

“ONCE & FOR ALL...”
by Rom A. Pegram (8/6/17)

Jane and I met at a church camp, here in Wisconsin, in the summer of '77. It was a very good year...

It wasn't long after I met Jane that I took a picture of her and, because she was going back to school in Indiana after the summer was over, that picture came to mean a great deal to me. *It kind of became an item of pre-nuptial 'worship.'* (I'm not saying that was right; I'm just saying that's how it was...) It was one of those candid pictures, taken at the staff house at Asbury Acres United Methodist Church Camp. As you can see, she was kind of half-smiling, half-laughing. She was beautiful! And for that very long year of engagement, when Jane was in school in Indiana and I was working in Wisconsin, it became kind of a portable 'hope' for me, many times sitting on my desk, sometimes in my car, and at other times propped in front of me wherever I was at...

However, the day came when we stood before God and our families and friends ... and pledged our lives to each other as she became mine ... and I became hers. Suddenly, I had gone from the possession of a two-dimensional portrait ... to the real thing, who smiled, and talked, and laughed—a real, three-dimensional wife—a living, life-loving soul! 'And the picture? It remained just as beautiful, but from that day on ... it didn't receive quite the attention it had in the year before...

Now, imagine that one day I appear before my wife holding that picture that had gotten me through that year of engagement long, long ago ... and I say something like, "Jane, I've missed your picture, and I'm going back to it. I really am attached to that image and to the look that was captured on your face!" Then, I passionately kiss the picture, clutch it to my chest, and exit mumbling sweet nothings to that photo... *Well ... my guess is that people's suspicions that pastors are weird would be confirmed. And it may be time to call in the men in white jackets ... don't you think?*

Folks, *how absurd for anyone, who once they had the real thing, to want to go back to a mere likeness?* Yet, that's what some in the Early Church were doing; they were turning on Christ, moving back to the old ways of sacrifice (remember, they were being persecuted...)! Today's lesson is: Hebrews 10:1-18 (*read as we move through the message*). But first, let's begin here...

The sacrifice of blood, in the Bible, is all about *atonement* (at-one-ment)—*a way of reconciliation between God and God's people*. Atonement has always been necessary because God is holy and we're not! There had to be some sort of atonement (way of reconciliation) to get us together. God demanded a blood sacrifice—a *living sacrifice*—in order to make this relationship possible. And this sacrifice resulted in an effect on both God and us! For God, he's satisfied with the atonement of Christ's death; that did it for God. The effect upon us, however, is of greater importance! We receive:

- *Consciences that are cleansed...*
- *Confidence of forgiveness & restoration* in our relationship with God and our...

- *Consciousness of sin is gone; fear of meeting God face-to-face is gone...*

A devotional writer said the other day, “Until we come to the place where we get over our fear of death, we will never really know what living is!” I believe that. And through Jesus, that fear of death *can* be conquered & we can then know LIFE as God planned it for us... So, *we receive a release from this fear of death ... in Jesus! Wow...*

Today, the author of Hebrews is letting his congregation know how much better atonement is through Christ, compared to what they had before. So, let’s start here...

THE PROBLEM OF IMPERFECTION (OLD COVENANT/OLD SYSTEM). Verses 1-4 tell us, “The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. ² If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. ³ But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. ⁴ For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The problem of imperfection—*an imperfect sacrifice*—is this: There is an *imperfect cleansing* – Old Testament sacrifices, in other words, were *temporary* at best...

Folks, the Old Testament sacrifice (way of atonement) was *but a shadow* of what was to come in Christ! At the insistence of God, those under the Old Covenant (OT) had to follow the law, sacrificing animals *exactly* as God told them to, for various reasons and at various times of the year. Let me give an example:

Passover came once every year. This was a specific time where every Jew was to take part in a Passover celebration. They prepared a Passover or Paschal Lamb. They held this festival every year, in remembrance of what happened in Egypt when the Angel of Death flew over and God saved the Hebrew people—those who had the blood of the lamb painted over their doors. So, every year they remember this act of God in Egypt. Not today, but for many years, they sacrificed a Passover Lamb again and again to atone for their sins. And since they had to do this once per year, you can see that OT sacrifices were temporary at best! And, why is that a problem? Well...

