

SERIES: The Absolute Supremacy of Christ in Hebrews
SERMON: *One for All; Once for All*
SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:1-18
SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
DATE: February 14, 2010

We've been studying Hebrews for 16 weeks now. The author spends the first 10 chapters making an argument that Christ is absolutely supreme; he is greater than all things. Christ is superior to angels, to Moses, to Joshua, to Aaron and the whole Levitical priesthood. The new covenant Christ mediates is superior to the old covenant, and the sacrifice Christ offers is superior to the sacrifices under the old covenant. Today we come to the conclusion of the argument. I think it is important before we move on to be reminded of the circumstances that surrounded this letter, and the reasons why the superiority of Christ is being established. Listen to this challenge to the Hebrew Christians in chapter 10.

10:32-36 *Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*

These early Christians were being persecuted; they were suffering because of their faith. And it seems that in the face of this suffering they were being tempted to drift back into Judaism because it seemed safer than living out their distinctively Christian faith. They needed confidence and endurance to persevere in the Christian faith, in the face of persecution. So in an attempt to encourage his readers the author shows them the futility of Judaism and the supremacy of Christ.

They needed encouragement and we need encouragement, because we are *all* called to do the will of God. If we are Christians in the biblical sense of the term, we have been set apart by Christ to serve God. And if we have been set apart by God then we need to live like it. There is a tendency to drift in our faith when facing pressures, struggles, and the trials of life. There is a temptation to blend into the world instead of being set apart. It's easier to play it safe instead of being sold out. There is a temptation to abandon the will of God in our lives and seek our own comfort, but Hebrews reminds us that we must persevere.

The author of Hebrews knew the best antidote to drifting is seeing the superiority of Jesus more clearly. He is superior to everything. He is our great reward. If we see him as our great reward and treasure then we will be less likely to drift. When we understand what he has done for us we can have confidence to endure anything. If we're going to do the will of God we need to see who we are in Christ. Let's continue to look at him this morning.

Hebrews 10:1-18

¹The 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. ²If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;

⁶with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

⁷Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

I have come to do your will, O God.' " ⁸First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). ⁹Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁵The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

¹⁶"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." ¹⁷Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts

I will remember no more." ¹⁸And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

We've been talking about the superiority of Christ's sacrifice for two weeks, and will continue to do so today, but did you notice in verses 5-8 this text says four times that *God doesn't desire sacrifice*. Verse 8 says, *the law required sacrifices* to be made, but God didn't *desire* sacrifice. If God doesn't desire sacrifice then what does he desire? We see the answer to this question in a discussion between Samuel and King Saul recorded in 1 Samuel.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 ...Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To **obey** is better than to sacrifice, and to **heed** is better than the fat of rams.

God desires obedience; he actually wants perfect obedience. God wants his people to do his will, but God's people don't do his will perfectly. Instead we disobey God. Disobedience to God's will is called sin and, as we saw last week, sin is a big deal! Sin separates us from God. Sin makes it impossible for us to live in an obedient relationship with a holy God. So sacrifice is necessary because sin keeps us from living in a relationship with a holy God.

It is important as we move on to keep this in mind. God first of all *desires* a relationship with his people, where they live in obedient service to God, for the sake of his glory. But he *requires* sacrifice because of sin. God doesn't want sacrifice, he wants us. Sacrifice is necessary for relationship. God wants relationship, but he requires perfection.

This morning we're going to look at three ways that Jesus provides the perfection we need to live our lives for God.

Christ has offered perfect obedience. (vv. 5-10)

It is significant that this section in verses 5-10 starts out by saying, *when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me* (v. 5). The writer is referring to the incarnation; the Word became flesh. Jesus who was completely God became one of us; Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. And it is critical that Christ was fully human. Without his full humanity he couldn't have died for us, as chapter 2 makes clear. Without his full humanity he couldn't serve as a high priest and mediator between God and man, as chapter 7 makes clear. But the emphasis in this section is different. Without Christ's full humanity he couldn't have lived the perfect obedient life that God requires of humanity; he couldn't have *done God's will*. So *Christ came into the world*.

What did he come into the world to do? Verses 7 and 9 say he came into the world *to do the will of God*. Jesus was like us in every way, except for the fact that he did the will of God, and we fail to do the will of God. He was obedient to God and we are disobedient and sinful. Jesus was like us in every way, *yet he was without sin* (2:11; 4:15). This is an important distinction. It is critical that he was fully human so that he could die for us. But it was also critical that he was fully human so that he could live the life that all humans are called to live.

