

True Form: Forgiveness in Christ

- 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.
- 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.
- ⁴ For **it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**
- ⁵ **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.**
- ¹¹ And every priest stands **daily at his service**, offering **repeatedly** the same sacrifices, which can **never take away sins.**
- ¹² But when Christ had offered **for all time a single sacrifice for sins**, he **sat down at the right hand of God**,

¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

¹⁶ "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"

¹⁷ then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Hebrews 10:1-18

Forgiveness

FORGIVENESS. IT IS SOMETHING that all of us want to receive, but many find—at least at times—quite hard to give out. Someone has hurt me very badly. Someone has done something so serious to a member of my family that it is basically unforgiveable. Someone is such a totally rotten person, it is beyond the pale to extend forgiveness to them.

I once knew two people who had been in the same church for 30 years. They had not been on speaking terms for most of that time, even though one was the church

secretary and the other was the janitor. You see, a long time ago, one of them did something to the other, and it resulted in a decades long grudge that both of them carried with them, even when they walked through the doors to worship Jesus, receive communion, render service, and offer gifts to God. When I confronted them both on the issue, begging them to extend forgiveness, if not for that person's sake then for their own, my suggestion was scoffed. "I couldn't forgive *her* after what *she* did. It is *her* fault, not mine." It's never "my" fault, is it? This is the hardness of heart that people can have even towards their own sisters in Christ.

But sometimes, it can also be as hard to receive as it is to extend. This is particularly true when a person knows himself to be exceedingly sinful and when he has not found a lot of people willing to extend forgiveness to him. The child who can do nothing right in the eyes of his drunken father; the employee who has been fired a dozen times; the criminal who keeps getting sent back to jail. This often starts with those closest to the person not knowing how to give love. When a person is not loved or does not feel loved by others, then they often do not love themselves. When they do not love themselves, they will not forgive themselves, nor will they know how to receive forgiveness from others

[even God]. I will return to both of these cases at the end of the sermon so that we might learn to think rightly about them.

These thoughts popped into my mind because of the way our passage today ends. Its focus is the ending of the new covenant promise in Jeremiah, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more” (Heb 10:17). Then it has a comment, “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin” (18). Somehow, Hebrews ends up here at the issue of forgiveness. Its focus is on the forgiveness that God extends through Christ. If God is willing to extend forgiveness, then my thought was, why aren’t we? But there is a context to how Hebrews gets here, and unless we understand that context, forgiveness—as good an idea as it is—will at best be something we will understand from the perspective of a self-help seminar. It will be extended and received for good, but ultimately incomplete and even wrong reasons. The world knows something about forgiveness, because it is part of what the conscience puts on a person’s heart when they break the law. But what it knows is nothing in comparison to the biblical doctrine of forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ.

The Shadow of the Law (1-4)

The passage begins by talking about “the law.” The law in mind here is the **cultic or ritual laws of the Levitical covenant**, for that is what he has been and will continue to talk about. He then refers to these laws as “a shadow.” He used this word (*skia*) one other time in **8:5** where the various duties and ministries of the priests serve as “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” The word is used sparingly in the NT. Paul talks about how ceremonial questions of food and drink, festivals, new moons, Sabbaths,¹ asceticism, the worship of angels, and earthly regulations of “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch” are “shadows of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (**Col 2:17**). Notice that all of the things said to be shadows in the law are ceremonial or religious in nature. It doesn’t have moral law in mind at all.

The OT uses the imagery of “shadows” (such as the valley of the shadow of death), but it doesn’t talk exactly like this. Hebrews adds an important word here: **form**. “The law has but a shadow ... instead of the true form.” Curiously, but probably not coincidentally, we do find something very

¹ The word is literally “the sabbaths” (plural), and refers to the various Sabbath days instituted throughout the Levitical law such as the year of Jubilee.

similar to this in **Plato**. Platonic thought tries to understand the world appearances (the *eikon*) in light of things called Forms (the *eidos*).² In one of the most famous things Plato wrote, he discusses the effect of education through philosophy and the lack there of on people via an allegory of a **cave**.

He describes a group of prisoners who have lived their entire lives chained in a huge, dark cave. Their heads have been forced to look only at the wall and there is a light source behind them, so all they can see on are shadows on the wall. This is all they have ever seen or known, and thus they think that the shadows of people are the substance of people, for they cannot even look down and see themselves. They have no idea that there is anything outside of the cave that isn't remotely like those shadows.

