time not referring to Christ but to ourselves. The Jewish sacrifices, by reason of their very nature, could not make us perfect; and this fact we shall find repeated in the first verse of chapter 10. Then passing on to the fourteenth verse of that chapter we find stated, by way of contrast, the glorious fact that, "by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (ch. 10:14). The law not merely did not accomplish it, but could not; whereas Christ has done it.

But what is this perfection which has to do with ourselves? That question is answered for us here. It is a remarkable fact that the first time the word is used in this connection it is carefully defined for us by the Holy Spirit. The perfection has to do with our consciences. As we read on into chapter 10, we shall see more clearly what this signifies. It means having the whole weight of sin as an accusing load completely lifted off, so that the conscience is perfectly cleared in the presence of God.

Now this was something quite unknown under the law. If a Jew sinned it was his duty to bring to the tabernacle the appropriate sacrifice; and having done so he was clearly entitled to enjoy the relief afforded by the words, "it shall be forgiven him" (James 5:15) (Lev. 4:31). That one particular sin was forgiven when once the prescribed sacrifice was offered; but that was all. If he sinned again, again he had to bring a sacrifice: and so on and on, all through life. There was no such thought as a sacrifice being offered which could settle once and forever the whole question of sin, and so perfect the sinner's conscience.

The second thing is that the law with all its ordinances was only imposed upon Israel "until the time of reformation," (ch. 9:10) that is, until the time of "setting things right" (ch. 9:10). The law was after all a provisional measure. It proved beyond dispute that things needed setting right, by proving how wrong they were; but it did not put them right. When presently God blesses Israel under the new covenant the time of setting things right will have arrived. Meanwhile, as we have just seen, we have been blessed upon new covenant principles, as the result of the sacrifice of Christ; and there is no setting things right upon any other basis than that.

Verses 11 to 14 furnish us with the contrast to that which we have in verses 6 to 10. If we analyze the verses with a little care we shall see how complete and far-reaching the contrast is.

In the first place CHRIST is set before us, in contrast to the high priest of Aaron's order.

Then, the Aaronic priest just had to administer the things that existed under his hand. Christ is an High Priest of good things to come.

Christ has entered into the true holiest in the heavens, a greater and more perfect tabernacle than that made with hands in the wilderness; and He entered in once, instead of every year, as with the high priest of old.

Not by the blood of goats and calves, which can never really put away sins, did He enter; but by His own blood which obtains redemption.

The blood of the sacrificial animals did sanctify to the purifying of the flesh: the blood of Christ alone can purify the conscience.

The purifying of the flesh which was accomplished by the Jewish sacrifices was but temporal: the redemption obtained by Christ is eternal.

Notice, moreover, the majesty which characterizes the one offering of Christ. All three Persons of the Godhead stand related to it. The spotless Son of God offered Himself. It was to God that He offered Himself; and it was by the eternal Spirit He did it. No wonder that all-sin comes within its scope, and that its results abide for eternity.

The immediate effect of it, as far as we are concerned, is the "purging" or "cleansing" of our consciences. By that cleansing they are perfected and we turn from the dead works of law-dead, because done with the object of getting life-to serve the living God. If our consciences need cleansing from dead works, how much more do they need cleansing from wicked works!

The argument of the opening verses of chapter 9, reaches a climax in verse 14, but the Spirit of God does not immediately carry us on to the results which flow from it. Instead of that He elaborates with great wealth of detail the point He had just been making; so that when we reach chapter 10:14, we find that we are back again at the point we had started from in 9:14. And only then do we proceed to the consideration of its results.

From this we may learn the very great importance that attaches to the truth concerning the sacrifice of Christ. It lies at the foundation of everything, and until it is thoroughly apprehended by us we are not able to appreciate what follows from it. Let us pray for the understanding heart as we consider these verses, in which the main point of the Holy Spirit is so fully developed and supported.

The main point, then, is that the blood of Christ completely purges the believer's conscience so that he is enabled to serve and worship the living God. Now this was an end utterly unattainable under the old covenant; hence it follows, as verse 15 tells us, that the Lord Jesus became the Mediator not of the old but of the new. And hence, too, His death had a twofold bearing: bringing in redemption as regards the transgressions under the old covenant, and becoming the basis whereon is fulfilled the promise connected with the new. Something had to be done for the removing of the mighty mountain of transgressions which had accumulated under the law: and equally something was needed if God was to call people with an eternal inheritance in view. Both these great ends are reached "by means of death," (ch. 9:15) and that the death of Christ.

Verses 16 and 17 are a parenthesis. The word translated testament here, and covenant in chapter 8, has both those meanings. Used in relation to God it is "a disposition which He has made, on the ground of which man is to be in relationship with Him." In this short parenthesis the writer uses the word in the sense of a testament or will, which only is of force when the testator is dead. If viewed in this way, again we see the absolute necessity of the death of Christ.

There was no "death of the testator" (ch. 9:16) under the old covenant, yet the necessity for death to take place was acknowledged in a typical way. If we turn to Ex. 24:7 and 8, we shall find the incident referred to in verses 19 and 20., and we may note a remarkable fact. Exodus records only the sprinkling of the people with blood; Hebrews adds that the book of the law was also sprinkled.