Verse 9 tells us that Christ *set aside* the old covenant and its sacrificial system. We've talked about this for three weeks now. I'd like to review how Christ does away with the old covenant. Christ does away with the old covenant because he completely fulfills the old covenant. He fulfills the priesthood by becoming our eternal high priest who is without sin. He fulfills the role of the temple because he himself is the great meeting place between God and man. And he fulfills the requirements of the sacrificial system by becoming our perfect sacrifice. He offers to God a perfect life in place of our life of sin. And he offers God his own blood as the required penalty for our sin.

This is amazing. But he also offers something that was unprecedented before his advent. There was sacrifice under the old system, but the bulls and goats didn't offer their lives willingly; they were victims. With Christ you have something entirely different – you have a willing volunteer. Jesus was not a victim, he was a volunteer. He offered himself! He offered complete obedience to the commandments, this is plain; but that's not all. He willingly offered his whole life; he

came to do the will of God. And the will of God was that he would die for us. So he offered to God sacrifice, which was *required*. But he also offered to God obedience, which is what God *desired*. Jesus fulfilled the human vocation. Sacrifice was necessary because man's obedience wasn't perfect, but now with Christ we have both. "Simultaneously his obedience is his sacrifice".¹

Let's look closer at Christ's sacrifice, the second way he provides perfection.

Christ has offered the perfect sacrifice. (vv. 11-13)

How is Christ's sacrifice perfect? Our passage this morning mentions three things:

1. It takes away imperfection.

The old system couldn't take away sin, as verse 4 makes clear.

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

We discussed this in detail last week, so I won't deal with it much here. But if the old covenant couldn't take away sin, then what did it do? We see its purpose in verse 1.

10:1 *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves.*

The main thing the old covenant did was point to the new covenant. It was a shadow of a greater reality that was coming; the old covenant's main job was to point to Christ. The old covenant couldn't take away sin, but the blood of Christ can, as 9:26 says.

9:26 *...But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

2. It gives perfection.

10:14 *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

This word "perfect" is important. It shows up six times in Hebrews before we see it here in chapter 10. I would like to look at those occurrences.

"Perfect" is used three times as a description of Jesus.

2:10 *...God...[made] the author of their salvation [Jesus] perfect...*

5:9 *and, once made perfect, [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*

7:28 *... the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.*

¹ Doriani, pg. 10.

“Perfect” is also used three times regarding the inadequacy of the old covenant.

7:19 (for the law *made nothing perfect*)...

9:9 ... the gifts and sacrifices being offered were *not able to [perfect] the conscience of the worshiper.*

10:1 *the law...can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.*

So Jesus was perfect. And the old system couldn't give perfection. Then we come to verse 14 and see something entirely different.

10:14 *by one sacrifice [Jesus] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

The old system couldn't give us perfection, because it didn't possess perfection. But Jesus is perfect so he can make perfect those who have faith in him; he *can* give what he possesses. This is very important because God requires perfection. The only one who was ever perfect is Christ. Through Christ's sacrifice his perfection is imputed to (or attributed to) those who put their faith in Christ. Without the imputed perfection of Christ, we cannot stand before a holy God.

One of the biggest heresies is the belief that Jesus was nothing more than a good example. While he surely is a good example, his perfect life is more than a good example; it is what we need. His perfect life must serve as a substitute for our imperfect life. And his perfect sacrifice must serve as a substitute for the penalty we deserve. His blood takes away our imperfection and it gives us perfection.

A friend of mine came to my office last week and shared with me some things about blood. So much of what she shared was over my head, as I don't know a lot about science. But one thing she said has stuck with me. Blood gives and takes. It *takes away* from your cells the things that will kill you, and it *gives* your cells the things you need to live.

The blood of Christ does something similar. It takes away our sin and imperfection. But it also gives us righteousness. We need our sin removed and replaced with the righteous perfection of Christ if we are to live in relationship with our holy God.

3. It perfects for all time.

Under the old system many sacrifices were offered. In the new there is one sacrifice, for all people who are called (9:15). In the old system the sacrifices had to be repeated year after year. In the new there is no need to repeat the sacrifice because the sacrifice that Christ has offered is “once for all.” The author of Hebrews is really trying to drive this point home! I see at least six references to this “once for all” nature in the high priest chapters (7-10).