Until one day, one of the prisoners is freed. He turns

² **Going Deeper:** Plato used the word *eidos* to describe the Eternal Forms, and *eikon* to describe the copies here on earth. Ironically, the word translated “forms” in the ESV of Heb 10:1 is *eikon*. In Plato and Hebrews, the shadows are *skia*. In Hebrews, there is a “true form” or “very form” (*autos eikon*) and in this way, it seems to me that Hebrews is actually using Plato against himself, with the idea being that the basic Platonic view of forms/matter is onto something important, but the problem is not that the *eikon* are bad or the lowest rung of existence on the hierarchy of being because they are not eternal (Republic 509), because there is an *autos eikon* which is the True Form for which Plato was looking. Importantly, Jesus is the *eikon* of the invisible God in 2Co 4:4 and Col 1:15 (cf. Heb 1:3 where Christ is the *charakter* [exact representation] and *apaugasma* [radiance] of God). Thus, a subversive translation of Hebrews 10:1 in light of Plato might be that the “law is a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true copies of these realities.” “True copies” would be an oxymoron for Plato, and this is why the ESV chooses “forms,” a perfectly good word to use in the context.

around to see the fire source that has lit those shadows. His eyes begin to hurt. It is painful to look into the light of truth. Suddenly, he is dragged out of the cave by force to face the full light of the sun. The prisoner becomes angry. It is even more painful. He is blinded. This is the new reality of the knowledge that he is suddenly seeing. It is overwhelming. He can't take it in.

Slowly his eyes begin to adjust to the light. Ironically, at first he can only see shadows, though this time it is a kind of negative picture of what he has seen his whole life. Then he can start to see reflections, and finally he can see the people and things themselves. Soon he is able to look up into the night sky to see the stars and moon until at last he is able to see the sun itself. It is only at this point, having seen the sun, that he is finally able to think clearly about his life in the cave.

With all of his new knowledge, he would understand that this world he has now experienced was superior to his life in the cave. He is the Philosopher. He would be thankful for the revelation, the ability to understand it, and he would take pity on the others still in the cave. He would want to free them and enlighten them. He should be, what Plato called the Philosopher-King, the one who should be leader.

However, as he re-enters the cave to set others free, he suddenly realizes that he is blinded again, this time by the darkness. This would cause him to cry out. The prisoners would infer from his yelling and cursing that his trip out of the cave had harmed him and that they should not go with him. In fact, Socrates—whom Plato has telling the allegory—concludes that the prisoners would, if able, reach out and kill anyone who tried to drag them out of the cave.³ This is why there are so few Philosopher Kings. They can't take the heat of the prisoners in the cave. This is an allegory of True Forms and the shadowy copies and the Philosopher Kings.

The similarities between Hebrews and the law and Plato and his forms in the allegory of the cave has caught many commentator's attention.⁴ There is no question in my mind that Hebrews is deliberately employing Platonic imagery, but it does so to a very different end. **Whereas** Plato is talking about the physical world as being the “shadows” and

³ My outline of The Cave follows the basic outline on the Wiki article.

⁴ Cf. Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation.*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 61; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Heb 10:1; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 140; Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 270.

the invisible realm of eternal “forms” as being the substance, Hebrews is talking not about the physical world *per se*, but about religious duties that were given in the OT to bring about forgiveness of sins. This is why “the law” is a shadow.

Whereas Plato is talking about our world as we see it with our eyes as the shadows, Hebrews is talking about the timeframe of the OT as the shadows. Plato’s shadows are the physical universe. Hebrew’s shadows are the time of history that was before these “last days.” Hebrews shadows are eschatological, not physical. This is why it continues, “**For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come...**” (**Heb 10:1**). They are a shadow because these “**same sacrifices ... are continually offered every year.**” Hebrews is talking about “time” not “being.”

Finally, **whereas** Plato sees the problem as a lack of education into philosophy, Hebrews sees the problem as a lack of revelation and teaching by the Holy Spirit (the promise of the new covenant) as to what Jesus Christ has done. The “shadow” is cast not by physical substances, but by evil and sin over the course history. It is the “shadow of death,” and ironically, only in the shadow of the cross through the image of God in Christ can one truly understand what reality is all about. You can’t gaze into the

form, even through reason. You have to have the Form of God mediated through the Image of the Son.

