

# Hebrews 10:3-4 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

[Hebrews 10:1](#)

[Hebrews 10:2](#)

[Hebrews 10:3](#)

[Hebrews 10:4](#)

[Hebrews 10:5](#)

[Hebrews 10:6](#)

[Hebrews 10:7](#)

[Hebrews 10:8](#)

[Hebrews 10:9](#)

[Hebrews 10:10](#)

[Hebrews 10:11](#)

[Hebrews 10:12](#)

[Hebrews 10:13](#)

[Hebrews 10:14](#)

[Hebrews 10:15](#)

[Hebrews 10:16](#)

[Hebrews 10:17](#)

[Hebrews 10:18](#)

[Hebrews 10:19](#)

[Hebrews 10:20](#)

[Hebrews 10:21](#)

[Hebrews 10:22](#)

[Hebrews 10:23](#)

[Hebrews 10:24](#)

[Hebrews 10:25](#)

[Hebrews 10:26](#)

[Hebrews 10:27](#)

[Hebrews 10:28](#)

[Hebrews 10:29](#)

[Hebrews 10:30](#)

[Hebrews 10:31](#)

[Hebrews 10:32](#)

[Hebrews 10:33](#)

[Hebrews 10:34](#)

[Hebrews 10:35](#)

[Hebrews 10:36](#)

[Hebrews 10:37](#)

[Hebrews 10:38](#)

[Hebrews 10:39](#)

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CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

[Click chart to enlarge](#)

Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
[Swindoll's Chart](#), [Interesting Pictorial Chart of Hebrews](#), [Another Chart](#)

**The Epistle  
to the Hebrews**

| INSTRUCTION<br>Hebrews 1-10:18                   |  |                                  |                                      | EXHORTATION<br>Hebrews 10:19-13:25                |
|--|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Superior Person<br>of Christ<br>Hebrews 1:1-4:13 | Superior Priest<br>in Christ<br>Hebrews 4:14-10:18 |                                  |                                      | Superior Life<br>In Christ<br>Hebrews 10:19-13:25 |
| BETTER THAN<br>PERSON<br>Hebrews 1:1-4:13        | BETTER<br>PRIESTHOOD<br>Heb 4:14-7:28              | BETTER<br>COVENANT<br>Heb 8:1-13 | BETTER<br>SACRIFICE<br>Heb 9:1-10:18 | BETTER<br>LIFE                                    |
| MAJESTY<br>OF<br>CHRIST                          | MINISTRY<br>OF<br>CHRIST                           |                                  |                                      | MINISTERS<br>FOR<br>CHRIST                        |
| DOCTRINE   |  |                                  |                                      | DUTY  |
| DATE WRITTEN:<br>ca. 64-68AD                     |  |                                  |                                      |   |

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)  
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#)

Hebrews 10:3 But in [those sacrifices](#) there is a [reminder](#) of [sins year](#) by [year](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [all' en autais anamnesis amartion kat' eniauton](#)

**Amplified:** But [as it is] these sacrifices annually bring a fresh remembrance of sins [to be atoned for], ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** So far from that, in them there is a year by year reminder of sin. ([Westminster Press](#))

**NLT:** But just the opposite happened. Those yearly sacrifices reminded them of their sins year after year. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** In practice, however, the sacrifices amounted to an annual reminder of sins; ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** But in them [the sacrifices] there was a calling to mind of sins year by year,

**Young's Literal:** but in those sacrifices is a remembrance of sins every year,

**BUT IN THOSE SACRIFICES THERE IS A REMINDER OF SINS YEAR BY YEAR: all en autais anamnesis hamartion kat eniauton:**

- He 9:7; Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 16:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 21, 22, 29, 30, 34; 23:27, 28; Nu 29:7, 8, 9, 10, 11; 1Kings 17:18; Mt 26:28
- Hebrews 10 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 10:1-18 Total Forgiveness](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 10:1-18 Christ: The Living Sacrifice](#) - John MacArthur

## ONE FUNCTION OF THE OT SACRIFICES

Notice from the chart above where we are in the Letter to the Hebrews -- the author is on the "home stretch" of his doctrinal defense of all that is better in the New Covenant and in Hebrews 10:19 will move into the section dealing with "Duty."

Ever tie a string around your finger? Why did you do that? You were giving yourself a reminder! Beloved, every time they celebrated the **Day of Atonement** the Jews were in effect tying a string around their finger each year, a divine reminder of sin and a divine finger pointed to their need for a Savior.

And so every time an Israelite brought a sacrifice and especially every time they celebrated the annual **Day of Atonement**, they were reminded that they had sinned against God.

**"The offerings, thus, in their inability to remove sin, remind of sin."**

**Clinton Arnold** sums up that the writer's "point applies to the whole of the old covenant sacrificial system, as it is epitomized in the Day of Atonement sacrifice. Since the sacrifices really cannot cleanse the worshipers, as is shown by the offerings' repetition, all they really serve to do is affirm the perpetual state of sin in which the worshipers suffer. The offerings, thus, in their inability to remove sin, remind of sin."

**A reminder year by year** (ESV = "every year") - This clearly refers to the annual **Day of Atonement** (Leviticus 16:1ff+)

**Vincent**... Each successive sacrifice was a fresh reminder of sins to be atoned for; so far were the sacrifices from satisfying the conscience of the worshipper. (Contrast the result of the better covenant - He 10:17) (cp reminder of iniquity in Nu 5:15)

**S Lewis Johnson** - Now, if the Day of Atonement was a sacrifice for Israel, which removed their sins, why does it have to be repeated? Well, for the simple reason that in the meantime they have also been sinning and it is necessary again for the atonement sacrifices to be made in order that Israel may remain in good standing with the covenant of the Old Testament. So just appealing to experience would or should have taught Israel and should have taught anyone else that there is no definitive cleansing in the Old Testament sacrifices. You can see it in so many ways. I remember in one year, many years ago, I had an automobile that I had some difficulty with after I'd purchased it. And I remember taking it back to the dealer and having him fix it. And then, after I'd had it for a few more days I had to take it back again. It was a Dodge, I remember, and the name of the company was Nichols Brothers. And I gave advice to a lot of people don't buy one from that company because I had to keep taking it back. The very fact that I took it back a couple of times was evidence that they hadn't fixed what they said they were fixing. Well, this is like our author's argument here. He says, "For then would they not have ceased to be offered?" For then, would I not have ceased having to take that automobile back to Nichols Brothers, if they had fixed it the first time? "For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more conscience sense of guilt for sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year." So every time I drove it back to Nichols Brothers, it was a reminder to anyone who knew the facts that Nichols Brothers had not fixed that car. ([The Shadow and the Reality](#))

**Cornerstone Commentary** - The argument here recalls that of Paul in Romans to the effect that the **law only makes people aware of their sin** and thereby heightens or magnifies it (see Rom 3:20; 5:13, 20; 7:7).

Excerpt from The Purpose of the Law - a "negative" effect -- As an aside one **purpose of the law** has an interesting (and unwanted) "**side effect**" -- while law is given to reveal sin, what is amazing is that law in fact **increases sin**. This is one of the great dangers of a legalistic spirit. To say "I won't" in reliance on my natural power is to put myself under the law which is exactly where my flesh wants me to be placed! Living under the "Law" never changes you. If you focus only on what you shouldn't do, you will be pulled more powerfully to do it. Here is a Scripture that supports this premise "For while we were in [the flesh](#), the sinful passions, which were **aroused by the Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." (Romans 7:5+).....

