

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

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WHY DID GOD, AFTER COMMANDING THOSE OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES, TELL THE PSALMIST HE DIDN'T DELIGHT IN ANY OF THEM?

Hebrews 9:11-14 - "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) [12] he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. [13] For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, [14] how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

I should first of all establish the premise made in the title of this teaching. Many Christians aren't quite sure what to do with the references in the Old Testament revealing God's lack of pleasure in the old covenant sacrificial system. These references cover a variety of circumstances, from prophetic messianic passages looking forward to the coming of our Lord, to references to God's beloved King David repenting after his sin with Bathsheba:

Psalm 40:6-7 - "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. [7] Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me...."

Psalm 51:16 - "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering."

There are many other such passages but I've chosen these two with specific purpose. The **first** passage deals with those mysterious prophetic words of the Messiah. And they make a sweeping statement - "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted...."

Notice, "...have not delighted"(40:6). **When** was Father God **not** delighted? And these words of God the Son reveal the Father was **never** delighted in old covenant sacrifices and offerings - not **ever**. There are no time limitations on those strong Messianic words - "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted...."

The **second** reference is equally decisive on the issue because it deals with the prayer of repentance of the "**man after God's own heart**," King David. I point this out because we all know there piles of references where the prophets chide Israel for thinking she could just blandly throw around sacrifices while cherishing and persisting in sin. The prophet **Isaiah** is relentless in his rebuke regarding this.

But this **isn't** one of those passages. This is the "**man after God's own heart**" pleading and seeking restoration on God's terms. This is David, under the Spirit's inspiration, revealing **even under the very best conditions** God wasn't taking great delight in the sacrifices and offerings of even the truly contrite in heart.

In other words, there was something in the **very nature of those sacrifices and offerings themselves that failed to please Father God's heart**. And the thing that makes that a bit hard to explain is God Himself is the One prescribing and demanding those sacrifices in the first place. It leaves God appearing somewhat **schizophrenic**.

Our Hebrews text deals with two issues. **First**, it reveals the divine but limited **purpose** of those old covenant ceremonies. It isn't that they accomplished **nothing**. And **second**, it reveals why God never **delighted** in those sacrifices **in themselves** and never **could**. And both of these issues are explained by means of **contrast** with Christ's new covenant priesthood.

1) FATHER GOD'S DELIGHT IN THE SON'S PRIESTHOOD IS ROOTED IN THE ACCESS IT PROVIDED FOR SINNERS

Hebrews 9:11-12 - "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) [12] he entered once for all into the holy places...."

The impact of these words is lost unless we do the mental work of making the comparison with the old covenant system. What did those old covenant sacrifices, both in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, accomplish for the

sinners bringing their offerings? What did those people gain by those sacrifices?

And the simple answer is they **regained access into the tabernacle or, later, the temple**. Their sacrifice offered, they could come again and worship with the people of God without fear of divine judgment. They were no longer banned from the company of those worshipping in the tabernacle.

And that was valuable, as far as it went. Family life and covenant keeping were fortified. The community was bound more deeply together. The law of God was once again heard in a collective fashion.

So, as a result of those sacrifices, the people could have the ban lifted from entering the tabernacle with the other worshipers. But that was it. The people were **treated as clean** rather than **defiled**. In the case of certain sins, the penalty of being exiled to dwell **outside the camp** was lifted. This was the access provided by the sacrificial ministry of the priests.

Good enough, for sure, but it was all **earthly**. They regained admittance to an **earthly tabernacle**. They could gather again with the people, but the people were all those fellow-wanders in the wilderness. You could plot their location on any good map.

The problem, of course, is God never has lodged in any of these earthly places. He **revealed** Himself to His people on these earthly terms for their benefit. But the Scriptures are clear. You can't put God in any earthly box or structure:

1 Kings 8:27 - **"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!"**

Even as Solomon is dedicating the very temple he built for the worship of God he knows God can't live there. You can't get close to God just by physical geography.