Now, sin is what sacrifices came to forgive. Thus, the “**true form**” of these realities is **the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus** into the heavenly temple rather than the shadowy copy of it made by Moses and Solomon in the OT. They are a shadow because they are not able to “**make perfect those who draw near**” (10:1). The problem is ethical, not ontological. The implication is that the true form of these sacrificial shadows in the OT religious worship is able to make people perfect (or “**completely clean**” BBE).⁵

For what reasons? 1. His sacrifice “**ceased being offered**” (10:2), thus showing its eternal value. 2. He “**cleansed**” “**once**” for all the worshiper who draws near through it (10:2). 3. He purified the “**consciousness of sins**” (10:2) among those who have been cleansed by it. Not that we do not know we have sinned any longer; not that we do not feel guilty when we do; but that we know that Jesus’ sacrifice is enough. The OT shadows were constant

⁵ The verb “make perfect” (teleiosai) is an aorist active infinitive. The thought is not that somehow Christians no longer sin, anymore than it is implied that Jesus ever did sin when he was nevertheless “made perfect through suffering” (2:10). That is foreign to the context. Rather, it is that the sacrifice of Christ is now all the legal remedy a person needs to be clean in the sight of the law and the Judge. This is forensic language even as the law-system of animal sacrifices was legal in nature. To put it in Luther’s language, this is what it means to be “justified.”

“reminders of sins” (10:3), because they were offered again and again. We no longer have that reminder, because Christ’s sacrifice is the “true form.” The OT shadows were not able to “take away sins,” and this is why they are shadows. In fact, the language used is powerful. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10:4). Animals as sacrifices were copies of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Copies cannot atone for sins, except in the foreknowledge and forbearance of God who allowed them as pictures of the Coming Sacrifice of Jesus. Only the spilt blood of the God-man could do this. That is why he alone among all religious leaders and all religions of the world is the way to heaven. No one else has ever done what he did.

The Obedience and Sacrifice of Christ Prophesied (5-9)

Jesus’ sacrifice was perfect. It was the True Form. The passage now unfolds four ways that his worship, his offering, and his work make him the Form rather than the shadow. The first, which begins “consequently,” thereby relating it to what has just been said, is because his is the

sacrifice that was prophesied. To have such a thing as this prophesied means that it is infinitely important.

Hebrews quotes **Psalm 40:7-9**. It is a **Psalm of David (vs. 1)**, the King. This is not unrelated to the Philosopher King. The Apostle reads the Psalm properly, as **the words of Christ**. It is a classic psalm of crying to the Lord who hears and answers. But suddenly, **vs. 6** appears, “**Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, ears were dug for me, burnt offering and sin offering you did not demand.**” “Ears dug” seems to be a metaphor for hearing and understanding the gospel, as our ears have holes and what else would God put those there for unless he wanted us to hear and know the truth.

But just here, we have a problem, for Hebrews does not say, “Ears dug” but “**a body prepared.**” This is one of the most puzzling quotations in all of the NT. How do we explain this difference? I’ve read several opinions on the matter. Some say Hebrews is quoting the LXX. The problem is, while most of the LXX copies do read “body prepared,” at least one manuscript reads “ears” rather than “body.” Which is original? Some believe the LXX is giving a “dynamic equivalent.” Some skeptically believe later editions of the LXX changed the language of the Psalm to

reflect Hebrews. Others believe that the Hebrew originally read “body” but was corrupted through a manuscript error,⁶ perhaps even deliberately to obscure Christ. One of the more creative ideas, and plausible given the style of writing of the day, is that Hebrews is using good rhetoric, and for his listening audience creating rhythmic sounds with the various other small but meaningless changes in the text so they could remember it better.⁷ It could be a combination of these or something else.

Whatever the case, we have to keep in mind that **it would be of no value to so radically change a quotation to say what you want it to say when it never said that in the first place.** Therefore, however we make sense of the change, we have to deal with what the author of Hebrews said and trust that he was in fact quoting the Psalm. It seems impossible that he could get away with a misquote. Therefore, the Psalm predicts that a body is prepared “**for me,**” that is Christ, who is speaking, for David never

⁶ Calvin’s commentary has an appendix that gives this view saying that the word “ears” (‘oznayim = אזנים) would have originally been two words “a body you have formed” (‘az = גוה, from gewiya/body (גוהי)), and the adverb “then.” Perhaps the Jews did this to intentionally obscure the testimony of Scripture respecting Christ. John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 390.

