

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

## The Cleansing Power of Christ (Hebrews 10:1-18 – Part 2)

*“For by one offering He [Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14).*

Let me remind you that last week we began looking at Hebrews 10:1-18, noting from its thoughts the pursuit of excellence in Christian living. Remember our axiom – <sup>[slide 2]</sup> “if you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” If our following after Jesus Christ and the abundant life He offers seems to short of Biblical expectation, is that because the promise of Scripture is at fault or is it rather because we have sold ourselves out for something less than what God has offered?

The problem is that people tend to be creatures of comfort. We get comfortable with things the way they are and get nervous about change or making efforts to excel for fear of being uncomfortable or of failure. This presents a problem for the Christian because our lives are to be reaching “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Not to oversimplify this statement, but what is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? This call is that we might be truly like Christ – He attitudes our attitudes, His heart our heart, His actions our actions and His words our words. When Romans 8:29 reveals to us God’s purpose for believers as that of being “conformed to the image of His Son” we must be in awe of such a blessed position, that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, might be not only our example for living, but also our goal. Did Jesus pursue excellence in His living for God? Do you suppose that Jesus ever did anything half-hearted, ill-prepared or flippantly? How do you suppose Jesus readied Himself upon entering the congregation of the synagogue? With what kind of fervor might Jesus have sung the songs of praise and worship? With what intent did Jesus go from place to place and speak to people? Perhaps Jesus answered these questions the best with His words as recorded in John 17:4 – <sup>[slide 3]</sup>

***I have glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.***

Oh, beloved, may it become our greatest desire to glorify God in all the work He has given us to do. It is easy to forget that each moment of life is a moment from God to glorify Him. It does not matter whether you be a preacher, a housewife, a student, a blue or white collar worker, retired or otherwise – do you not know that the goal of every believer is to glorify God in all that he or she does – whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). This, my friends, is the pursuit of excellence.

As we have noted, we are called to excel in the Christian life. But what does this mean? What does it mean to pursue excellence? <sup>[slide 4]</sup> Remember that we defined the word “excellence” as “a fact or state of excelling.” To “excel” means, “to pursue the highest standard or level of completion.” Remember as well that the book of Hebrews has been emphatic about proclaiming the truth that Jesus alone is superior over all people and things and that He alone has pursued excellence and has accomplished for sinful man what sinful man could not do for himself. In other words, if Christ has done it all, paid it all, accomplished it all? What is left for us to do? May I remind you again, we must do nothing and everything. Our text here in Hebrews 10 clearly summarized the previous great teaching of this letter – Jesus has done it all and Jesus is to be then our all in all. <sup>[slide 5]</sup> The pursuit of excellence in the Christian life is not ever to be seen as the cause or source of our salvation, for salvation is from the Lord

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alone. Rather, the pursuit of excellence becomes the only reliable marker or assurance that we have been saved. <sup>[slide 6]</sup> We are to pursue excellence in living for Christ not because we must, so that we might be saved, but rather because we can, having the fullness of our salvation secured by Christ alone and so in this sense there is nothing we can do in the pursuit of excellence because we can do no more and certainly no better than what Christ has done, and yet, as we will come to see salvation is not a static thing. Salvation changes the heart of a person causing him to love God and desire with increasing fervency to worship and serve Him. It is in this sense that we then do everything in our pursuit of excellence. We must recognize that while we do nothing to obtain that highest standard, having been bought and brought to that highest standard by the efforts of Christ, we now get to live according to that standard.

Let me illustrate it this way. As citizens of the United States, we get to elect our leaders. This is the privilege of our position – we get to vote. Our right to vote and live in this country the way we do has been given to us by the effort of others – not based upon our own efforts. Now then, if we actually vote, we do not vote in order to secure our citizenship – our voting doesn't make us citizens; but rather we vote because we can and being able to vote is a distinguishing mark of our citizenship. Likewise, by the efforts of someone else, namely Christ, we have been given a privileged position – we get to live for God – we get to pursue excellence. When we pursue this excellence in living for God, such living does not secure our privileged position but rather is the distinguishing mark that we have been given this position by God.

So, then, we know that we are to pursue excellence not because we must, but because we can. Last week I offered you the following outline concerning the text of Hebrews 10:1-18 – saying that the pursuit of excellence is... <sup>[slide 7]</sup>

- I. Not founded in Sacred Practices (10:1-4)
- II. Founded in Single Person (10:5-10)
- III. Founded on Specific Purpose (10:11-14)
- IV. Founded on a Special Promise (10:15-18)

We considered last week the truth that our pursuit of excellence is not founded in sacred practices. In other words, the perfection or completion spoken of in 10:1 – this excellence in living for God, is not found in any sacred practice or religious ritual that man can perform. The law of God, as wonderful and sacred as it was, could not make anyone perfect. It could only remind a person of the guilt of their sin, of their constant need for repeated sacrifices to make them temporarily right with God. If this was the best that the prescribed law of God could accomplish for man, then what folly to think that any religious practices that lie outside of Scripture could make a person right with God.