Now, keep all of this in mind as we read again the opening verse of our text - **Hebrews 9:11-12a** - **"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) [12] he entered once for all into the holy places...."**

Later in our text our writer will flesh out these details, calling our attention to the blessings of an **"eternal redemption"**(12b). But for now he's laboring to shift our attention to a realm entered by our High Priest - a location - a destination - that **isn't** located in the middle east.

Unlike the old covenant, our Lord's priestly accomplishment provided access for purified sinners that **isn't** in some earthly tabernacle or temple. In fact, His priestly access assures entrance into a destination **"not of this creation"** - **Hebrews 9:11** - **"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)...."**

This is the same access the Apostle Peter describes in glorious detail - **1 Peter 1:3-5** - **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."**

Or Paul describes the same access in **Ephesians 2:4-7** - **"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— [6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."**

Our writer in Hebrews doesn't even bother to take the time to state the obvious. There is no earthly priest who can take us to **"heavenly places in Christ Jesus"**(Eph.2:6). The destination of Christ's priestly work isn't any earthly building. It's heaven itself.

This is the eternal access gained by our Redeemer and High Priest. It is forever unchangeable. Significantly, when the Apostle John sees his vision of the New Jerusalem, he makes it very clear that there is still **no temple there** - **Revelation 21:22** - **" And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the**

Lamb.”

There will never be a return to the old covenant. Not ever. The unchangeable eternally powerful accomplished priestly ministry of our Lord guarantees it.

2) **FATHER GOD'S DELIGHT IN THE SON'S PRIESTHOOD IS ROOTED IN THE NATURE OF THE SACRIFICE HE OFFERED**

Hebrews 9:12 - “...he entered once for all into the holy places, *not by means of the blood of goats and calves* but *by means of his own blood*, thus *securing an eternal redemption*.”

Having contrasted the access given into God's eternal presence, our writer now deepens his analysis of the two different types of sacrifices under the two covenants.

The old covenant was anchored in the blood of “*goats and calves*.” The new is anchored in Christ's *own* blood. And our writer can't leave this without applying the huge difference this makes.

There is no *love* demonstrated in the “*blood of goats and calves*.” No goat ever *volunteered* for sacrifice. There was no *willingness* demonstrated, either in love for the guilty or devotion to the God who had been wronged.

The priests ministering were doing their duty. The penalty was death if they did it improperly. They were Levites and that was their assignment. The priests never knew the names of those sinners who came with their animals.

Our writer can't wait to remind us Christ entered into God's holy presence as our forerunner “*by means of his own blood*” (12). Why did He do this? We *ought* to be asking that question. This is where the contrast between the old covenant and the new shines with piercing vividness.

- a) Christ shed His own blood *willingly* - **John 10:18** - “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord....”
- b) Christ shed His own blood *in love and devotion to Father God* - **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.”
- c) Christ shed His own blood *with a passionate love for sinful mankind* - **Galatians 2:20** - “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, *who loved me* and *gave himself for me*.”

Notice those last words. It's not really enough just to say Christ died for us. Those words are true enough, but they can convey the idea of a cold legal transaction. A debt needed paying. Father God's justice needed satisfying. Jesus was the solution to my sin dilemma.

And then we hear Paul, choking back the tears, “*He didn't just shed His blood for mankind - though that's true enough. No. He loved me. He gave himself for me. The cross of Christ is personal. It's not general. And it is pondering this merciful, transcendent love that has re-oriented my life. His love is magnetic. It draws out mine. The world has no such love for my greatest good. I have joyfully left it behind.*”

Such is the chasm between the sacrifices and the covenants. Christ's sacrifice was *Himself*. He shed His blood *willingly*. He shed His blood in *devotion to Father God*. And He shed His blood *out of His infinite love for me*.

3) **FATHER GOD'S DELIGHT IN THE SON'S PRIESTHOOD IS ROOTED IN THE KIND OF CLEANSING ACCOMPLISHED**

Hebrews 9:13-14 - “For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, *sanctify for the purification of the flesh*, [14] how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, *purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*.”