**Augustine** - Nothing could be truer. For a prohibition always increases an illicit desire so long as the love of and joy in holiness is too weak to conquer the inclination to sin. So without the aid of divine grace it is impossible for man to love and delight in sanctity. (CITY OF GOD)

I will never forget an illustration of this by Charles Swindoll who described a beautiful "putting green" like lawn in his front yard. And to keep it pristine, he placed a sign so the kids would not ride their bikes over the lawn "**STAY OFF THE LAWN**." You guessed it! Kids began to ride "rampant" over his "putting green" lawn. That's the effect of the Law!!!

In Galveston, Texas, a hotel on the shore of the Gulf of Mexico put this notice in each room **NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONY** Yet every day, hotel guests threw in their lines to the waters below. Then the management decided to TAKE DOWN THE SIGNS – Guess what happened? The fishing stopped! (For more discussion see The Purpose of the Law - a "negative" effect)

**Reminder**(364) (**anamnesis** from **ana** = again + **mimnesko** = remember) means for causing someone to remember. Each successive sacrifice was a fresh reminder of sins to be atoned for; so far were the sacrifices from satisfying the conscience of the worshipper.

**Vine** comments on **anamnesis** in this verse noting that it... suggests more than the mere memory of having done wrong, it involves

an awakening of mind, the consciousness of guilt in the sight of God, and the consequent realization, in seeking to draw near to God, of a hindrance to the unclouded enjoyment of His presence. Communion with God is impossible where guilt is upon the conscience. Where sins are not removed through acceptance of God's means by the blood of Christ, sins and their consequences must remain both now and in the eternal state hereafter. ([Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Wuest** - The word **reminder** is the translation of **anamnesis** which speaks of "a calling to mind." The memory of sins committed, is revived by the continual repetition of the yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. The sacrifices themselves did not satisfy the consciences of the worshippers. They knew that these sacrifices did not pay for sin. ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

Here are all the other uses of **anamnesis** in Scripture...

**Leviticus 24:7** "And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be a **memorial** portion for the bread, even an offering by fire to the LORD.

**Numbers 10:10** "Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a **reminder** of you before your God. I am the LORD your God."

**Psalms 38:1** A Psalm of David, for a **memorial**. O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath; And chasten me not in Thy burning anger.

**Psalms 70:1** For the choir director. A Psalm of David; for a **memorial**. O God, hasten to deliver me; O LORD, hasten to my help!

The most memorable (pun intended) use of **anamnesis** is by our Lord Who on the night He was betrayed...

when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; **do** (present imperative) this in **remembrance** (anamnesis) of Me." (Luke 22:19+)

**Comment:** The memory of the greatness of His sacrifice should serve to motivate praise to the Savior and abstinence from sin. Is this not the idea inherent in the spiritual principle the expulsive power of a new affection? I think it is!

Paul reiterates this wish of our Lord...

and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; **do** (present imperative) this in **remembrance** of Me. In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; **do** (present imperative) this, as often as you drink it, in **remembrance** of Me." (1Cor 11:24, 25)

Daily, monthly, yearly, sacrifice after sacrifice - in fact more than 300,000 lambs were sacrificed in Jerusalem on Passover to the point that blood ran down as red rivulets into the Kidron Valley.

**Spurgeon** says the blood of animals "was only a **picture**, an **emblem**, a **type** of far more precious blood—the **shadow** of the real atonement that was afterward to be offered. There was a lamb slain every morning, and that sacrifice must have reminded at least some of them that a perpetual atonement was provided (ED: SPURGEON IS ALLUDING WHO THOSE WHO BELIEVED IN MESSIAH AND SAW IN THE SACRIFICES A SHADOW THAT HAD BEHIND IT THE SUBSTANCE OF CHRIST IN WHOM THEY BELIEVED). But, as with an undertone of thunder, it also reminded them all that such an atonement was still needed; that, **after a thousand years of the offering of lambs, sacrifices were still required**. There was ordained a day of atonement with especially solemn ceremonies, but what did that day say to the Jews? That atonement was provided? No, but that an atonement was still needed. For, as soon as ever that year was up, the atonement had not been made, and they must have another day of atonement.

What a contrast the writer of Hebrews pictures...

**OLD COVENANT - REMEMBER YOUR SINS**  
**NEW COVENANT - REMEMBER YOUR SAVIOR**

Instead of soothing the conscience, the Levitical system stabbed the conscience, awakening each year when the High Priest confessed their sins. Oh, the wonder of grace, for the New Covenant reverses the pattern, so that today we are called to remember **not** the **sins** but the **sacrifice** for those sins. (see above Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:24) The contrasting promise of the New Covenant was that the sin would be removed and even God would "remember" their sins "no more" (He 8:12+, He 10:17+ from Jer 31:34).

Although not using the word **anamnesis**, the following passage from Numbers conveys the same sense intended by the writer of Hebrews...

(In context of a wife being unfaithful) the man shall then bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring as an offering for her one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall not pour oil on it, nor put frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of memorial, a **reminder** of iniquity. (Nu 5:15)

Think of it this way. If someone is ill, medicine may be prescribed which effects a cure. Then every time he looks at the bottle after that, he will say: "That is what gave me back my health." On the other hand, if the medicine is ineffective, every time he looks at the bottle he will be reminded that he is still sick and that the recommended cure was useless. So it was with the Law and the Levitical system which could not cure the sin sickness.

**THOUGHT - Now how does this apply to believers today?** Do we not all have a tendency to return to our own "little sacrificial systems", saying things like "My quiet time wasn't long enough this morning, so God won't bless me today!" We have just returned to our little "ritual". Although there was no blood spilt, the [gist](#) of our action is the same as it was for Israel under the Old Covenant. But like Israel we learn that ritual and rules only serve to remind us of our inability to keep even our own rules! We need to remember that we are not longer under the law and a sacrificial system but under grace. We need to walk by faith in the light of this new covenant truth. Then, our quiet time becomes a time of freedom and fellowship, not a time of burdensome legalism.

**Jamieson** writes that this reminder is "a recalling to mind by the high priest's confession, on the day of atonement, of the sins both of each past year and of all former years, proving that the expiatory sacrifices of former years were not felt by men's consciences to have fully atoned for former sins; in fact, the expiation and remission were only legal and typical (Heb 10:4, He 10:11- note). The Gospel remission, on the contrary, is so complete, that sins are "remembered no more" (He 10:17-note) by God. It is unbelief to "forget" this once-for-all purgation, and to fear on account of "former sins" (2Pe 1:9-note). The believer, once for all bathed, needs only to "wash" his hands and "feet" of soils, according as he daily contracts them, in Christ's blood (Jn 13:10). ([Hebrews 10](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Why did God require animal sacrifices in the Old Testament?](#)
- [Will there be animal sacrifices during the millennial kingdom?](#)
- [If God hates human sacrifice, how could Jesus' sacrifice be the payment for our sins?](#)
- [If the Jewish people do not offer animal sacrifices, how do they believe they can receive forgiveness from God?](#)
- [What were the various sacrifices in the Old Testament?](#)
- [What does the Bible have to say that would apply to animal testing?](#)
- [Why would the aroma of a sacrifice be important to God?](#)
- [Why did the sacrificial system require a blood sacrifice?](#)
- [How do we bring blemished offerings to God \(Malachi 1:8\)?](#)
- [Sermon by Charles Simeon on Hebrews 10:3 Season of Penitence Recommended](#)

**Hebrews 10:4** For it is **impossible** for the **blood** of **bulls** and **goats** to **take away sins**. (**NASB: Lockman**)

**Greek:** [adunaton gar haima tauron kai tragon aphairein \(PAN\) amartias.](#)

**Amplified:** Because the blood of bulls and goats is powerless to take sins away. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. ([Westminster Press](#))

**NLT:** For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** for the blood of bulls and goats cannot really remove the guilt of sin. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to be taking away sins.