But this then brings us to our second point of the outline – that our pursuit of excellence is founded in a Single Person – that person being the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

## II. Founded in a Single Person (10:5-10)

*5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. 7 THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO*

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YOUR WILL, O GOD.” 8 After saying above, “SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them” (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

These are most remarkable verses as I hope to reveal but let us note from the beginning here the great emphasis upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Putting these verses into context, Hebrews 10:1-4 reminds the readers that perfection, fullness and completeness – that blessed privilege and position of having everything be right between a person and God, could never come because of a person’s own sacrifice and offering according to the Law. How does a person come to be right with God? How is it that we might pursue the excellence of living in and for the Lord? May I submit to you from Hebrews 10:5-10 that we pursue excellence in living for God by following the Person and Work of Jesus Christ who manifest His Excellency <sup>[slide 8]</sup> in two ways; 1) In His Obedience (10:5-7) and, 2) In His Offering (10:8-10).

## 1. In His Obedience (10:5-7)

The opening words of our text remind us of some important truths concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. We read, “**Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says...**” This is a profound statement that speaks to us of the very incarnation of Jesus Christ. As we will see in a moment, our text attributes the words of Psalm 40, a psalm of David, a psalm written about 1000 years before the first coming of Christ, to Jesus Christ. The phrase, “**when He comes into the world**” perhaps more accurately “as He is coming into the word” points us back to a time prior to His incarnation. In other words, these are words spoken by Christ in eternity, just before the eternal Son of God would become the Son of Man. As Jesus prepares to come into the world, we have this insight, the glimpse into the mind of Christ as to His thoughts. What follows in verses 5-7 is part of a conversation that God the Son has with God the Father. For generations men had been seeking reconciliation with God through the blood of bulls and goats and so, as Jesus readies Himself to enter this world as the Redeemer/Savior, He remarks –

**Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body you have prepared for Me...**

The Son of God notes the futility of the animal sacrifices and says that God the Father has no desire in such things. This word “desired” might be better understood as “will.” God has not willed that man be saved by his own slaughtering of animals. The salvation and perfection of man would not be found in man’s performance of the Law, but rather through Jesus. Notice that Jesus has been prepared or equipped with “a body.” This reminds us once again that what would make Jesus superior to the OT Sacrifices is that His flesh would be human, not that of an animal. The blood of Jesus would be human blood, not the blood of an animal. The author of Hebrew is reminding his readers that Jesus was both God and man and that He needed to be man to provide the necessary sacrifice. In Hebrews 2:14 we read – <sup>[slide 9]</sup>

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**14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.**

So, Jesus obediently took upon His divinity a body of flesh. The Son of God was born into this world and became Jesus, the Son of Man. Why did Jesus need this body? Beloved, as we must come to see, Jesus took a body of flesh in order to accomplish the will of God. And what is the will of God? That by the one sacrifice of a perfect human, the many who believe might be made eternally right with God. That there was one human body prepared for the Son of God stands in stark contrast to the multitude of animal sacrifices that had been offered to temporarily cover the sins of men.

I love the way Vincent, a New Testament Greek Scholar, paraphrases the intent expressed in these verses. He writes from the perspective of the Son of God – <sup>[slide 10]</sup>

*“Thou, O God, desire not the sacrifice of beasts, but Thou hast prepared My body as a single sacrifice, and so I come to do Thy will, as was predicted of Me, by the sacrifice of Myself.”*

You see, God does not delight or take pleasure in the repeated sacrifices of the OT Law. It is not that there was anything wrong with them in themselves, but God’s will for man was greater. God did not simply desire something that would make people tolerable in His sight, rather it would be God’s will to make people lovable in His sight. And since the presence of God can only love that which is excellent, God provides for believing man the perfect life, righteousness and blood of Jesus Christ to cover him.

Note in verse 6 that in no OT sacrifice for sin God has taken any pleasure. The word “pleasure” here literally means “good pleasure” – the highest pleasure. If God takes no pleasure in the efforts of man according to the law, then in what does God take the highest pleasure? We find the most wonderful answer to that question in Matthew 3:17. The scene is familiar, the baptism of Jesus. As Jesus is coming up out of the water, these words of God the Father are recorded - **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”** Beloved, God the Father find the highest pleasure (same word as found in Hebrews 10:6) in His Son, in the work of the Son, in the life of Son, in the Words of the Son. For in the incarnation of Jesus we find that God is well-pleased to become man. In the life of Jesus we find God well-pleased to dwell with man. In death of Jesus we see God is well-pleased to shed His own blood for man. In the resurrection is revealed that God is well-pleased to give life to man. And in the ascension of Jesus into heaven we can rejoice that God is well-pleased to receive humanity into His presence. This is the will of God and we come to see clearly the obedience of Christ in verse 7 when Jesus says, *“Behold, I have come...to do Your will.”* In the familiar words of Philipians 2:5-8 - <sup>[slide 11]</sup>

