

Valley View Chapel
February 8, 2015
God's Final Answer Part 20
"Already, But Not Yet"
Hebrews 10:1-18

Introduction

I am one of the few people in my neighborhood without a gas grill sitting on my deck. I prefer to cook the old-fashioned way – with Kingsford charcoal briquettes. Admittedly there are certain things a gas grill can do that my grill can't do. A gas grill heats up faster; has a larger cooking surface; you can control the heat; clean up is easier; and a bottle of propane lasts longer than a 10-pound bag of charcoal. My charcoal grill serves the purpose but it's limited.

The Old Testament sacrificial system for dealing with sin was like my charcoal grill. It served the purpose but was limited in what it could do. Hebrews 10:1-18 describes its limitations.

Before we look at the limitations of the Jewish sacrificial system, let's review *the purpose* of the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians, probably living in Rome, who were under pressure to abandon their faith in Christ. Their family and friends felt like they had betrayed their heritage and abandoned the traditions of their forefathers. Some of these newer followers of Jesus felt a strong temptation to return to the family religion. Hebrews was an attempt to persuade them to "hang in there" and stay true to Christ, the gospel, and the church. The writer based his argument on the fact that God's *new covenant* under Christ could do things that the *old covenant* under Judaism was powerless to do. Why abandon a clearly *superior* way to return to a decidedly *inferior* system?

Let's begin by looking at three reasons outlined in today's text why the old covenant was inferior to the new covenant.

Why the old covenant was inferior

The first reason that the old covenant was inferior to the new is because it couldn't make the worshiper "perfect." We see this in verse 1, "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make *perfect* those who draw near to worship."

The word translated "perfect" does not mean what it means today in English – "without defect or flaw." The Greek word means "completed," "accomplished," or "fulfilled." In other words, the law was incapable of bringing us to our full potential as creatures made in the image of God.

It failed to make believers "perfect" in three ways.

1. The old covenant could not establish *a personal* relationship with God. In the Old Testament God was said to be the "father" of Israel as a nation but was never thought to be the "father" of individual Jews. In a similar way, George Washington is called "the father of our country," but is never thought to be our own *personal* father. That's why the opening words of The Lord's Prayer sounded so revolutionary when Jesus instructed his disciples to pray: "Our Father...."
2. The old covenant conveyed *no inner spiritual power*. Most Jews knew nothing at all of the power of the Holy Spirit. It is true that on certain special occasions the Holy Spirit came

upon a few individuals. For example we're told in Exodus 31:1-3 that one of the builders of the Tabernacle named Bezalel received the Holy Spirit in order to do his work: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have *filled him with the Spirit of God*, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts....'" (NIV)

Peter, in his second epistle, stated that the authors of the Old Testament did their work under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:21 (NIV)

But these men were the exception and not the rule. And it needs to be noted that in every case where an individual in the Old Testament experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, it was unrelated to the performance of any act of worship or sacrifice prescribed in the law.

3. The old covenant could not grant an *assurance of heaven* when the Jewish worshiper died. The Israelites' view of the afterlife was shadowy and vague at best. Solomon summarized this uncertainty in Ecclesiastes 3:19-21, "Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" (NIV)

The second reason that the old covenant was inferior was that it served only to remind people of their sins. This is evident in Hebrews 10:3, "But those sacrifices are *an annual reminder* of sins..."

Notice what the writer said about the sacrificial system in verse 1. He said that "the same sacrifices [are] repeated endlessly year after year...."

Now look at verse 11, "*Day after day* every priest stands and performs his religious duties; *again and again* he offers the same sacrifices...."

Every year on the Day of Atonement when an animal was slain and the priest sprinkled its blood on the mercy seat, the people were reminded of their sins. Instead of a sense of relief and release, the Old Testament sacrifices reminded the people that they fell short of the divine standard for another year.

The third reason that the old covenant was inferior is related to the second reason: It could never *take away their sins*. This is plainly set forth in the fourth verse: "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Why couldn't "the blood of bulls and goats take away the sins" of the people?

If bulls and goats were sinners, then bulls and goats would have been adequate substitutes. But bulls and goats aren't sinners. People are. So in order for our sins to be "taken away once-and-for-all" a *person* would have to die. But not just any person. The sacrifice would have to be a *perfect person* because that's the only kind of sacrifice that a holy God can accept.

The Reason for the Incarnation

Now we can understand more clearly the reason for the word "Therefore" in verse 5. "Therefore" is always connected to what came immediately before it. *Because* the blood of bulls and goats could not make the worshiper perfect, and because the blood of bulls and goats only reminded the people of their sins, and *because* the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins, "*Therefore*, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin

offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, O God.'" Hebrews 10:5-7 (NIV)

God in Christ took the form of a human being – a *perfect* human being to do what bulls and goats could never do. He came to “take away sins” once-and-for-all. He accomplished that by shedding his precious blood and dying in our place.

“I have come to do your will, O God.”

The will of God for Jesus was to drink the cup of God’s wrath so that we wouldn’t have to.

Those who argue against the doctrine that Jesus died as our substitute do so by calling it “divine child abuse.” But it was no such thing because Jesus prayed in Luke 22:42, “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. *Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.*” (NLT)

No bull or goat ever made a pre-meditated willful decision to die as a sacrifice. They were tied and then dragged, kicking and protesting to the altar. Not so the Lord Jesus. The prophet wrote in Isaiah 53:7, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is *led* to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” (ESV)

Jesus was *led* – not driven or forced - to Calvary. He *willingly* offered his life in our place.