**Young's Literal:** for it is impossible for blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

**FOR IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE BLOOD OF BULLS AND GOATS TO TAKE AWAY SINS: adunaton gar haima tauron kai tragon aphairein (PAN) hamartias:**

- He 10:8; 9:9,13; Ps 50:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 51:16; Isa 1:11, 12, 13, 14, 15; 66:3; Je 6:20; 7:21,22; Ho 6:6; Amos 5:21,22; Mic 6:6, 7, 8; Mk 12:33

- He 10:11; Hosea 14:2; John 1:29; Romans 11:27; 1Jn 3:5
- Hebrews 10 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 10:1-18 Total Forgiveness](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 10:1-18 Christ: The Living Sacrifice](#) - John MacArthur

## THE INEFFICACY OF ANIMAL BLOOD

**Inefficacy** describes the failure to produce the desired effect or the lack of power to produce a desired effect. It is the state or quality of being incapable of producing a desired result. Synonyms include feebleness, helplessness, impotence, inadequacy, incapability, ineffectiveness, ineffectualness, powerlessness, uselessness, weakness. Such was the effect of the blood of animal sacrifices.

**For (gar)** - always pause to prayerfully ponder this poignant **term of explanation**. The author now gives an explanation of (Heb 10:1-3) "We don't need any more animal sacrifices. They cannot take away sins. They cannot accomplish a definitive cleansing from sin." (Johnson).

**Spurgeon** - There was a perpetual remembrance of sin in everyone of the offerings under the ceremonial law. They were intended—the most of them, at any rate—continually to remind men that sin was not washed away. Thus all the ceremonies drew up a handwriting, and said to the Jews, and to us, too, "You need an atonement by blood; you are guilty, and there is no hope of your ever coming to God except by a sacrifice, which these rams and bullocks represent, but the place of which they cannot possibly fill."

**Wuest**... The truth of this statement is so obvious that it hardly needs proof. There is no relation between the physical blood of animals and man's moral offence. ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

**Pfeiffer** - The reason it was necessary to repeat the Old Testament sacrifices is not hard to find: "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb 10:4). They served a temporary function, but they pointed to the need of a greater sacrifice. Jesus came as the Lamb of God who purposed to take away the sin of the world. He was named Jesus because He was destined to take upon Himself the sin of His people. (Hebrews Commentary)

**Impossible** (102)(**adunatos** from **a** = without + **dunatós** = possible, able, or powerful from **dunamai** = to be able or have power by virtue of inherent ability and resources. Note the stem *duna-* or *dyna-* conveying the basic sense of ability or capability, power, strength, might) means impossible, incapable of being or of occurring, incapable of being done.

**Adunatos** is used twice to convey the idea of one who is impotent, has no strength or lacks capability in functioning adequately, once in a literal sense (Acts 14:8 below = powerless) and once in a spiritual sense (Ro 15:1-note = of those who do not "strongly" believe).

Note that **adunatos** is first in the Greek sentence for **emphasis**. It's as if the author wants to make it blazingly, blatantly clear... "Impossible it is... !" One can hardly miss his point. In regard to man's moral offense, there is no "permanent cure" effected by the physical blood of animals.

**Adunatos** - 26 uses in the **Septuagint (LXX)** - Job 5:15,16; 20:19; 24:4, 6, 22; 29:16; 30:25; 31:16, 20, 34; 34:20; 36:15, 19; Pr 30:18; Joel 3:10)

**Adunatos** - 10 uses in the NT. **NAS** = impossible(6), no strength(1), things that are impossible(1), could not do(1), without strength(1).

One will note the obvious concentration of "impossibilities" in the book of Hebrews!

**Matthew 19:26** And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is **impossible**, but with God all things are possible."

**Mark 10:27** Looking upon them, Jesus said, "With men it is **impossible**, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

**Luke 18:27** But He said, "The things **impossible** with men are possible with God."

**Acts 14:8** And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, **without strength** in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

**Romans 8:3** For what the Law **could not do** (adunatos), weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh

**Comment:** The truth in Romans parallels that in Hebrews 10, Romans dealing with the Law per se and Hebrews addressing the Levitical sacrificial system. Neither source had the inherent ability to make man right before the Holy God and both point ultimately to the Son, the perfect Sacrifice and the fulfillment of the Law!

**Romans 15:1** Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those **without strength** and not just please ourselves.

**Hebrews 6:4 (ESV)** For it is **impossible** to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

**Note:** the NASB places "impossible" in Heb 6:6-note) (Note also that commentators and some translators take **adunatos** to mean "**difficult**" but clearly from the other NT uses and specifically the uses in Hebrews this is inappropriate and leads to a thoroughly incorrect interpretation of this stern warning passage.

**Hebrews 6:18** in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is **impossible** for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.

**Hebrews 10:4** For it is **impossible** for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

**Hebrews 11:6** And without faith it is **impossible** to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

**Blood (120) (haima)** refers to literal blood as the basic oxygen carrying unit of the human body. It refers to blood as constituting the life of an individual (Lev 17:11).

**Haima** - 97x in 90v (~20% of blood in the NT is found in the book of Hebrews, a bloody book!) -**NAS** = blood (94), hemorrhage (3).

Mt 16:17; 23:30, 35; 26:28; 27:4, 6, 8, 24, 25; Mk 5:25, 29; 14:24; Lk 8:43, 44; 11:50, 51; 13:1; 22:20, 44; John 1:13; 6:53, 54, 55; 19:34; Acts 1:19; 2:19, 20; 5:28; 15:20, 29; 18:6; 20:26, 28; 21:25; 22:20; Ro 3:15, 25; 5:9; 1Co 10:16; 11:25, 27; 15:50; Gal 1:16; Ep 1:7; 2:13; 6:12; Col 1:20; Heb 2:14; 9:7, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25; 10:4, 19, 29; 11:28; 12:4, 24; 13:11, 12, 20; 1Pe 1:2, 19; 1Jn 1:7; 5:6, 8; Rev 1:5; 5:9; 6:10, 12; 7:14; 8:7, 8; 11:6; 12:11; 14:20; 16:3, 4, 6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2, 13.

**Swindoll** - If the author of Hebrews could have used bold font, 10:4 probably would have been emphasized. It represents the clear, concise explanation for the assertion in Hebrews 10:1, that the sacrifices can never make worshipers perfect: "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Underscore the word **impossible**. *Not improbable, not difficult, not unlikely, not rare. IMPOSSIBLE.* Notice that it wasn't simply rendered impossible because of the death of Christ. The context is referring to the limitations of the sacrifices under the Old Testament Law itself. It has always been impossible for the blood of animal sacrifices to take away sins. If the sacrifices did anything permanently, it was to remind the people of Israel of their sinfulness. Just as a speed limit sign reminds us of the law, and a speeding ticket reminds us of our guilt, the Law and the sacrifices stood as a constant reminder of sin (Rom. 3:20-23). Under the old system, Israel's national sins accumulated daily over the course of the year; then the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement temporarily covered them. They accumulated again the next year; the Day of Atonement covered them again. The old covenant kept kicking the can down the road, so to speak. But that system of endless blood got old. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Hebrews)

**Barnes** comments that the writer is emphasizing that "there was no efficacy in the blood of a mere animal to wash away a moral offence. It could not repair the law; it could not do anything to maintain the justice of God; it had no efficacy to make the heart pure. The mere shedding of the blood of an animal never could make the soul pure. This the (writer) states as a truth which must be admitted at once as indisputable.