The significance of the sprinkling of the people would seem to be that they were thereby reminded that death was the penalty of disobedience. Any breach of its demands meant the death penalty on them. The significance of the sprinkling of the book would indicate, on the other hand, that death was necessary as the basis of everything. Hence even the law system was not dedicated without blood; and this fact is added here by the inspired writer since it is just the point of the argument in this epistle.

Moreover at different times in connection with the sacrifices the tabernacle vessels, and indeed "almost all things," (ch. 9:22) were purged with blood; and all this was intended to drive home into men's hearts the all-important lesson, that, "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (ch. 9:22).

In our twentieth century we might almost call this great statement—the most hated fact of Holy Scripture. Nothing so moves to wrath and contempt and ridicule the soul of the "modern" theologian as this. And why?

Not because his delicate sensibilities are shocked by the idea of blood being shed, for the average modernist enjoys his slice of roast beef as much as other average people. But because he knows what this fact really signifies. It means that the death-sentence lies on mankind as creatures hopelessly lost; and that only death can lift this death-sentence so that remission can reach the fallen creature. The solemn witness borne to the modernist, that as a sinful creature he is under the death-sentence before God, is what his soul loathes with an intensity that amounts to hate. The prouder he is the more he hates it.

Do we not all understand this quite well? Did we not all share those feelings until grace subdued our pride and brought us into an honest frame of mind before God? The modernist, of course, deludes himself into thinking that his aversion to this truth arises from his superior aesthetic or moral sense, and we may never have victimized ourselves with that particular little piece of vain conceit. If so, we may well thank God! The moment we were brought to honesty and humility of mind we grasped the absolute necessity of the death of Christ.

Of that necessity verse 23 speaks. The blood of goats and calves sufficed to purify the tabernacle and its furniture, which were but patterns; the heavenly things themselves needed a better sacrifice. We might be surprised that heavenly things should need a sacrifice at all, did we not remember that Satan and the fallen angels have had their seat in the heavens, and have introduced the taint of sin there; and also that we, who are sinners and had our seat here, are destined as the fruit of redemption to take our seat in the heavens. As the fruit of the work of Christ not only shall there be purification wrought on earth but in the heavens also.

Consequently, in verses 24 to 26 we are introduced to the work of Christ from a most exalted view-point. He appeared once at the consummation of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and now, in virtue of His blood shed, has gone into the very heaven of God's presence on our behalf. Let us mark that word, "to put away sin" (ch. 9:26). How comprehensive it is! The expiation of our sins is of course included, but it is not limited to that. The judgment of sin is included, but it is not limited to that. It includes sin in all its ramifications and bearings. Sin, the root, and all the sins which are the fruit; sin as it has affected man and the earth, and sin as it has affected the heavens; sin, in its totality; all put away by His sacrifice. And His sacrifice was the sacrifice of Himself!

In these verses again, the work of Christ comes before us as contrasted with the service of the high priest of old, and this it is which accounts for the way things are put in the last verse of our chapter. When the Jewish high priest had entered the holy place made with hands on the yearly Day of Atonement, carrying the blood of the goat, the people stood outside waiting for his reappearance. Very possibly they waited with a certain amount of trepidation for they knew that to enter wrongfully into the presence of God meant death. For him they were waiting, and they hailed his appearance with a sigh of relief. Now we, Christians—and this specially applies to the converted remnant of Jews, who were addressed in this epistle—are waiting for the re-appearance of our great High Priest. We "look for" or "await" Him, and when He comes it will be "without sin" or "apart from sin." He so effectually dealt with sin at His first coming that He will have no need to touch that question at His second coming. He will appear unto the salvation of His people, and the deliverance of a groaning creation.

Thus we can see what a striking analogy exists between the actions of Aaron on the day of atonement and the great work of Christ; only with this complete contrast, that whereas Aaron's actions were typical and confined to the patterns of heavenly things, and oft repeated, Christ has to do with the heavenly realities and His work in offering for sin has been accomplished once and forever. It is the lot of sinful men once to die, and then to face the judgment of God. In keeping with that, Christ has once been offered to bear the sins of many, and therefore those that await Him look forward not to judgment but to salvation.

You notice that here it speaks of Christ bearing the sins of many, not of all. It is true that He died for all, as far as the scope and intention of His work is concerned. When however the actual effect of His work is in question, then He bore the sins of many, that is, of those who believe. You will notice also that the words, "look for Him," have not really got the meaning so often imported into them, by which they are made to support the idea that only certain believers who are watchful are going to find salvation when the Lord comes again. The force of the whole passage the rather is, that sin has been so perfectly put away, and believers so perfectly cleared as to their consciences, and as to all liability to judgment, that they are left awaiting the coming forth of their High Priest from the heavenly sanctuary to their salvation from every adverse power.

With this thought before us, the opening words of chapter 10 carry us back to the days of the law, that once more we may realize the glory of the gospel as contrasted with it. Twice already that contrast has been laid open before us; first in verses 6 to 14 of chapter 9, and then again in verses 23 to 28. In the earlier of these two passages the great point of the contrast seems to be as regards the nature and character of the law sacrifices contrasted with the sacrifice of Christ. In the later passage the contrast seems more to lie in the absolute sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, which is therefore one, and not a repeated thing like the sacrifices of old.

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