⁷ See the fascinating article, Karen H. Jobes, “Rhetorical Achievement in the Hebrews 10 ‘Misquote’ of Psalm 40,” *Biblica* 72 (1991): 387-96. http://www.karenjobes.com/images/Biblica_Rhetorical_Achievement_in_Heb_10.pdf

sacrificed his own body! This prepared body is in the middle of two phrases of sacrifices and offerings, meaning that **his own body is to be a sacrifice** as well.

This sacrifice of his body is in the larger context of “**doing [God’s] will**” (**Heb 10:7**) that is **obeying God’s law** to the letter, and we have seen how Hebrews says that Jesus is the Perfect Man. But curiously, this was also prophesied of Jesus, not only in this quote from the Psalm, but “**in the scroll of the book.**” Therefore, the Psalm itself seems to be reaching back into the older Scripture. This is probably referring to prophecies of Christ as the obedient King in the Torah (cf. **Dt 17:15-20**, esp. **vs. 19**).

But the focus is on the sacrifice and that was done by Christ *the Priest*. Therefore, he comments on the prophecy in the Psalm saying that when it says God does not delight in sacrifices—these are offered according to the law (**Heb 10:8**). In other words, Jesus’ sacrifice was done obediently **according to priestly law**. But, because he has done his work perfectly, in accordance with prophecy, since he has “**come to do your will**” (**10:9**), “**He does away with the first [covenant] in order to establish the second**” (**9**).

Perhaps the most amazing part of all this, and all of it is amazing, is how Hebrews opens the prophecy discussion

saying that this was all said *by Christ*. “He said” it “when he came into the world” (Heb 10:5). So maybe Jesus himself said this as he applied the Psalm to himself as he was prone to do and this is the only record we have of it. Jesus knew what the Scripture said to him. Jesus did what the Scriptures said of him. And he did these things because he is the True Form, not the shadow of the sacrifices that could not take away sin.

Psalm 40	Psalm 40 LXX	Hebrews 10
^{7a} Sacrifice and offering you do not desire	Sacrifice and offering you did not desire	^{5b} Sacrifice and offering you did not desire
^{7b} Ears were dug for me	Ears (<i>hotia</i>) ¹ you prepared for me	^{5c} But a body (<i>soma</i>) you prepared for me
^{7c} Burnt offering and sin offering you did not demand	Burnt offering and sin offering you did not demand	⁶ [with] Burnt offerings and sin offering you were not pleased
^{8a} Thereupon I said, ‘Behold! I come’	Then I said, “Behold! I have come”	^{7a} Then I said, “Behold! I have come”
^{8b} In the scroll of the book it is written about me	In the scroll of the book it is written about me	^{7b} In the scroll of the book it is written about me
^{9a} To do your will, my God, I desire	To do your will, my God, I desire	^{7c} To do, O God, your will
^{9b} And your law is within me	And your law is in the middle of my belly	
h translations of the Greek LXX say “body,” even		

The Obedience and Sacrifice of Christ Typified (10-11)

The second way Christ's sacrifice is the True Form is because **his was typified in OT sacrifices**. If all OT sacrifices pointed forward to One Sacrifice, then that one Sacrifice is the True Form. This is found in the connecting verses: **Hebrews 10:10-11**. They begin "And by that..." I look at these two verses as Jesus now being typified in the shadowy work of the OT priesthood. We have been looking at the idea of types. In fact, speaking of "shadows" is the language of typology. A type is a shadow of something coming down the pike.

Thus it says, "by that [sacrifice done in perfect obedience] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (**Heb 10:10**). The Form does something that the shadows can't do. "Sanctification" *here* does not refer to the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives as he conforms us more and more into the image of Christ. This is **not "progressive sanctification," but "definitive sanctification."** It is the one-time setting apart as holy that God does when he justifies sinners. We "have been sanctified" is a perfect passive

participle, which simply means that it is a done fact. It is not ongoing. This occurs by the “will” (*thelema*) of God in Christ who did God’s will (*thelema*, vs. 9). It is God’s will to sanctify his people who trust in Christ alone. Can anyone thwart that will of his?