**Barclay** - Let us take an analogy. A man is ill. A bottle of medicine is prescribed for him. If that medicine effects a cure, every time he looks at the bottle thereafter, he will say: "That is what gave me back my health." On the other hand, if the medicine is ineffective, every time he looks at the bottle he will be reminded that he is ill and that the recommended cure was useless. So the writer to the Hebrews says with prophetic vehemence: "The sacrifice of animals is powerless to purify a man and give him access to God. All that such sacrifices can do is to remind a man that he is an uncured sinner and that the barrier of his sin is between himself and God." So far from erasing his sin, they underline it. The only effective sacrifice is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. ([Hebrews](#))

**Max Alderman** comments on the inadequacy of **the blood of bulls and goats** noting that...

We immediately understand that His blood is superior to animal blood. His blood is superior to all blood. Animal sacrifice under the Old Covenant could only cover sin. The Hebrew word for atonement is kophar,

which literally means "to cover." But animal sacrifice could never take away sins. Only Jesus, the Perfect Sacrifice of the New Covenant, takes sins away. The sacrifices of the old economy had a prophetic significance. They were offered not only to protect, but also to project an object lesson pertaining to the greater offering of Jesus. The greater offering was in every way superior to the lesser offering. Thank God that He is the altogether Lovely One. This is demonstrated in the fact that God found pleasure in Him. He was pleased with His Son as indicated at both the baptism of Jesus and also the transfiguration of Jesus. Notice these scriptures.

And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Mt 3:17).

This voice came at the baptism of Jesus and it was the voice of the Father declaring that His Son pleased Him. Then the same occurrence of the voice took place at the transfiguration giving the same declaration:

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (Mt 17:5)

These are two major public events that let something take place that had never happened before, when the Lord publicly placed His acceptance and satisfaction on His Son. Once again, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Peter restated the fact that the Father was satisfied with His Son as they witnessed from the holy mount the voice of God.

For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (2Pe 1:17,18-note)

These events took place indicating the superiority of the Son of God as being One uniquely set apart from all others in being able to please God. ([Reference](#))

### **Rich Cathers - The best the Old Testament sacrifices could do was to look forward in faith to a perfect sacrifice – Jesus**

But the Old Testament sacrifices themselves did not have the ability to do anything with your sins. We may not bring animal sacrifices to God in order to find forgiveness, but people do all sorts of things to try and take away their awareness of guilt. And they too don't work. Some people try to do good works, hoping in the end that their good works will somehow offset the evil of their sins. Some people try to punish themselves for their sins. They either sabotage the good things in their life so they can be more miserable, or they choose to stay away from things that could be a blessing all because they feel they deserve some sort of punishment. What's worse is often the person isn't quite aware they're doing it to themselves. Others just try and cover up their sense of guilt through self-medication: Drugs, alcohol, sex. Have you found the complete forgiveness that Jesus offers to you? ([Sermon](#))

**Cathers** - Because the Old Testament sacrifices weren't strong enough to do the real job, the people had to keep offering them. On the Day of Atonement, each year the past sins of the entire year were to be recalled (remembrance made). If the Old Testament sacrifices were really effective, then they wouldn't have had to be done each year. Jesus' sacrifice was so awesome, that He only had to do it once, and it was good enough for all time. ([Hebrews 10:1-14](#))

**Take away** ([851](#)) (**aphaireo** from **apó** = from + **haireo** = to take, seize, grasp, make a choice of one or more possible alternatives) means to put or take something away from its normal location, to put out of the way or to remove.

Luke 1:25+ uses **aphaireo** to refer to taking away of one's reproach. (cf Ge 30:23) (cf Lk 1:24 Elizabeth who said "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.")

All three synoptic gospels record the literal use in describing Peter's removing of an ear "away from" the slave's head!

Animal blood cannot **take away sins**. Here in Hebrews the use of the **present tense** points to a continual action and thus emphasizes what is always true.

Only God can **take away sins** which He will do for "all Israel" in the end times (Ro 11:27-note)

**Aphaireo** is used 132 times in the **Septuagint (LXX)** --

Ge 21:25; 30:23; 31:9, 16, 31 (Jacob fearing that Laban would *take away* his daughters); Ge 40:19 (Joseph's prophecy of Pharaoh *taking away* the head of the baker); Ge 48:17; Ex 5:8, 11; 13:12; 29:27; 33:5, 23 ("Then I *will take* My hand *away* and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."); Ex 34:7 (God "Who forgives [*takes away*] iniquity"), Ex 34:9 ("Thou pardon our iniquity and our sin"); Ex 35:24; Lev. 1:16; 2:9; 4:10; 6:10, 15; 8:29; 9:21; 10:17; 22:15; Nu 11:17; 14:18; 15:19, 20; 18:19, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32; 21:7; 31:28, 52; 36:3, 4; Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Jos. 5:9; 1Sa 5:4; 7:14; 17:36, 39, 46, 51; 21:6; 24:4,5, 11; 30:18; 2Sa 4:7; 16:9; 20:22; 1Ki.

15:12; 20:41; 2Ki. 6:32; 1Chr 11:23; 19:4; Esther 4:4, 17; 8:2,3; Job 1:21; 9:21; 19:9; 22:6; 24:7, 10; 36:7; 38:15; Ps 76:12; Pr 1:19; 4:16; 11:30; 13:18; 14:35; 22:9; 26:7; 27:13; 30:7; Eccl 3:14; Is 1:16, 25; 3:1, 18; 4:1; 5:5, 8; 6:7; 7:17, 20; 8:8; 9:4, 14; 10:13, 27; 11:13; 14:25; 16:2; 18:5; 20:2; 22:17, 19, 25; 25:8; 27:9; 28:18; 30:11; 38:15; 40:27; 53:10; 58:9; Je 6:2; 11:15; 26:2; Ezek 21:26; 23:25; 26:16; 36:26; 45:9; 48:14; Da 4:1, 31; 5:20; 9:25; Ho 2:9; Mic 2:8; Zec 3:4; 10:11).

Here is a representative use of **aphaireo** in the **LXX**...

**Genesis 30:23** So she (Jacob's wife Rachel was remembered by God and she) conceived and bore a son and said, "God **has taken away** (aphaireo) my reproach."

**Leviticus 10:17+** "Why did you not eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and He gave it to you **to bear away** (aphaireo) the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD.

**1 Samuel 17:51** Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and **cut off** (aphaireo) his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

**Isaiah 6:7+** And he touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is **taken away** (aphaireo), and your sin is forgiven."

**Zechariah 3:4** And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, **Remove** (aphaireo) the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes."

**Aphaireo** is used 10 times in the NT...

**Matthew 26:51** And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and **cut off** (took away) his ear.

**Mark 14:47** But a certain one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and **cut off** (took away) his ear.

**Luke 1:25** "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to **take away** my disgrace among men."

**Luke 10:42** but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not **be taken away** from her."

**Luke 16:3** "And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is **taking** the stewardship **away** from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.

**Luke 22:50** And a certain one of them struck the slave of the high priest and **cut off** (took away) his right ear. ( uses it

**Romans 11:27** "And this is My covenant with them, when I **take away** their sins."

**Comment:** He is referring of course to the New Covenant in His blood, the covenant even prophesied about in the OT in Je 31:31, 32, 33. This verse speaks of Israel's future forgiveness which was prophesied by Isaiah 27:9 "Therefore through this Jacob's iniquity will be forgiven" [**LXX** = aphaireo = taken away]... ". When the Redeemer returns to Zion to triumph over the Antichrist and his cohorts at the end of the Great Tribulation, when He then sets up His Millennial Kingdom) 1Sa 17:51; Is 9:14; 18:5

**Hebrews 10:4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to **take away** sins.

**Revelation 22:19** and if anyone **takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall **take away** his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (**Comment:** This is a serious warning - sow a take away and reap the most horrible of all take away's - eternal destruction! The reader would be advised to consult Tony Garland's excellent comments on this verse in Re 22:19-[note](#)) (The **LXX** uses **aphaireo** in a similar way, Moses recording "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor **take away from** it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." Deuteronomy 4:2)

The Levitical system was not designed by God to remove or forgive sins. These external, visible sacrifices were always meant to be a reflection of the heart change of the one offering the sacrifice, even as external circumcision was to picture internal circumcision, of the heart, by the Spirit and not the letter (Ro 2:28, 29-note).

