

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Hebrews 9:1-10:18: Christ our Atonement (Part 2)

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Abstract

The source explores Hebrews 9:1-10:18, focusing on the ultimate efficacy of Christ's once-for-all self-sacrifice in contrast to the repetitive Levitical system. By drawing on Psalm 40 and Psalm 110, the author demonstrates how Christ's obedience fulfilled the divine will and inaugurated the New Covenant, removing the barrier of sin and cleansing the conscience. This theological argument provides the foundation for believers' unprecedented, unhindered access to God and their subsequent priestly ministry. Ultimately, it encourages Christians to remain faithful and live lives pleasing to God as they wait eagerly for Christ's second coming.

Outline

I. The Shadow of the Law and Inefficacy of Annual Sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1-4)

A. The Law as a "shadow" of future good things (Hebrews 10:1)

1. Lacks real substance, pointing forward to Jesus' self-offering as the source of true cleansing power
2. Departure from Platonic views: committed to a temporal framework in which God intervenes historically in human history

B. The repetitive nature of Torah sacrifices (Yom Kippur) signals their inherent ineffectiveness

1. Argument from the contrary: if these rituals cleansed the conscience once and for all, they would have ceased
2. Endless repetition serves as an annual reminder of sins rather than their actual removal
 - a. Generalization from Numbers 5:15 (sacrifice for a suspected adulteress to bring guilt to remembrance) applied to the entire sacrificial system
 - b. Philo of Alexandria's parallel use of Numbers 5:15 as proof that the sacrifice of an insincere person only reminds God of sinfulness

C. Ideologically motivated interpretation vs. Levitical assertions of efficacy

1. Day of Atonement rituals repaired the relationship with God but did not structurally improve access
2. The first covenant's rituals perpetuated graded, limited access and physical barriers separating the people from God
3. Principal declaration: "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4)
4. Drawing on Jewish prophetic critiques (Isaiah, Hosea) emphasizing internal obedience and justice over routine offerings
 - a. Isaiah 1:11-13 as a classic rejection of useless offerings performed without a dedicated heart

II. Christ's Obedient Offering as the Will of God (Hebrews 10:5-10)

- A. Exposition of Psalm 40:6-8 as scriptural warrant for Jesus' voluntary human sacrifice
 1. Citation textual variations: Masoretic Hebrew text ("ears you have dug for me") vs. Septuagint Greek ("a body you have prepared for me")
 2. The Greek translation's meaning: obedience to the covenant represented by the physical body pleases God over transgression followed by sacrifice
 3. Christological application: the preparation of a body is interpreted as the Son taking on flesh and blood in the incarnation
- B. The theological shift: God sets aside the first (animal sacrifice) to establish the second (Christ's obedience)
 1. Jesus' willing self-offering of His body replaces the Levitical system as the means to fulfill God's will
 2. Believers are decisively sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all (Hebrews 10:10)

III. The Enthronement and Final Victory of the High Priest (Hebrews 10:11-18)

- A. Contrast in priestly posture: Levitical standing vs. Melchizedekian sitting
 1. Levitical priests must stand daily to perform repetitive, ineffective cultic activities
 2. Deuteronomy (Deut 10:8, 18:7) defines "standing before the Lord" as the proper posture of Levitical service
 3. Jesus, after offering a single sacrifice, sat down permanently at the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1)
 4. The posture of sitting indicates a completed priestly act with no need for repeated offerings
- B. Eschatological implications of Psalm 110:1
 1. Jesus waits in the interim for His enemies to be made a footstool for His feet
 2. The double-sided nature of His return: reward and salvation for believers, but subjugation for those who oppose Him

3. Assurance of vindication for committed believers and warning for those wavering in their commitment

IV. Scriptural Confirmation of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

A. The second recitation of Jeremiah 31:33-34 serves as a scriptural Q.E.D.

1. The Holy Spirit is invoked as a witness to confirm the perfection of those being sanctified
2. Decisive forgiveness of sins demonstrates that there is no longer any need for an offering for sins

B. Dual benefits of the New Covenant realized in Christ

1. Complete removal of the sins that stood as a barrier between God and His people
2. Internalization of the law (written on minds and hearts) to equip believers to live lives that please God

V. Pastoral and Rhetorical Goals

A. Reinforces key Christian convictions regarding Jesus' death, ascension, and covenant inauguration

B. Invites imaginative engagement with the invisible, heavenly realm where Jesus has entered on their behalf

1. Secures the reality of activity beyond death and the eternal sphere over the visible, material world
2. Frees believers from the fear of physical loss by showing their possession of greater, heavenly goods

C. Provides the theological foundation for the sermon's major exhortations (Hebrews 4:14-16 and 10:19-22)

VI. Modern Application for Discipleship and Ministry

A. Critical evaluation of modern ecclesiastical structures and divisions

1. The danger of clergy-laity distinctions re-instituting graded access to God and forming new hierarchies
2. Clergy should function as facilitators and equippers rather than as new mediators or ministry professionals who do all the work
3. Laity must recognize their spiritual consecration and responsibility to enact their priestly ministry
4. Casting the daily activity of the laity in the language of priestly activity (worship, witness, love, and service) in Chapter 13

B. Living faithfully in the interim

1. Remaining loyal to our reconciled divine patron amidst a mocking or hostile society
2. Shaping daily ambitions, activities, and priorities in eager anticipation of Christ's second coming
3. Fulfilling the internalized law by pouring ourselves into witness, worship, and love