

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part thirty-seven

Sunday, December 10th, 2017 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2013

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

IS BRIAN ZAHND RIGHT - WERE ALL THOSE OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES A VIOLENT MISTAKEN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD?

Hebrews 10:5-10 - "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; [6] in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. [7] Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" [8] When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), [9] then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. [10] And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

I don't imagine anyone reads the old covenant sacrificial record with a sense of inward delight. It all smacks of occultish blood-letting. The violence and suffering doesn't sit well in the stomach. Chapter after chapter repeating God's emphasis on the importance of the "**shedding of blood**" seems contradictory to Jesus telling His followers to respond to personal wrongs suffered by "**turning the other cheek.**"

All of this to say, while I'm **disappointed**, I'm not **surprised** at the abundance of modern writers trying to **bleach the bloodshed** from our Bibles. Old covenant sacrifices seem to fit better in the world of witch-doctors and snake handlers. They will never **market well** in a world where **tolerance** and **live and let live** are the new standards of God-like character.

The **anti-wrath movement** is the new trend. It has many contemporary theologians lined up like ducks all in a row. You can find them all in the same theological box. **Brian Zahnd's** comments in his book, "**Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God**" can be found in very similar words in dozens of contemporary church leaders:

"Does God require animal sacrifice? The priests and the Levites say yes, and that's what we find in the Torah. But eventually the psalmists and prophets begin to challenge this. David says, 'Sacrifice and offering you do not desire....Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required' [remember those two verses for later]. In this psalm David contradicts the Torah's unambiguous laws requiring animal sacrifice! Later Hosea claims that God doesn't want sacrifice but mercy."

"...The Bible itself is on the quest to discover the Word of God....The Old Testament begins with a primitive assumption that God requires ritual sacrifice but eventually moves away from that position....It seems obvious that we should accept that as Israel was in the process of receiving the revelation of Yahweh, some unavoidable assumptions were made. One of the assumptions was that Yahweh shared the violent attributes of other deities worshiped in the ancient Near east. These assumptions were inevitable, but they were wrong...."

Just to be clear, **Zahnd** is saying these Old Testament priests and prophets and leaders **thought** they were receiving the instruction for these animal sacrifices from God, but they weren't. They were merely **copying** the idolatrous pagan nations around them and **those** nations had these monstrous ideas that the gods demanded these violent, bloody sacrifices to make them happy.

So it was all an honest **mistake**. Problem solved. Pull a verse or two from the Psalms and another from the prophet Hosea and it's all perfectly clear. And all those scores of entire chapters describing and commanding those sacrifices? Well, just a mistake.

Here's the striking feature of today's text. Our writer in Hebrews actually quotes the exact verses from **Psalm 40** that **Brian Zahnd** uses in the above quote to explain away the whole sacrificial system. But there's one important difference. Our writer in Hebrews explains the coming of Christ as the **fulfillment** of those divinely commanded sacrifices rather than recklessly and ignorantly writing them off as a complete mistake. In short, our text today, inspired by the Spirit of God Himself, brilliantly describes the divine purpose in **both** the old covenant sacrifices and the **replacement** of them with the new covenant sacrifice of the Christ.

1) **OUR WRITER HAS BEEN CAREFUL TO REMIND HIS AUDIENCE OF JEWISH BELIEVERS THAT ALL OF THE OLD COVENANT SACRIFICES, WHILE POWERLESS TO CLEANSE, WERE STILL COMMANDED BY GOD**

Hebrews 10:1 - "For since **the law** has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near."

Hebrews 10:8 - "When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt

offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law)....”

Please notice that the last part of that verse - “...these are offered according to the law...” - those words **aren't** quoted from the Psalmist. That's why, in many translations like the ESV they're enclosed in parentheses. In other words, we are meant to see our **writer of Hebrews** affirming and **reminding** that these sacrifices were a part of God's revealed law.

The important question we need to ask is **what law is our writer referring to?** And fortunately we don't need to guess:

Hebrews 9:18-20 - “Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. [19] For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, [20] saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.’”