Levitical sacrifices foreshadowed the coming of the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God, the Messiah (Gal 3:24) in that it made the people expectant (1Pe 1:10-note). Paul explains...

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

**Sin** (noun) (266)(**hamartia** literally conveys the sense of missing the mark as when hunting with a bow and arrow (in Homer some hundred times of a warrior hurling his spear but missing his foe). Later **hamartia** came to mean missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. **Ryrie** adds that "this is not only a negative idea but includes the positive idea of hitting some wrong mark."

Blood sacrifices necessitated a death and thus revealed God's utter hatred of and the the seriousness of **sin**. These sacrifices also spoke of the reality of God's holiness and righteousness by indicating that sin had to be covered with the element that conveyed "life" (the life is in the blood). Finally, the blood sacrifices pointed to the necessity of full and complete forgiveness so that God could have desired fellowship with His people.

Under the Old Covenant, the priests were busy all day, from dawn to dusk, slaughtering and sacrificing animals. It is estimated that at Passover as many as 300,000 lambs would be slain within a week. The slaughter would be so massive that blood would run out of the Temple ground through specially prepared channels into the Brook Kidron, which seemed to be running red with blood. But no matter how many sacrifices were made, or how often, they were always ineffective for they could not bring access to God, could not remove sin and were only external.

The essential defects in the animal sacrifices were that they were not of the same nature with those who sinned, were not of sufficient value to make satisfaction for the affronts done to God and as mere beasts, the victims could not consent to put themselves in the sinner's place. The atoning sacrifice must be by One capable of and willing to consent to substitute Himself in the sinner's stead! Hallelujah, what a Savior. Hallelujah, what a Friend!

**Ray Stedman** observes that "These animal deaths were unwilling, even unconscious, sacrifices of a lower and quite different nature and therefore inadequate substitutes for humans made in the image of God. It is impossible, says the author, for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Isaiah had quoted God long before saying, "I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats" (Is 1:11). Nevertheless, despite this limitation, through the deaths of many animals, one unchanging message was being pounded out. Every sacrifice declared it and every offering told the same story. It was burned in blood and smoke into every listening heart. The essential point for a God-approved dealing with sin in one's life was that a life be laid down. Every dying animal meant a life brought to an end. Sin was serious; it forfeited life. Unless the sin could actually be removed, the sinner must die. To save the sinner from such a fate, an equal and willing substitute must be found. Such a substitute the author now finds described in the words of Psalm 40. ([Hebrews 10:1-39 Let Us Go On!](#))

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**Sacrifice** - In the agony of Psalm 51, David seems to contradict himself. He exclaims, "You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering" (Ps 51:16). Then, two verses later, he says, "You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering" (Ps 51:19). Does God want our sacrifices or not?

Sacrifices resemble the flowers a husband gives to his wife after a heated argument. The wife doesn't need the flowers. They are valuable to her only if they accurately represent her husband's feelings. If she thinks they are merely a ritual and do not symbolize his regret, the flowers make the divide between them worse.

God didn't need the animals offered to Him in sacrifice. Hebrews says, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (He 10:4). These sacrifices pointed to the once-for-all payment Jesus would make with His own blood when He died for our sins.

What mattered was the attitude of those making the sacrifices. If the offerings were without repentance, the ritual was a mockery. That's why David wrote, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).— Haddon W. Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**For Further Study** - Learn more about David's sin and his return to God. Read [David & Manasseh: Overcoming Failure](#)

**Repentance is sorrow for the deed, not for getting caught**

**Total Forgiveness**

**Hebrews 10:1-18**

**Steven Cole**

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of the Sherlock Holmes detective novels, was a practical joker. One time he sent a telegram to twelve famous people in London whom he knew. It read: "Flee at once. All is discovered." Although all twelve were upright citizens, they all quickly left the country.

That story may be fictitious, but it illustrates the fact that a guilty conscience is a common thing. Even in the church many are uncertain about their standing before God because of past sins. These ghosts from the past stay out of sight for a while, but then they come out of nowhere to haunt them. They wonder if anyone else knows what they have done. They're fearful that the truth may leak out. But even more seriously, they wonder if God has truly forgiven them. They're not sure how it will go when they stand before Him someday. Will God punish them in this life or in eternity for the terrible things that they have done? Such people need the assurance that our text hammers home:

Through Christ's obedience to God's will at the cross, new covenant believers receive what those under the Law could not receive: Total forgiveness.

As I said last week, the author of Hebrews uses repetition to drive his point home. He has already told us the bulk of what he tells us here again. This section concludes the main argument of the Book of Hebrews. It "expresses the very heart" of the book (Donald Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews* [Baker], p. 128).

If the original readers were to go back to Judaism, with its sacrificial system, they would forfeit the tremendous benefits that Jesus Christ secured for them. His death on the cross fulfilled all that the old system pointed toward. What it could not do completely, He did, namely, provide total forgiveness for those who draw near to God through Him. The old system, by its very design, barred the average worshiper from drawing near to God's presence. Only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies, and that only once a year. But in Christ, every believer has free access to God's presence because Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice of Himself provides perfect standing with God.

The author piles up a number of synonymous phrases which show either negatively what the Law with its sacrifices could not do, or positively what Christ's sacrifice did accomplish. Note:

Heb 10:1: The sacrifices of the Law could never "make perfect those who draw near."

Heb 10:2: Those sacrifices could not completely cleanse the worshipers and take away their consciousness of sins.

Heb 10:3: Those sacrifices provided a yearly reminder of sins.

Heb 10:4: Those sacrifices could not take away sins.

Heb 10:10: By God's will through the cross, "we have been sanctified" once for all.

Heb 10:12: Christ "offered one sacrifice for sins for all time."

Heb 10:14: "By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

Heb 10:17: God promises to remember their sins and lawless deeds no more.

Heb 10:18: "Where there is forgiveness..." "there is no longer any offering for sin."

All of these phrases add up to news that sounds too good to be true, and yet is true: In Christ we receive a complete, final, once for all pardon for all of our sins, past, present, and future! We're prone to say, "What's the catch?" There's no such thing as an absolutely free lunch, but there is such a thing as God's absolutely free pardon from all of our sins. It is totally free to us, because Christ bore the awful penalty that we deserved to pay.

Before we work through the text, let me clarify that we are talking here about our standing or position before God in Christ. In our daily walk, when we sin we need to confess our sins in order to receive what we may call "God's family forgiveness." But even our worst sins do not eradicate our positional forgiveness as children of God.

For example, my children enter my family through natural birth, and nothing that they do changes their standing as family members. But if they sin against me, they need to confess that sin and ask forgiveness so that our relationship is not hindered. Even so, like Peter we may fail the Lord badly, but our failures do not remove us from God's family. We possess our standing in the family through the new birth, which provides total forgiveness. We maintain daily fellowship as God's children by confessing our sins and asking

forgiveness of the Father.

Our text falls into four sections. In Heb 10:1-4, the author shows how the sacrifices of the Law could not completely remove the guilt of sin. In Heb 10:5-10, he shows that Christ's obedience to God's will at the cross set aside the Old Testament sacrifices and provided for us perfect standing before God. As I understand it, Heb 10:11-18 consists of an illustration and a quotation that both drive home the same point. In Heb 10:11-14, the author illustrates the totality of our forgiveness by contrasting the unfinished, repetitive ministry of the Old Testament priests with the finished, all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. Then in Heb 10:15-18, he cites again the Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34) to show that the total forgiveness that it promises means that the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ is sufficient and final.

