

Sufficient and Insufficient Sacrifices

Hebrews 9:1-15

Hebrews 9:1-15 - *Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. ² For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; ³ and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, ⁴ which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; ⁵ and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

⁶ *Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. ⁷ But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; ⁸ the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹ It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— ¹⁰ concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.*

¹¹ *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ¹⁵ And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*

Background Notes

In Hebrews 8 we saw that Christ, our High Priest, ministers in a better Sanctuary and mediates a better Covenant. In the first half of Hebrews 9 we see that the ministry performed by Christ, in that better Sanctuary and with that better Covenant is far superior to the ministry of the high priest on the Day of Atonement under the old covenant.

The instructions for the Day of Atonement were given in Leviticus 16. On that day - and on that day alone - the high priest would take the blood of the atoning sacrifice, bring it into the Holy of Holies, and place it on the Mercy Seat (the top of the Ark of the Covenant).

The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, is still a very important day in the Jewish calendar. But as great as the Day of Atonement was and is in Israel's history, ***no sin was ever removed*** by the ceremonies of that day – and that's the point of Hebrews 9. The Old Testament sacrificial system was only temporary. It was a "type." It was symbolic, pointing forward to the coming of Christ. *"It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience" (v9-10).*

Doctrinal Points

1. Before the coming of Christ, many insufficient sacrifices were offered in the temporary earthly Tabernacle.

Verse 10 referred to the time of the coming of Christ as the "time of reformation," or the "new order." This "time of reformation" was not a reference to the Protestant Reformation of Martin Luther's time – it was talking about the coming of Christ, and the time of the new order and the new covenant. The Greek word that's used here literally means "to put things right." The same word was used in ancient times for setting a broken bone or repairing an old road. Jesus Christ came to "put things right"!

In the first six verses of this chapter, the author gave a brief description of the Old Testament Tabernacle and its furnishings. If you've never read the book of Exodus, or if you've never seen some diagrams or pictures of the Tabernacle, you might be a little confused when you read through these verses.

A brief description the Tabernacle and its furnishings may help. The Tabernacle was basically a large tent that was surrounded by a fenced courtyard. In the courtyard was the bronze altar of sacrifice and the "laver" of water for ritual cleansing. The Tabernacle had two sections. Beyond the entrance curtain was the Holy Place, with a menorah-type lamp stand and the table of "shew bread" for the priests. The golden altar of incense stood directly in front of the second curtain (or veil) that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. On the Day of Atonement, this second veil was opened, and the golden altar of incense was seen in association with the Holy of Holies (v3-4).

The Ark of the Covenant was in the Holy of Holies. The Ark was a chest covered with gold that contained three items: the golden pot that held manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and tablets of stone on which were written the Law. The top of the Ark of the Covenant was the Mercy Seat, of gold plate, where the blood of the atoning sacrifice was placed on the Day of Atonement. Overshadowing the Mercy Seat were two cherubim with outstretched wings. The Ark of the Covenant represented the presence of God in the midst of His people. All these things were reminders of God's dealings with His people under the ***old Covenant***.

Is the Ark of the Covenant still in existence today? Is it hidden in the Judean wilderness? Is it under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem? Is it in Ethiopia? I don't know if the Ark of the Covenant still exists today. One thing I know for sure - it's not in a government warehouse, as in the "Raiders of the Lost Ark"! Furthermore, there's nothing in the Bible that says the Ark must be found for prophecy to be fulfilled. It may be found, but it does not have to be found.

Only the priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place of the Tabernacle and the high priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. *“But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year”* (v7). This ceremony was done every year at the Day of Atonement. It was a never-ending cycle that **had** to be done every year, because the sacrifices were insufficient. They never took away sin.

So verse 8 is the point of this whole first section: *“...the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.”* Before the coming of Christ, there were many insufficient sacrifices in the temporary earthly Tabernacle.

2. Since the coming of Christ, one sufficient Sacrifice was presented in the permanent heavenly Tabernacle.

Verses 11: *“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.”*

I love the way verse 11 starts – **“But Christ”!** What a wealth of truth was conveyed by those two words! ***With the coming of Christ, everything has been put right*** in the perfect Tabernacle of verse 11 - “not made with hands” - not of this creation, in the abode of God in Heaven. This heavenly Sanctuary is mentioned in Hebrews 8:1-2.

In this heavenly Sanctuary, the Day of Atonement has taken place once and for all (as it were). As our High Priest, the Lord Jesus presented His own blood as the once and for all perfect and sufficient sacrifice for sin: *“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”* (v12). God the Father saw the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross, and was satisfied with this great sacrifice. As our Lord died on the cross He said, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). ***The sacrifice of Christ for our eternal redemption has been accomplished – once, for all time!***

The sacrifice of Christ cannot be repeated. The Lord’s Supper is a **memorial** of this sacrifice - it is **not** a re-sacrifice! The bread and wine do **not** literally become the body and blood of Christ. The idea that the sacrifice of Christ is repeated in the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, or the Lord’s Supper, is a denial of this Scripture.

Verse 13 mentions the *“ashes of the heifer, sprinkling the unclean.”* This was a particular sacrifice under the old Covenant, described in Numbers 19. I think you can easily see the overall point that the writer was making. All these old Covenant sacrifices could only sprinkle the flesh – the exterior of the sinful individual (v13). These sacrifices of the old Covenant could only take people who were ceremonially unclean, and make them **outwardly** clean. The sacrifices of the old Covenant **could not remove sin**.

But Christ, by His sacrifice, completely cleanses the guilty conscience of sin. *“For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the*

living God?” (v13-14). What a contrast! The New Covenant has been established only because Christ gave His life as the perfect sacrifice (v15).

But what about the sins that were committed in Old Testament times, under the first Covenant? How can those sins be removed? Verse 15 covers this question: *“And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”*

*“...the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant...” (v15). Now we can see how Genesis 15:6 is possible: “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.” Why will Abraham be in Heaven? He will be in Heaven because Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. **The one sacrifice of Christ was sufficient to remove the sins of all believers, regardless of when they lived.** Since the coming of Christ, there is one sufficient sacrifice in the permanent heavenly Tabernacle.*

Practical Application

Why settle for less when you already have much more

The author of Hebrews was telling his audience that they had **so much more in Christ** than they had in Judaism. With the finished work of Christ on the cross and the perfect High Priest in heaven, why would they ever go back to the old Covenant and the temporary sacrifices of Judaism?

Many Christians today would say that they would never settle for the rituals of the old Covenant and the imperfect human priests - and yet there are people who call themselves Christians today who settle for less than what has been made available, and is already available to them!

Why go to an imperfect earthly priest, for example, when we already have a perfect High Priest in Heaven? Why live under the yoke of human regulations about *“foods and drinks”* and other *“fleshly ordinances”* (v10). Why reenact the sacrifice of Christ, when God says the once-for-all sacrifice is already finished – and it’s sufficient? Why come to God through rituals when we can freely enter His presence, with no ritual needed?

Why settle for less when you already have much more?