The law referred to is the law given by **Moses**. And if that weren't clear enough, our writer is careful to include Moses' **explanation** of where this law he was recording came from. **This law about the commanded sacrifices came from God Himself** - “**This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded you” (20).**

I'm sorry. But I am **angered** at the blatant arrogance of ministers standing for God in front of congregations waving their little fingers and saying, “**These words are just a mistake. The inspired text may say God commanded this, but I find it unacceptable. Therefore those words don't count!**”

True enough, there **were** pagan sacrifices offered by the gentile nations. There are references aplenty of sacrifices offered to **Baal** and child sacrifice to **Moloch**. That there have always been so many dark sacrifices offered should be no surprise to any thinking person. The conscience of fallen humanity is such that it will reach out in any way possible for relief. We all know that any of us will be better off before any god if that god is somehow **appeased**. It is the remnants of the image of God in every dark mind that we can't afford to have any god **mad at us**.

But God repeatedly denounced such sacrifices. Israel was punished for even considering them valid. No reader of the Old Testament could miss the clearly marked distinction between these dark offerings and the commanded sacrifices for His people by the law of God.

Now we have to do some hard work with our text. That these sacrifices were commanded by God and not just a cultural mistake is obvious to any person honoring the Biblical testimony. But this makes our text both more **difficult** - and far more **precious**.

2) **HOW CAN THESE SACRIFICES BE COMMANDED BY GOD AND ULTIMATELY REJECTED BY GOD AT THE SAME TIME?**

This seems to be **Brian Zahnd's** problem. His solution is simply to use one set of texts to cancel out the other. The Scriptures offer a far more Christ-honoring explanation:

- a) **The sacrifices were commanded by God to make plain sin had to be judged as well as forgiven.** This whole principle is rejected by **Brian Zahnd** and a host of others and I dealt with it last Sunday morning.

The Biblical text stands firm on this point in total clarity - **Hebrews 9:22** - “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Or, to restate this eternal principle from the new covenant - **Romans 3:26** - “It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

That God is a **forgiver** of sinners through faith in Jesus is easy for Zahnd to see - “**Father, forgive them. They know not what they do!**” But how the death of God the Son makes God **just** - that **God had to display sin as being punished** - **that** Brian Zahnd eliminates from the gospel. That's why Zahnd's gospel is **another** gospel.

- b) **The sacrifices were rejected by God when they were treated as though they alone could produce a righteous standing before a holy God.**

We get early glimpses of this in the old covenant itself. God repeatedly **denounced** the very sacrifices He

commanded when they were used superstitiously, as though they in themselves could produce a righteous standing before God:

1 Samuel 15:22-23 - "And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. [23] For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."

The same idea is conveyed in **Isaiah 1:10-17** and **Psalms 50:7-18**. Sacrifices couldn't be used like a *lucky rabbit's foot*, as though they somehow magically **cancelled out continued defiance and disobedience**.

But there's one more key revelation on the limitation of the old covenant sacrificial system:

- c) **God never intended the old covenant sacrificial system to effect a change in the heart of the one bringing it, and those who had eyes to see it recognized this limitation.**

This is the whole point of the first three verses of this tenth chapter of Hebrews - **Hebrews 10:1-3** - "For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. [2] Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? [3] But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year."

This is exactly the principle King David grasped in those oft quoted words in **Psalms 51:16-17** - "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

David knows that all the sacrifices in the world - sacrifices **commanded by God** as a reminder of the seriousness of sin and the need for a coming Divine Substitute - none of those sacrifices **in themselves** could produce the heart for God David longed for.

So are these sacrifices **commanded** by God or are they **rejected** by God? And the answer is **yes**. The sacrifices are commanded by God - **appointed** by God - for pre-figuring the twin principles of **judgment** for sin and **substitution** in the payment for sin.

But these same sacrifices are **rejected** by God when they are misused as **accomplishing redemption in themselves**. These God-commanded sacrifices are denounced by God when they cease to point to **their fulfillment in Christ** and become **ends in themselves**.