### **1. The sacrifices prescribed by the Law could not completely remove guilt and sin (Heb 10:1-4).**

First (Heb 10:1, 2), the author argues that the Law was only the shadow of good things to come, and not the very form of things. For this reason, the repeated sacrifices could not make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, they would have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had a consciousness of sins. "To make perfect" refers to our standing in God's sight. It includes total cleansing from sin, so that we have a clean conscience. If our consciences are aware of sins that have not been confessed and forgiven, we will hesitate to draw near to God.

This was illustrated with Adam and Eve. As soon as they sinned, they tried to hide from God's presence. They didn't want to face Him because of what they had done. Every parent has had the same experience. You come home and your child avoids you. When you track him down, he won't look you in the eye. He doesn't want to draw near to you because he has a guilty conscience. Even dogs have this sense of guilt, where they avoid you if they've done something that they know is wrong!

In Heb 10:3 the author goes on to argue that the annual sacrifices (on the Day of Atonement) only provided a yearly reminder of sins. The fact that every year the people had to go through this ritual sacrifice again and again only showed that it had not completely removed their guilt. It put it off for another year, but just like our April 15th tax deadline, that day of reckoning kept coming around. Then (Heb 10:4) the author states plainly, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Animal blood has no permanent efficacy for human sins. God designed that system of animal sacrifice to point ahead to His provision of the sacrifice of His own Son. As eternal God, His sacrifice has infinite value. As man, His sacrifice atones for human sin in a way that the blood of animals never could.

It's interesting that the word "reminder" (Heb 10:3) is the same Greek word used in the institution of the Lord's Supper, where Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19; 1Cor. 11:24). While we are instructed to examine ourselves and confess our sins before partaking of the elements, the gospel transforms our remembrance from one of guilt to one of grace (Philip Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 394).

The Lord's Supper reminds us that the penalty we deserve for our sins was put completely on Jesus Christ. His death accomplished what the blood of animal sacrifices never could accomplish, namely, it took away all of our sin and guilt!

### **2. Christ's obedience to God's will at the cross set aside the Old Testament sacrifices and provided perfect standing for us before God (Heb 10:5-10).**

In Heb 10:5-7, the author puts a quote from Psalm 40:6-8 (LXX) in the mouth of Jesus as He comes into this world. This assumes the preexistence of Jesus Christ as eternal God. There is a difficulty in that the Hebrew of this psalm reads, "My ears You have opened," whereas the LXX translated it, "A body You have pre-pared for Me." Apparently the Greek translators rendered an interpretive paraphrase of the Hebrew text, using a part and expanding it into the whole (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 232). "To dig out an ear" (the literal Hebrew) is a part of God's fashioning a whole body out of clay. It does not refer to the master boring the servant's ear with an awl (Exod. 21:6; Deut. 15:17). Rather, the picture is that of God's opening the ear of His servant so that He would be obedient to the cross (Isa 50:5f.). The LXX rendering puts the emphasis on God's preparing a body for Jesus that He would offer as the suitable sacrifice for our sins, thus supplanting the Old Testament sacrifices. These verses (Heb 10:5-10) make three points:

#### **A. The cross was the direct will of God.**

The cross was not an accident or an unforeseen tragedy that took Jesus by surprise. It was not a temporary setback that God figured out how to turn for good. Rather, the cross was God's pre-determined plan, before

the beginning of time, to deal with our sin. The Son of God would come into this world as a man, would fulfill through His obedience the complete Law of God, and then would die as the sacrifice that the justice of God demands as the payment for sins.

There is a great mystery here that we must submit to: even though God ordained the cross, down to minute details (e.g. casting lots for Jesus' clothing), He is not in any way responsible for the sin of those who crucified Jesus. As Acts 4:27, 28 puts it: "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

By coming into this world specifically to go to the cross, Jesus not only provided the sacrifice for sins that we need. He also provided a supreme example of resolute obedience to the complete will of God. The author twice repeats Jesus' words from this psalm, "I have come to do Your will, O God." As Luke 9:51 puts it, "He set His face to go to Jerusalem" (NASB, margin). As Jesus prayed in the garden, "not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). We cannot imagine how difficult it was for the sinless Son of God to be made sin for us. But His determined obedience to God's will, no matter how difficult, teaches us to commit ourselves to obey His will, whatever the cost. You don't decide to obey God at the moment of temptation. It has to be a rational commitment that you make before you find yourself facing temptation.

#### **B. Christ's obedience to God's will at the cross set aside the Old Testament sacrifices once and for all.**

"He takes away the first [O.T. sacrifices] to establish the second [the will of God at the cross]" (Heb 10:9). When the psalm states that God did not desire or take pleasure in sacrifices (Heb 10:5-6), it reflects a frequent theme in the Old Testament, that God did not desire sacrifices for their own sake. Rather, the sacrifices should reflect a repentant heart (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 51:16, 17; Isa. 1:11, 12, 13; 66:3, 4; Jer. 7:21, 22, 23; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21, 22, 23, 24; Micah 6:6, 7, 8). God is displeased when people go through the outward motions of worship, but their hearts harbor sin that they are unwilling to forsake. In modern terms, you can go to church and partake of communion, but if you are living in disobedience to God or if you are covering some sin in your heart, God is not pleased with your worship.

But the author's main point to his original readers is that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross permanently replaced the Old Testament sacrificial system. For this reason, I cannot accept the view that animal sacrifices will again be offered in the millennium. It is explained that they are "memorials" of the cross, but I cannot reconcile that with Hebrews. The cross supremely fulfilled and re-placed that old system. There is no reason to go back to it, even as a memorial, when we can gaze at the Lamb on the throne!

#### **C. By Christ's obedience to God's will at the cross, we receive perfect standing before God once and for all.**

That is the point of Heb 10:10. The author of Hebrews uses "sanctified" to refer to "inward cleansing from sin" and "being made fit for the presence of God, so that ...[we] can offer Him acceptable worship" (Bruce, p. 236). "Have been sanctified" is the Greek perfect tense, signifying a past action that has ongoing results. By way of contrast with the often-repeated Old Testament sacrifices, the one offering of Christ on the cross conveys to believers perfect standing before God for all time. As I explained, this refers to our position before God, not to our daily relationship. As we will see (in Heb 10:14), even though we are perfect in our standing, we are progressing in our growth in holiness.

The author has shown that the Old Testament sacrifices could not completely remove guilt and sin (Heb 10:1-4), and that Christ's sacrifice on the cross removed the sacrificial system and provides for our perfect standing before God (Heb 10:5-10). He goes on to illustrate his main point in Heb 10:11-14.

#### **3. The totality of our forgiveness is illustrated by the contrast between the unfinished, repetitive ministry of the Old Testament priests and the finished, sufficient sacrifice of Christ (Heb 10:11-14).**

Heb 10:11 portrays the priest, who stood daily "offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." You can feel a sense of futility in these words! But Heb 10:12 contrasts the "one sacrifice for sins for all time" that Jesus offered, after which He "sat down at the right hand of God." The standing of the priests indicates unfinished work that is never done (there were no chairs in the sanctuary). The sitting of Jesus indicates that His work of sacrifice is finished, and that He has been exalted to the place of supreme honor.

The author could have ended the quote (from Ps. 110:1) after the reference to Jesus' sitting at God's right hand, but he adds (Heb 10:13), "waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His

feet.” He may have done this for two reasons. First, he didn’t want his readers to grow discouraged because of the cross, as if it represented a defeat for God. Perhaps their unbelieving Jewish friends were taunting them for their belief in a crucified Messiah. If Jesus is really Lord, then why do His people suffer persecution and martyrdom? The author says, “Just wait! The day is coming when Jesus’ enemies will all become His footstool, just as Psalm 110 predicts.”