7:27 *He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself*

9:12 *he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood*

9:26 *he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin*

10:10 *we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

10:12 *this priest...offered for all time one sacrifice for sins*

10:14 *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

In addition to stating explicitly the “once for all” nature of Christ’s perfect sacrifice, the writer also uses a word picture in verses 11-12. He contrasts “standing up” in the old covenant with “sitting down” in the new covenant. Under the old covenant there was always a priest standing up, serving before the altar with sacrifices. When someone is standing up they are still working. When Christ offered his sacrifice the Bible tells us that he “sat down;” his work is finished (Jn. 19:30).

Christ was able to sit down because the sacrifice he offered was sufficient. Christ was able to sit down because the sacrifice he offered was decisive; it was once for all. Christ’s one sacrifice was enough to satisfy God; Christ’s work is done. His once for all sacrifice secures the eternal inheritance of those who believe.

I was doing the dishes the other night and a thought occurred to me. The problem with cleaning is not the cleaning itself; as a matter of fact I kind of like cleaning, especially pots and pans. The problem with cleaning is the never ending nature of it. I scrubbed about seven large dishes that night, in addition to loading the dishwasher, wiping down all the counters, and the table. But guess what? The next morning after breakfast there were more dishes that needed cleaned. The same is true with all cleaning. After you vacuum the floor it needs vacuumed again. After you pick up a room it needs picked up again. After you clean out your garage it needs cleaned out again. Most work seems to have this “never finished” nature to it. So when the author of Hebrews comes along and tells us that Christ’s sacrifice is once for all it is a hard concept to grasp.

It’s a mystery, but the fact remains; our sin has been taken away once for all. We have been perfected once for all. And that brings me to the third way Christ provides perfection.

Christ has perfected those who are being perfected. (v. 14)

Some of you may be wondering what all this talk about perfection really means. After all each of us is a walking case study of imperfection, not perfection. I fight laziness and gluttony everyday of my life. I lose my temper more than I would like to admit. Is there a man in this room this morning that doesn’t battle lust in one form or another? (I’m sure you could add to the list.) It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that we aren’t perfect. So what does the Bible mean when it says...

10:10, *we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*

10:14 *he has made perfect those who are being made holy?*

I think these two verses make three related, but distinct points.

1. We are justified before God. (10:14a)

This is seen in the first half of verse 14.

10:14a *he has made perfect*

This doesn't mean that we won't struggle with sin anymore, because we will. Look at verse 17.

10:17 *Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.*

It says that God won't remember our sins anymore, not that we won't commit them anymore. Somehow we are completely clean by Christ's once for all sacrifice on the cross. I don't understand how, but it's as if we have a dish that has been washed one time and even though we continue to cook in it and eat from it, it is never dirty again in the eyes of God. We don't stop sinning as Christians, but we are no longer condemned before God. The author of Hebrews calls this perfection; the apostle Paul calls it justification – two terms, one truth: we are innocent before God legally. Somehow Christ's righteousness has been transferred to us and our guilt has been taken away. Something happened decisively on the cross that can never be undone, and never needs to be repeated. That's why assurance of salvation is an objective reality.

So are we perfect? Can we say that with confidence even though sin persists in our life? Yes! Or should I say, yes...if.²

2. We are justified, if we are being sanctified. (10:14b)

Look at the second part of verse 14.

10:14 *he has made perfect, those who are being made holy.*

If you have been made perfect by God, then God will continue his work of sanctification in your life. God will finish what he starts. Sanctification is the process that God works in all true believers' lives to make them more like Jesus. This doesn't mean that you won't sin anymore, but it does mean that *the law which God writes on your hearts and minds* will convict you of sin, and give you a desire to grow in holiness.

One of my favorite quotes is, "God accepts you just the way that you are, but he refuses to leave you that way; he wants you to be just like Jesus" (Max Lucado). Those who have received the perfection of Christ by faith will become more like Christ as they grow in the faith. Paul says in Philippians, "*he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*" (1:6).

So there is an objective source of assurance in what Christ did on the cross, but there is also a subjective source of assurance in what Christ is doing in you today. Are you perfect? If you belong to Christ you are. How do you know if you belong to Christ? You do if you are growing in Christ-likeness. Struggles will remain, but the main struggle will be to appropriate that which you already possess, which is Christ's perfection. If you already possess Christ, then the main struggle is to grow in Christ-likeness.³

² Piper, February 1997.