Please think deeply about this. Don't let these words just run past your ears. There are other examples of the same principle in the Scriptures. In exactly the same way the Scriptures **command good works** from followers of Christ. The words of Jesus and epistle after epistle creek under the weight of such exhortations to productive holy living.

But the very same works are soundly **denounced** when they are misused and relied upon for **creating our relationship with Jesus in the first place**.

What's used toward its divinely intended end is praised. What's misused is condemned.

3) **OUR TEXT CLEARLY STATES BOTH WHEN AND WHY THESE OLD COVENANT SACRIFICES WOULD BE REPLACED**

Hebrews 10:8-10 - "When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law), [9] then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He does away with the first in order to establish the second. [10] And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Now think back to one particular portion of **Brian Zahnd's** earlier quote: "...The Old Testament begins with a primitive assumption that God requires ritual sacrifice but eventually **moves away from that position**...."

Seriously? The Old Testament just ***“moves away”*** from those old covenant sacrifices? But is that even in the ball-park of Scriptural teaching? No. Not even close. There’s something more precious and more important happening.

Look carefully again at **Hebrews 10:8-9** - “ ***When he said*** above, ***‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’*** (these are offered according to the law), [9] ***then he added***, ***‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’*** ***He does away with the first*** in order to establish the second.”

First things first. There are three ***“he’s”*** in these verses. Who is this ***“he?”*** And when you back the verses up you will find that the ***he*** is the same ***Messianic “he”*** referenced in ***Psalm 40:6-8***. The ***he*** is ***God the Son at the point of His incarnation***. We’ll look specifically at those great verses in our last point in just a minute.

But right now notice that those old covenant sacrifices aren’t something that, in ***Brian Zahnd’s*** words, the Biblical witness mysteriously just ***“moves away from.”*** Our writer wants to emphasize they were ***“done away with”*** ***by the incarnation and sacrificial death of the Christ - Hebrews 10:9-10*** - “...then he added, ***‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’*** ***He does away with the first in order to establish the second.*** [10] ***And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.***”

Now we’re ready to put all the pieces together. Christ does away with the old legal sacrificial covenant with the coming of ***His own body prepared for sacrifice***. This is done because the divinely commanded ***purpose*** of those old covenant sacrifices was ***completed and fulfilled in Christ Himself and His sacrificial death for our sins***.

Always remember there was a divine ***purpose*** in the removal of those sacrifices. It works like this. Just as there were ***promises made throughout the old covenant preparing the world for placing trust in the Christ before He arrived, those same sacrifices were removed so they couldn’t possibly be a distraction or hindrance to faith in Christ after He died and rose for our redemption***. The removal of those sacrifices is a further evidence of God’s grace in aiding trust in Christ alone.

4) **THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PREPARED BODY FOR GOD THE SON**

Hebrews 10:5-7 - “Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ***‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; [6] in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. [7] Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’***”

The bruised body of the Son was always the plan of Father God. That’s the reason for the obvious contrast in the Father’s pleasure in the two kinds of sacrifice. In ***“...burnt offerings and sin offerings”*** our writer says Father God took ***“no pleasure”*** (6). But in the preparation of the Son we hear the voice from heaven, ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”*** (Matthew 3:17).

But what about this body ***“prepared”*** by divine plan and will? Have you ever wondered ***why*** this particular ***kind*** of human body? God created Adam out of the dust of the earth. Why couldn’t He make a physical body of sacrifice that same way? God apparently created the angels at some point. I assume they weren’t made, like Adam, from the dust of the ground. I assume at some unknown point in time God simply ***spoke them into existence*** like He did the other living things in the creation account. Why couldn’t the Son’s body have been made that same way?

And here’s the precious reason for the body specifically ***prepared*** for the Son. God intended the whole world to see the ***actual physical link with the rest of fallen humanity that already existed***. The body is prepared in such a way that sinners are ***linked*** with the Redeemer and the Redeemer is ***linked*** with the sinners He will physically die to redeem. Please, Please, Please - never let any small-minded writer diminish the unmatched glory of the Word made flesh to die our deserved punishment. That’s what those old covenant sacrifices pictured. And that’s what the cross fulfilled. Anything else is ***another gospel***.