Second, the author may be giving a subtle warning to his readers. If they abandoned the faith and went back to Judaism, they would be placing themselves on the losing side in history. They would be making themselves enemies of Jesus, and that’s not where you want to be, because Jesus’ enemies are headed for certain defeat and judgment.

In Heb 10:14, the author again repeats the effect of Jesus’ one offering: “He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (literal translation). This verse brings together two vital truths. First, the position of believers before God is that they are perfect.

God has forgiven all of their sins through Christ’s sacrifice, and He has imputed Christ’s perfect righteousness to them. These great facts are the basis of our standing before God. Second, the practice of believers is that they are being sanctified. They are growing in holiness in thought, word, and deed. The position is granted instantly at the moment of saving faith. The practice is worked out over a lifetime of growth in obedience. If there is no growth in holiness, there is reason to question whether the person has been perfected in his position through faith in Christ.

The author wraps up this section with a supporting quote:

#### **4. The Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant sup-ports the totality of our forgiveness (Heb 10:15-18).**

Note that the author attributes Jeremiah’s prophecy to the Holy Spirit, who inspires all Scripture (Heb 10:15). He paraphrases (perhaps from memory) what he had earlier cited (8:11-12) from Jeremiah 31:33-34, because this quote gives God’s own testimony to what the author has been arguing. God promises to put His laws upon His peoples’ hearts and to write them on their minds (Heb 10:16). The author may have cited this part of the new covenant promise to preempt any criticism from a Jewish reader to the effect that the setting aside of the Law (Heb 10:9) would lead to lawless living. “Not so! God’s people are marked by obedience from the heart.”

Then he adds the part of the new covenant that is directly to his point, “And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” God’s not remembering our sins does not mean that He is forgetful, but rather that He will not bring up our sins against us for judgment. They are totally forgiven because of God’s covenant decree. And so the conclusion is, “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin” (Heb 10:18). The Old Testament sacrifices are now rendered worthless and obsolete. What they pointed to, Jesus has completely fulfilled. Through the cross, believers under the new covenant receive God’s total forgiveness! If you have total forgiveness in Christ, why go back to a system that could never provide that?

#### **Conclusion**

If the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches would accept the message of our text, they would do away with the doctrine of purgatory, which is not in the Bible anyway. Purgatory is supposed to be a place where, after death, our remaining sins are purged away. Supposedly, the friends and loved ones of the deceased person can pay to have masses or prayers said on their be-half to shorten the time in purgatory. What a blatant denial of the gospel of God’s grace in Christ! If His death places us in perfect standing with God, purgatory is a lie!

Our text also eliminates the practice of penance. Not to be confused with penitence (a synonym for repentance), penance is the Catholic teaching that certain good deeds prescribed by the church will make satisfaction for sins and thus lessen time in purgatory. Sometimes this is coupled with indulgences, which supposedly remove the guilt or punishment of temporal sins.

All of these unbiblical practices detract from the total merit of Christ’s sacrificial death for us. His death obtained total forgiveness for believers. His death perfected us for all time. His death sanctified us once for all. His death completely takes away the guilt of our sins. To believe in purgatory and to practice penance and indulgences is like going back to the Jewish sacrificial system!

Imagine a young man who falls in love, but he and his lover are separated by distance. He has a beautiful photograph of her that he gazes at every day. Finally, the two get married. The photo is still there, but now he

has her.

But then one day, he starts behaving rather strangely. He stands before his wife, clutching the photo to his chest. He tells her, "I've really missed your photo, so I'm going back to it. He passionately kisses the picture and goes out the door mumbling, "Oh, how I love you, dear photo! You're everything to me." (Adapted from Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* [Crossway], Heb 2:19). We would rightly conclude that this guy's dipstick reads a quart low!

But that guy's weird behavior illustrates what people do when they abandon Christ for the shadow. Christ and His sufficient sacrifice on the cross provide total forgiveness of all of our sins. Any religious system that devises human works to atone for sins is a mere shadow. Trust in Christ alone and God bestows on you by grace alone His total forgiveness!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. If the Old Testament sacrifices could not provide total forgiveness, why did God institute that system for 1,500 years?
2. Why is it important to distinguish between our position in Christ and our daily practice with regard to God's forgiveness?
3. How do the Catholic teachings on purgatory and penance completely undermine the gospel of God's grace in Christ?
4. How would you answer the charge that total forgiveness by grace alone will lead to licentious living? ([Hebrews 10:1-18 Total Forgiveness](#))

## **Season of Penitence Recommended**

### **Hebrews 10:3**

**Charles Simeon**

SIN the institutions of the Mosaic law, burthensome as they were, God consulted the best interests of his people. Repentance, faith, and obedience, were inculcated in them all. The daily sacrifices and frequent ablutions were intended to shew them, that they stood in need of mercy and of spiritual renovation: and the authority with which they were enjoined, taught them, that their whole happiness depended on an entire submission to the will of God. Those ordinances had also a further use; which was, to lead the minds of all to the contemplation of mysteries, which should in due season be more fully revealed. They did not themselves convey any solid or lasting benefit: they were mere shadows, which indicated indeed a substance; but which would vanish away, when that substance should appear. This is the view given of the law in the passage before us. The Apostle says, "The law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then, would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers, once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins." Hence it appears, that the most solemn institutions of the law, not excepting the sacrifices offered on the great day of annual expiation, were, in fact, no more than mere "remembrances of sins," which could never be removed, but by that better Sacrifice which should in due time be offered.

But that we may have a fuller insight into this subject, I will endeavour more distinctly to shew,

#### **I. For what end those annual remembrances of sins were enjoined—**

Doubtless they were intended, as the whole of the Mosaic ritual also was, to separate the Jewish people more entirely from all the nations of the world. But they were more particularly designed,

##### **1. To make them sensible of their need of a Saviour—**

[Every offering had this tendency: no man could see his victim bleed, without seeing and acknowledging what was his own desert before God. But, if there had been no day of annual expiation appointed, the people would have been ready to imagine that every offering which they had presented to God had actually taken away the sin for which it had been offered. To guard against this fatal error, a day was appointed annually for a more especial remembrance of their sins, and for a deeper humiliation of their souls before God on account of them. Thus they were taught that neither their repentances nor their sacrifices had really availed to put away their sins: for, if they had, there had been no occasion for a repetition of them. Moreover, the same ordinances being still appointed annually, and annually observed, they were made to feel, that not even

these more solemn rites had been able to prevail for the expiation of sin; so that, in fact, the guilt contracted throughout their whole lives still abode upon their souls; no offerings, which they had ever presented, having been able to remove it. In the view of this, they were particularly required to “afflict their souls.” And, in truth, this ordinance was well calculated to produce in them the deepest humiliation: for, having occasion every year to review their lives through the past year; and to add, as it were, the sum of their recent iniquities to the incalculable score that was against them in consequence of former transgressions; and being at the same time necessitated to see that nothing which they either had done, or could do, could cancel the smallest portion of their debt; they would, of necessity, be led to cry for mercy with the deepest contrition, and to acknowledge their need of that Saviour whom they were instructed to expect.]

## **2. To shew, then, the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices—**

[Nothing could carry stronger conviction with it than this particular ordinance: for, if former sacrifices had prevailed, why should they be repeated? What occasion was there for the annual offerings, if the occasional ones had answered their full end? or why should the same sins be atoned for in a future year, which have been expiated in the present year, if the present expiation has been satisfactory and complete? Here, then, was the axe laid to the root of all self-righteous conceits. It was to no purpose that these ordinances were of Divine appointment; or that they were observed according to the strict letter of the law: they were never intended to serve as real expiations of sin; nor was the observance of them ever intended to form a justifying righteousness before God: they were intended only to shadow forth a Saviour, to whom all must look, and through whom all must be justified; and the very repetition of them was, in fact, not only a remembrance of the sins which rendered a Saviour necessary; but a pledge, that such a Saviour as they needed should in due time be sent them.]