Central to understanding all of those old covenant sacrifices is the realization they were all **assigned** a value by God they never actually **possessed in themselves**. As shadowy pointers to the genuinely effective work of Christ God **treated them** as though they accomplished something they never **actually accomplished at all**.

Actually, though most people wouldn't bother tracing this fact out, our text gives a crisp illustration of this very point. And it's revealed in those strange words about, **"....the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer...."** (13), and the way this was somehow able to, **"....sanctify for the purification of the flesh...."** (13).

Not many would take the time to deal with all the details, but they're recorded in **Numbers chapter 19**. This chapter deals with the defilement from contact with dead bodies. Either through violence, or accident, or a death in the household - any contact with a corpse made the one who made such contact **"defiled,"** or, **"unclean."**

And there were consequences to this uncleanness. You were banned from entrance into the camp. Think about that. You had no access to friends, to loved ones, or to the tabernacle where the worship of God took place and the sacrifices were offered for the sins of the people. There were serious **effects** to this uncleanness.

Enter the **"ashes of a heifer"** (13). These ashes from the sacrifice of a heifer were kept and mixed with water. The priest would go and wash the defiled one who had touched a corpse and this would accomplish the **"....purification of the flesh"** (13). Fellowship with friends and family were restored. Access to the camp was re-established. And the person would once again enter into the tabernacle worship of a holy God.

Now, no one dares to say it out loud, but almost everyone in this room is thinking, **"This is crazy. Under normal conditions a corpse doesn't actually defile anyone. And even if it did, the blood of a heifer wouldn't actually cleanse anyone in a million years!"**

Truth is, when we see anyone on the news or hear of relief agencies or medical workers helping in the ghastly areas of genocide and starvation in the world we don't think of them as **defiled** people. We think of them as **saintly** people.

So what's going on in this text? And the answer is God is **treating** contact with a corpse **as though** it defiled the flesh. And God is **treating** those ashes of a heifer **as though** they accomplished actual purifying of the contaminated flesh. God is temporarily **assigning a value** to those things they never **actually had**.

And the next big question naturally arises. **Why?** Why is God doing all of this? Well, the truth is all these people really did have a defilement problem. Only it's a contamination they can't actually see. And they do need a cleansing that will come about through the sacrifice of another Redeemer. But that too, for the time, is unseen.

So if you wanted to teach a people who had no New Testament that sin was so serious its wages were death and that such terrible defilement couldn't be **self-removed**. And if you wanted to show how this sin separated from God and all that is holy - how might you go about it?

This is what this - and all other - old covenant sacrifices and washings and ceremonies and days and feasts and altars and regulations and tabernacles were all about. They were all divinely **assigned a temporary value they never possessed in themselves**.

Our writer wants us to think all of this through - but **not** to bring us all in bondage to the old covenant. The big words are the opening words of **verse 14** - **"How much more...."**

And the emphasis here is the sacrifice of our High Priest **has incredible worth and power in and of itself**. It isn't a picture of something else. It **is** the reality to which all those impotent sacrifices pointed. And all of this is bound up in that mysterious phrase used only here by our writer - **Hebrews 9:14** - **"....how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."**

Unlike the old covenant, this isn't God **assigning a value to something it never possessed**. This is **God doing the sacrificing Himself**. This is **God doing the actual work**. And the cleansing provided isn't merely the **outward re-establishing of tabernacle worship and fellowship**. The power of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice **cleanses inside the sinner**. It brings the **spirit of adoption in our minds and hearts**.

That's why, unlike all those old covenant sacrifices, Father God **delights** in the work of His son. This sacrifice **works**

eternally.

Let me try to say it in a way you might remember. ***God is more pleased with the sacrifice of His Son than He is displeased by the combined accumulated sin of the whole world.*** And that's why you can take this hope with you all the way to heaven itself.