³ Doriani, pg. 10.

3. We are set apart to do his will. (10:10)

Look now at verse 10.

10:10 ...*we have been made holy*...

This verse could be translated a few different ways. The NIV does a fine job in saying *we have been made holy*. It could also say *we have been sanctified* (as the ESV says). However, when we think of sanctification or holiness we often think about growing in Christ-likeness, which we just spoke about in verse 14; but that is not really what the author means when he says we have been made holy in verse 10. I think a better translation is *we have been consecrated* (or set apart).⁴

Christ has justified those who are being sanctified. But he has done that all for a purpose: to set apart a people for himself who will serve him and do his will.

The Hebrew Christians were not persevering in the faith; they were not doing the will of God. They needed to be reminded of who they were in Christ so they would continue in the faith. We too need to be reminded of who we are in Christ. If we have faith in Christ we have all of the benefits of Christ. We have his perfect obedience and we have been made perfect by his perfect sacrifice. We have an eternal inheritance that awaits us. We have such a great reward in Christ that the pressures and suffering in this life are nothing compared with the supremacy of Christ. But all of that is not without a purpose. We have been set apart by God to serve him and to do his will.

If we have been *set apart from* the world to serve the living God then we shouldn't *blend in with* the world so much. We should look less and less like the world and more and more like Christ himself. If we have *better and lasting possessions* that await us then we shouldn't be so consumed by temporary possessions here on earth (10:34). If we experience suffering in this life it shouldn't cause us to *shrink back* from following Jesus (10:39), because we know that we will not suffer eternally. As a matter of fact we should count it a privilege to suffer, as the apostles did, because Christ himself suffered for us.

Christ was obedient. If we belong to him we should strive to live our lives in obedient service to him – that's what it means to be set apart. Christ offered his life as a sacrifice. If we belong to him we should live sacrificially as well – that's what it means to be set apart. The perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice of Christ has made us perfect so that we can offer our life as an obedient sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1).

Do we view what we have in Christ as a great reward or a great burden? I pray that we would live in such a way that it would be evident to the world that we really believe we have everything in Christ and therefore there is nothing this world has to offer that would compare to him. However, I'm afraid that at times the world can't tell the difference Christ has made in many of our lives, because they don't see much of a difference in the way we live our lives from the way

⁴ Lane, pg. 266.

they live theirs. When we're not set apart from the world we show the world that their treasures are just as valuable as or even more valuable than Christ.

The Hebrew Christians faced the confiscation of their property, they faced imprisonment, they faced public ridicule, and they even faced death. In the face of this great persecution they were drifting in their faith. They were drifting towards Judaism. They were drifting towards something that seemed safer. They needed to be reminded of who Christ was and who they were in Christ.

We don't face near the pressures that they did, but we too tend to drift. I would even be so bold as to say the Evangelical Church as a whole is drifting. How much more do we need to be reminded of who Christ is and who we are in him?

We are playing it safe in the Evangelical Church as a whole. But if we belong to Christ and have been set apart to serve the living God then we will be growing in Christ-likeness. He didn't play it safe, he was sold out. He lived his life with one agenda – to do the will of God. When we don't take risks we are saying he is not worth the risk, but he is!

He is worthy. He is supreme. He has given his perfection to those who have faith in him. He has set us apart to serve the living God. I pray that we at First Free will persevere in the faith, that we will have confidence and endurance to run the race that is set before us. And that as we run we will be satisfied in him and that he will be glorified in us.

References

- Doriani, Dan. "Hebrews 7-10: The Priesthood of Christ." Lecture notes, Hebrews to Revelation, Summer 2006.
- Ellingworth, P. "Hebrews." in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. ed. Alexander, T. Desmond, and Brian S. Rosner. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Guthrie, G. *Hebrews*. The NIV application commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1998.
- Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1974.
- Lane, William. *Hebrews. 9-13*. Word Biblical Commentary, v. 47B. Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1991.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *Hebrews: A Guide*. London: T & T Clark, 2006.
- Peterson, D.G. "Holiness." in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. ed. Alexander, T. Desmond, and Brian S. Rosner. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Piper, John. "Perfect for All Time by a Single Offering" Sermon, Hebrews, February 16, 1997.