“I have come to do your will, O God” - The will of God was his paramount concern: nothing more; nothing less; nothing else.

How about us? Can we say along with the Savior we profess to follow: “I have come to do your will, O God?”

The will of God may involve suffering, disappointment, and uncertainty. But it’s the only safe place.

The devil tells us that it’s a choice between being in the will of God and being miserable and being out of the will of God and being happy. The truth of the matter is that there is far more unhappiness, uncertainty and disappointment *out of the will of God* than in it.

After Jesus breathed his last he cried out: “It is finished! The debt of humanity’s sin has been paid in full! Nothing further is owed!” we’re told in verse 12, “But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, *he sat down* at the right hand of God.”

The old covenant priests never “sat down” in the Most Holy Place because their work was never done. There was always another animal to kill and to sacrifice.

What Christ’s Death Accomplished

When Christ said “It is finished” and sat down at his Father’s right hand, two things were accomplished.

First: Hebrews 10:10 says that “we have been *made holy* through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Second: Hebrews 10:14 declares: “By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever *those who are being made holy.*”

Verse 10 says that “we have *been made* holy.” That’s in the past tense – a completed action, not to be repeated.

Verse 14 says that we “are *being made* holy.” That’s in the present tense, a continuous process.

So have we been made holy already in the past? Or are we being made holy now in the present?

Let’s look first at Hebrews 10:10 – “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

To understand Hebrews 10:10 we need to put it next to Romans 3:21-26, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” (NIV)

Paul said that those “who have faith in Jesus” are “justified.” When we repent of our sins and believe that “Jesus paid it all” when he died on the cross, the righteousness of Christ is transferred to our spiritual bank account so that we appear as righteous and perfect in the eyes of God as Jesus himself.

When a criminal has committed a crime but is acquitted, in the eyes of the law he never committed the crime.

The word for that – spiritually – is “justification.” We are “declared holy” in the eyes of God – we’ve been acquitted in the heavenly court - because of our faith in Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf. It’s like we never sinned in the first place. That’s what verse 10 means when it says we have been “made holy.”

Now let’s look at Hebrews 10:14, “By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

While we are judiciously and positionally holy, we know (and everybody else knows) that we are *not* perfectly holy in our *experience*. The Christian life is a journey wherein our mind, character and conduct are being conformed to that of Jesus Christ. This journey is called “sanctification.”

John MacArthur described the goal of sanctification: “It is God’s will that our practice match our position.”

Though we are “perfect” according to heaven’s record, we are meant to move in the direction of spiritual and moral perfection throughout our earthly journey.

We may not be sinlessly than we were this time last year? Can we say with the saint of old: “I’m not what I ought to be; but I’m not what I used to be?”

The Path to Progress

The Lord has not left us to muddle through life on our own, doing our best to measure up to his standards. He has made provision for our spiritual growth.

Verse 16 is a source of great encouragement: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

God wants to plant his laws, his principles, his precepts, and his rule of life into our hearts, minds, and wills. He wants to make His Word part of our spiritual DNA so that our default response to be life will be a biblical, God-honoring response.

God does this through the Word of God.

The psalmist declared the key to the life of holiness, joy, satisfaction and blessing 3,000 years ago: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11 (ESV)

John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, put the same truth another way when he wrote in the cover of his Bible: "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."

Here's how to get the God's Word into your heart and mind.

Make a regular appointment to encounter God through his Word. Pick a time and a place. Make it the same time and the same place.

Before you open your Bible, PRAY. Ask the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers to open your eyes to God's truth.

READ carefully for however long you can.

REFLECT on what you read. Make sure you leave enough time to ask the Lord to show you one truth or one principle you can apply to your life.

WRITE in a journal, a 3x5 card or even a "Post-It" note a verse, a phrase, or a principle that you can think about throughout the day.

REVIEW several times during the day – at lunch, a traffic light, while you're waiting for someone or something – the truth that God showed you.

REHEARSE what you learned by living-it-out. Put God's Word into practice.

It has been said that you have really learned another language when you can *think* in that language.

A regular encounter with the Word of God empowers and equips us to "think biblically" about the situations, people, and opportunities that come our way throughout the day.

I want to close with a story about the value and the importance of the Word of God in our lives.

Conclusion

A young man was getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealer's showroom, and knowing his father could well afford it, he told him that was all he wanted. As Graduation Day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car.

Finally, on the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son, and told him how much he loved him. He handed his son a beautiful wrapped gift box. Curious, but somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather-bound Bible, with the young man's name embossed in gold. Angrily, he raised his voice to his father and said, 'With all your money you give me a Bible?' And stormed out of the house, leaving the Bible. Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful

home and wonderful family, but realized his father was very old, and thought perhaps he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day. Before he could make arrangements, he received a telegram telling him his father had passed away, and willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately and take care of things.

When he arrived at his father's house, sudden sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search through his father's important papers and saw the still new Bible, just as he had left it years ago. With tears, he opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. His father had carefully underlined a verse – Matthew 7:11, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

As he read those words, a car key dropped from the back of the Bible. It had a tag with the dealer's name, the same dealer who had the sports car he had desired. On the tag was the date of his graduation, and the words...PAID IN FULL.

When we treasure God's Word and hide it in our hearts, we may not get a new car. But we'll get something infinitely more precious and permanent: God's laws inscribed forever on our hearts and minds by the finger of God.