## **3. To direct their eyes to that Great Sacrifice that should in due time be offered—**

[In every sacrifice which was offered, they saw the Lord Jesus Christ exhibited before them: and were reminded, that in due time he should “come to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” They were informed, that there was to arise from the loins of Abraham, “a Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” The Prophets Isaiah and Daniel had fully described the way in which the promised seed should effect the work assigned him: that he should “be cut off, but not for himself;” that he should be “wounded for our transgressions, and be bruised for our iniquities;” that he should “make his soul an offering for sin; and that in this way he should “finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness,” by which all the sinners of mankind, who should believe in him, should be “justified.” Now, all this was set before them; and was seen by them, with more or less distinctness, according to the faith they had in exercise: and in every sacrifice which, from year to year, was offered, they saw an herald sent, and heard his proclamation, “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!”]

That we may bring the matter more home to ourselves, let us consider,

## **II. What good may be expected from stated remembrances of sins amongst us—**

It is granted, that nothing equivalent to the Mosaic ordinances is required of us. Yet, if we were to appoint stated seasons for ourselves — seasons for reviewing our past lives, and for special humiliation of our souls before God—I am persuaded we should find it highly conducive to our spiritual welfare. Such seasons would be useful,

### **1. For the deepening of our repentance—**

[We are apt to lose, very speedily, the convictions which sin has fastened upon our mind. At first, perhaps, they are pungent, and cause considerable anguish; but in a little time the impression wears away, and we almost forget that we have sinned at all. But if we had stated seasons for calling our ways to remembrance, our past convictions would be revived, and our humiliation before God be greatly promoted. The sins of early life being thus from time to time set before us, and those of daily incursion being added to them, we should have juster views of our extreme unworthiness. The whole life would then appear to be, what in reality it is, one continued scene of iniquity. For want of such seasons of recollection, men view their sins as they do the heavens in a cloudy night, when they can see only here and there a star of greater magnitude, and at remote distances: whereas, if our self-examinations were strict, and our retrospect frequent, our lives would appear rather like the heavens in the clearest night, full of stars of a greater or lesser order, and so connected as scarcely to leave an interval between them. With such views of ourselves, our repentance would not be slight, partial, transient; but deep, universal, permanent.]

### **2. For the endearing of the Saviour to us—**

[True is that saying, that “where much is forgiven, men will love much; and little, where little has been forgiven.” Now, if we be in the habit of bringing before our eyes the sins of our whole life, and of viewing them, even as God does, in the aggregate, how shall we adore that mercy of God that has been extended to us, and that love of Christ which he has evinced in giving himself for us! Verily, it will appear almost incredible that even God himself should be capable of such condescension and grace. This

self-knowledge is at the root of the experience of the saints in heaven. Behold them all prostrate before the throne, and casting down their crowns at the Saviour's feet; whilst they sing, "To Him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood." This is the state of mind which self-knowledge has a tendency to generate: and if our seasons of humiliation were more deep and frequent, we should more resemble the glorified saints, both in the nature and in the expressions of our joy.]

### **3. For the augmenting of our vigilance against the recurrence of sin—**

[It is a truth not generally considered, that the sins which more easily beset us in early life, continue, more or less, our besetting sins to the end of our days. Pride, envy, wrath, malice, lewdness, covetousness, rarely leave the soul of which they have once got an undisturbed possession. Now, if a person has been in the habit of self-examination from year to year, and of seeing by what temptations chiefly he has been overcome, he will know the better against what he needs more especially to watch: he will have seen, how, on many occasions, that, which, if resisted in the first moment, might have been easily overcome, has, by being harboured in the mind, acquired an ascendant over him, and defied his utmost efforts to subdue it. He will have seen, especially, how he has been betrayed, by unwatchfulness, into sins to which he had no natural propensity; and that there is not an evil in the human heart against which he has not reason to watch and pray. In a word, he will feel the need of committing himself wholly to the guidance of his God, and of crying continually, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."]

From this subject, then, we may learn,

#### **1. What use to make of the present season—**

[There are seasons which seem to claim somewhat more than an ordinary regard. The commencement of a new year, or the return of our natal day, may well lead us to a review of the past year, and consequently of our whole lives: and, were it so improved, how far more profitable should we find the season, than if it were spent in carnal mirth! I may add, too, how important is this suggestion in reference to eternity! Thousands go into the eternal world without having ever, in their whole lives, devoted one single day to the revision of their lives, and to humiliation for their sins. God forbid, my brethren, that you should be of that unhappy number! Let me recommend it to you all to begin, this day, to call your ways to remembrance; to enter minutely into the sins of your early youth, and of every succeeding year, even to the present hour. Let me recommend you to mark, not merely the sins of greater enormity, but those which the world accounts slight and venial. Let me recommend to you to notice the sins of omission, as well as of commission; and the sins of defect, as well as those of utter neglect. Could you be prevailed upon to take such a retrospect, it could not fail of being attended with the best consequences to your spiritual edification in this life, and to your eternal welfare in the life to come.]

#### **2. What especially to aim at, in all the exercises of your souls—**

[There is a frame of mind peculiarly characteristic of the advanced Christian: and which, I conceive, is suggested by the considerations of my text. You have seen that the most pious of God's people, no less than others, were to observe a day in every year for the special purpose of remembering their past sins, and of afflicting their souls on account of them; whilst, at the same time, they were to renew their applications to God for mercy through the appointed sacrifices. A sense of sin was not to weaken their hope of God's mercy, on the one hand; nor was their confidence in God's mercy to weaken their sense of sin, on the other hand: both were to be retained in constant and united exercise; that so, whilst they "rejoiced with trembling," they might tremble with rejoicing. Now, this is a state of mind by no means so common as might be wished. The generality of Christians, if they could feel towards God as a loving, obedient, and devoted spouse towards her husband, would conceive that they had attained the highest state of which they are capable. But, to make that image fully suited to our case, we must suppose the spouse to have been originally taken from the lowest and most degraded state by her husband; and, after her union with him, to have dishonoured him, and debased herself, by the grossest enormities. We must further suppose her husband to have followed her with the most affectionate entreaties to return to him; to have assured her of his most entire forgiveness; and, having prevailed on her to return, to be exercising towards her all imaginable kindness, without ever once uttering a single word of upbraiding. Now, suppose her to become faithful and obedient, and you will have a juster conception of the Christian's state. Though her husband has forgiven her, can you imagine that she has forgiven herself? On the contrary, does not every act of love on her husband's part fill her with deeper humility and self-abhorrence, for having ever acted so basely towards one of so exalted a character? Does not her whole intercourse with him, from day to day, augment her admiration of him, and her loathing of herself? Yes; though forgiven, she never for a moment forgets what she is, or what she deserves: and her whole soul is prostrate before God and man, even in the midst of her fondest endearments or her sublimest joys. Here is the Christian character: here is the character which I wish you all to attain. Do not mistake; you need not rush into gross sins in order to have a foundation for it: the adulteries of every one of you are manifest enough, without any fresh iniquities: you need only see how you have treated your divine Husband, and what base lusts you have harboured in your bosoms, from your youth up even until now, and you will see that you have need to "walk softly before God all your days," and to "lothe yourselves before him in dust and ashes." This is "walking humbly with God." This will not abate either your confidence or

your joy: but it will temper the one with fear, and the other with contrition.] ([Horae Homileticae or, Discourses](#))