The typology then becomes clear in vs. 11. “Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” His work is a shadow on the wall of the cave. The Form is the work of Christ that was done in heaven. The OT priestly shadow points us to Jesus the Priest. His work could not take away sins. Jesus’ work does.

The Obedience and Sacrifice of Christ Carried out (12-13)

The third way Christ’s sacrifice is the True Form is because of how his work was carried out. Verses 12-13 explain this. They begin “but ...” Again, the verses build upon the previous. “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.”

“Sitting down” is a theme from **Hebrews 1:3** (which also has the “image” language in it; see above). It comes from that now well played Psalm in Hebrews: **Psalm 110:1**, the great Psalm of the Priest-King. Why bring it up again? Again, the connections with Plato’s cave become apparent. But how?

Many Christians are pretty good at seeing the logical connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus. But this deals with the death and *ascension* of Jesus. Many of us really have no idea what to do with the ascension. But the ascension is where Jesus begins **his rule** in heaven. It is where he starts carrying out his dominion. It is always cosmic in scope. Everywhere it is talked about, it has both earth and heaven in mind. Jesus’ enemies are not just men, but also fallen angels and demons. They tried to defeat his mission on earth, but stumbled over the very thing they thought had brought them victory: His death. Now that he is seated at the right hand of God, he is shown to be their superior and they must bow before him. Again, this is about ethics and sin vs. righteousness. Therefore, the True Form sits enthroned in heaven above, high and exalted for every person to see and behold. To get out of this cave, you have to understand the person and work of Christ and how he is

infinitely superior to all that came before him. As a pastor friend of mine said to me this week, “Jesus is the ultimate philosopher-king because he is pure, noble, and true in every way AND has descended into the cave to rescue others AND rules and reigns for all eternity.”⁸

The Obedience and Sacrifice of Christ—Its Effects (14-18)

The **fourth way** his sacrifice is the True Form is because of **the effects that it had upon God**. We have seen one of those effects. God has “sanctified” people through his sacrifice. This is now elaborated in the remaining verses. “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). This time “sanctification” is viewed as **ongoing or progressive**. It is now a present passive participle rather than a perfect passive.

Hebrews knows that we are in need of ongoing sanctification. True Christians are aware that they still sin and need ongoing sanctification. But far too many of them root this in their own works. I’m not saying that we do not cooperate in this sanctification and do good works, but I am

⁸ Thanks to Nick Kennicott.

saying that in the Bible, this sanctification is not rooted in those good works. It is rooted in a definitive sanctification that you did not cooperate with—that is the sanctification we have already seen that is past tense. This is why it says he “has perfected.” This is the grounding of progressive sanctification.

There is maybe no place that preachers in Christianity get more confused and confuse others more than this one. Far too many beat people down with the law in this regard as they try desperately to help the Christian be sanctified. Some do it through a bully pulpit. Some do it through systematic theology (just “know” the “right things”). Some do it by trying to be a kinder Moses’ to the people. Some do it by being nothing more than self-help gurus. But however they do it, this is a plague in God’s church that must end.

How many sermons have been preached where at the end of the day, it was up to you to make yourself better? You may hear about Jesus, but what you are left with at the end is yourself. He is not the “End” that you exist to worship. He exists to help and please you. How many sermons at the end of the day are about you? How many sermons have left people feeling beat down knowing that they couldn’t possibly do what they are told to do, even

while what they are told you to do is actually less than what the Bible tells you to do? It is the Galatian problem of beginning with the Spirit and ending with the Law. And it is a bewitching, evil thing. There is nothing more frustrating in all the world to me personally than hearing the profound confusion of law and gospel from a church pulpit.

Some of you may wish I did more of it. I hope you don't. I refuse. I will not ground your sanctification in your own hands, though I absolutely believe you are responsible for it. I greatly desire that you know that it is in God's hands. Hebrews is not some victorious Christian sermon, some fundamentalist bible-thumping bash-o-rama. It is Christ centered to the core. It roots ongoing sanctification, not in your cooperation, but in God's having perfected for all time those who are being sanctified by a single offering. If you don't get this, you are living in the cave.