**5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

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The will of God was not that He would find pleasure in and reckon man right through the spilt blood of countless innocent and unwitting animals, but rather through one time willing and obedient sacrifice of Christ. Jesus obediently submitted Himself to the will of the Godhead, came to this earth, leaving paradise for poverty, a throne of majesty and splendor for a manger and no place to lay His head, so that He, in the offering of His life and His blood, through His sole efforts, might make men and women who believe in Him perfect, complete, wholly enabled to pursue excellence in living obediently for God. And how did Jesus perform this will of God. The idea may seemingly be missing in our Hebrews text, but Psalm 40:8 says, **“I delight to do Your will, O my God.”** As difficult as it must have been for Jesus to leave the glories of heaven only to be mistreated and eventually hung on a cross according to the will and predetermined purpose of God, He yet delighted to do God’s will. As Hebrews 12:2 says, **“for the joy set before Him endured the cross...”**

How little, in comparison, is the difficulty of the road to which God has called His own. Yet, as you live from day to day; as you seek to live for God, do you pursue His will with delight and great joy? I say to you that obedience to God is having joy regardless of your circumstances. Obedience to God is delighting to follow Him even if He leads you through the valley of the shadow of death. Is there something you know is God’s will for you right now, yet you have been unwilling to do it? Maybe there is someone you need to get right with or perform some act of kindness for. Maybe you know you need to confess sin, to give a gift, to fulfill a commitment. Whatever it is, will you allow the Spirit of God to soften your heart so that you might say, “Behold, I come...I delight to do Your will, O my God.” Follow the obedience of Christ in your pursuit of excellence.

## 2. In His Offering (10:8-10)

In verses 8-9 the author is simply referring back to verse 5 showing once again the incompetence of the blood of bulls and goats to accomplish the will of God. But, until the coming of Christ, the “first” in verse 9, a reference to the Law and the will of God under the Law, was all that was available. But after Christ came, the first could be taken away in order to make room for the second, a reference to the fuller and complete will of God for the salvation of man by means of the sacrifice of Christ. This is in essence the entire argument of the book of Hebrews – God’s taking away the symbols and shadows of God’s will as revealed in the first covenant of the Law and replacing it with the real substance of His will as revealed in the person and offering of Jesus Christ.

In verse 10 we read, **“By this will...”** referring to this second will of God which Jesus came to do. The sacred practices of men as performed according to the Law could never accomplish the sanctification of men. This could only be accomplished by Jesus. It is by the will of God in having Jesus be the offering for man’s sin that God could legally, rightly and morally have people be “sanctified.” The idea of the word “sanctified” speaks of God having done something for us, making us holy at a point in time in the past and that position of holiness will continue forever on into the future. The Greek tense of the verb here speak of the sanctification of believers as a permanent and continuous state. The excellence of our salvation does not lie in what we have or can do, but rather in the single person of Jesus Christ. Because of the will of God and the offering of Christ, we have been given the position of being “set apart for God’s purposes and use.”

And how was God’s will accomplished? It was accomplished by the “offering of the body [as opposed to an animal] of Jesus Christ once for all [as opposed to repeated

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sacrifices]. When Jesus died on the cross, it wasn't that He simply made salvation possible for those who would add something to His sacrifice, be it belief or good works. Such thoughts actually give men apportion of the glory that belongs only to Christ. It is only by the offering of Christ that we are sanctified and saved. This should cause us so much rejoicing, that our salvation is not dependent upon what we can or cannot do. For I say again to you that we are to pursue excellence in living for Christ not because we must, so that we might be saved, but because we can, having been perfected, sanctified, cleansed and fully saved by Christ and Christ alone – buy the offering of His body, that is His life and blood alone. And for those who may think that placing the fullness of salvation upon Christ alone would squelch godly Christian behavior, let me close with some words by A.W. Tozer. He wrote – <sup>[slide 12]</sup>

*Let us not imagine that the truth of the divine self-sufficiency will paralyze Christian activity. Rather it will stimulate all holy endeavor. This truth, while a needed rebuke to human self-confidence, will when viewed in its Biblical perspective lift from our minds the exhausting load of mortality and encourage us to take the easy yoke of Christ and spend ourselves in Spirit-inspired toil for the honor of God and the good of mankind. For the blessed news is that the God who needs no one has in sovereign condescension set Himself to work by and in and through His obedient children.*

He goes on to note – <sup>[slide 13]</sup>

*In the meanwhile our inner fulfillment lies in loving obedience to the commandments of Christ and the inspired admonitions of His apostles. "It is God which worketh in you." He needs no one, but when faith is present He works through anyone. Two statements are in this sentence and a healthy spiritual life requires that we accept both. For a full generation the first has been in almost total eclipse, and that to our deep spiritual injury.*

What is our responsibility in the pursuit of excellence? Nothing and everything. *Nothing* in our proclamation that Jesus paid it all – that He alone did it all – and *everything* in God given grace to pursue Christ likeness – not to earn salvation, but to demonstrate the reality that we have been saved. Let us find our pursuit of excellence then in the single Person of Jesus Christ – in Christ and Christ alone.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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