The *imperfect cleansing* led to an ... *imperfect conscience* – because the old system of sacrifice couldn’t take away their sin once & for all, it produced a second imperfection—*a guilty conscience* (Hebrews 10:2) ... which led to ... *a memorialized imperfection* – The result, as v. 3 points out, is that the sacrifices remain ‘an annual reminder—a memorial—of sins!’ You can see where the Passover would be quite a burden for those with sensitive hearts; the activities of this day were constructed to aggravate one’s conscience ... and *wouldn’t that get old?*

Folks, *we needed a better way!* The OT kind of atonement never really took care of sin; it was imperfect ... and God was not *unaware* of this. Beginning in v. 5 we have a brief synopsis of the conversation that must have taken place in heaven. It's all about...

THE SOLUTION FOR IMPERFECTION (NEW COVENANT/NEW SYSTEM). Verses 5-9 say, "That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God, 'You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer. ⁶ You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. ⁷ Then I said, 'Look, I have come to do your will, O God—as is written about me in the Scriptures.'" ⁸ First, Christ said, 'You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them' (though they are required by the law of Moses). ⁹ Then he said, 'Look, I have come to do your will.' *He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect.*"

The solution for imperfection came to us by way of the perfect, sinless, human sacrifice—*Jesus!* Here, Jesus is saying, in essence, "Father God, the Old Testament sacrifices have proven unsatisfactory, so you have prepared a body for me, that I might become a pleasing sacrifice." The truth is, when God put animal sacrifices in place, he did it as *an object lesson* to show his people 1) the sinfulness of their hearts, 2) his hatred of sin, 3) the fact that sin leads to death, and 4) the real need for atonement (reconciliation was needed). Jesus, folks, was the only answer to *true atonement*—the *taking away* of our sins! And you guys thought Coca-Cola was the real thing; I'm here to tell you that it was JESUS!

So, what's the application for us? *Jesus' joyous resolve to obediently do the will of his Heavenly Father is the essence of true worship & sacrifice—the kind God desires!* 1 Samuel 15:22 (NLT) speaks to this: "But Samuel replied, 'What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! *Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.*'" *God is so much more pleased with obedience, than he ever was with sacrifice!* And that, folks, is something we can be about right here, right now... But, let me go on and share the results of Jesus' perfect sacrifice (vv. 10-18), as I close:

Folks, what has God done for us in the past? What is God doing for us now? And what is God going to be doing for us in the future? Verses 10-18 tell us (*a selection*):

"For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. ¹¹ Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. ¹² But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. ... ¹⁴ For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy. ¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says, ¹⁶ 'This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' ¹⁷ Then he says, 'I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.' ¹⁸ And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices."

When we enter into this New Covenant (agreement), placing our faith in Christ, asking him to be Lord of our lives, *the very Spirit of Christ comes to live within us*. When that happens, we get: **Empowerment**... We may say, "I don't think I can ever live the Christian life!"—and you are right, if you think you can do it on your own! But a new heart, the expulsive inner power of new affection, will make it possible! Christ coming in ... forces everything out that is not of God! So, by loving Christ, and asking him to be Lord, *we're empowered to live a life God is pleased with...*

And we also get: **Forgiveness**... Forgiveness follows belief. If you really believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the perfect sacrifice for your sins, then forgiveness is right around the corner! And *this is a gift that is yours in Christ...*

- Every sin is forgiven by that One Sacrifice (Easter)...
- Those of the past? Yes...
- Present failures—the one this morning? Yes...
- Tomorrow's sins which make you tremble at the very thought of them?
Fear not, they too can be forgiven in the name of Christ...

So, let me ask you: *Why in the world would anyone want an image or a reflection or a shadow ... over the real thing?* If we do, there's something seriously wrong with us!

God gave us the gift of Jesus 2,000+ year ago. He's giving him to us today ... and he wants to continue to give us Jesus—*the perfect sacrifice for our sins*—in the future! *Jesus is the real thing!* He's God's very best—the gift that keeps on giving for eternity!

Karl Barth, that great theologian, had a sign on his desk that read, "Jesus is the answer. Now, what's the question?" Why would we want to settle for anything less? I pray we don't! So, let's take time to remember and be thankful for Jesus' sacrifice for us right now...