Again, it isn't that you are literally made perfect, as even this verse says that we are still being sanctified. But it is that at one moment in time, each Christian is counted as perfect. When is that time? In eternity past? No. You were not even born. At the cross? No, you were not even born. At your birth? No, you are born wicked and dead in your sins. You are perfected **at the moment you trust in Christ by faith.**

Hebrews is about to launch into an entire chapter on that subject.

But doesn't it say we are perfected by a single offering? Yes, but not at the moment the single offering was offered. Rather, God applies this single offering to your account when, and only when, you trust in Christ. It is the single offering that is the means by which you are perfected. But again, not made perfect, for that makes no sense of anything Hebrews has said or will say. Instead, it is the perfection that comes by the washing of regeneration, union with Christ, and being viewed "in Christ" instead of by yourself. It is a legal, forensic "not guilty" perfection. It is a passing out of death to life. It is being counted as righteous. It is, in a word, **forgiveness of sins**.

Suddenly, the way we began the sermon comes back into view. At this point, the **second effect** is stated. "And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,' then he adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more'" (**Heb 10:15-17**). Again, he quotes Jeremiah and his new covenant prophecy. Again he reminds us that God is the one who writes the law

on our hearts, and he does it by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit now teaches us God's law.

Beloved, Christians can't help but want to obey the law. That is why, while I certainly need to remind you of God's law and help bring conviction of your own sins as you break it, I don't have to crack the whip of God's law over your back each week. That is the Holy Spirit's job and he does it a lot better than I can. If you think that is my job, then either you aren't listening to the Holy Spirit, or you don't know him. You need to understand what it is saying now.

The focus is now on that last promise, the climactic promise of the new covenant. **Forgiveness**. “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin” (18). What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is not “forgetfulness.” But neither does it slither in tall grasses waiting to strike the next time you blow it, only to bring up a past offense that was never really forgiven. Forgiveness is not injustice. It doesn't mean “I'll let bygones be bygones.” It doesn't mean, “I'll just suck it up.” It doesn't mean, “I'll not hold that against you begrudgingly.” This is not forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not holding a person's guilt against them. Ever. Even though they are guilty. Forgiveness is able to do

this because justice has been met already. God would not forgive anyone if the True Forms had not happened in heaven to bring satisfaction for sin. God hates sin, but in Christ and his Offering, sin is forgiven. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” In Christ, God is not counting men’s sins against them, because he counted their sins on Christ’s own body. He died as a substitute so that God might forgive you.

The Obedience and Sacrifice of Christ—Its Implications

What are the implications of this? Of course, there are many. First, until you internalize the work of Jesus Christ and trust him by faith, you have no true grounding for either receiving or granting forgiveness. Not that you may not be able to, but you won’t have an eternal reason to. People do not know how to forgive themselves because they do not really believe that God in Christ has forgiven them. People do not forgive others because they do not really believe that God in Christ has forgiven—either your or them. This is love: Not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins

(1Jn 4:10). It isn't my love that comes first; it is God's love. My love is fickle, unforgiving, duplicitous, double-minded, easily changes its mind. God's is not like this. His love is the grounding of forgiveness. Christ's work is the grounding of his forgiveness. It resides fully in himself and not in anything about you or I. That is why it is pure, undefiled, perfect, holy, wonderful, and amazing.

Now, if I understand what my sin cost Jesus, and if I understand that he forgives me anyway, how on earth can I not forgive others of anything they do? To do anything less, to hold a grudge, to not extend forgiveness, to hate a person in my heart—why it is a repudiation and a denial of everything Jesus has done for me. This is why the NT so strongly tells us that if we do not love the brothers, we do not love God. Forgiveness is perhaps the supreme act of love.

A refusal to forgive someone else is a refusal to look at how severely I myself have brought Jesus to death on the cross, for he died for *my* sins. But what if someone doesn't ask for forgiveness? Well, at this point we have to understand the difference between a heart of forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus prayed to the Father for forgive even those who put him to death. “Father, forgive them.”

Forgive who? Just his disciples, or also Pilate and Herod, and everyone? To forgive someone is to be completely free of the anger and rage that their sin has brought to you. It is for your benefit more than theirs. In this way, we must also forgive even ourselves of our sins, in order to truly be free in the way Christ has set us free. It is as much a sin not to forgive yourself as it is not to forgive others.

But not everyone will be reconciled to God. Paul's ministry was a ministry of reconciliation between man and God. We read, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2Co 5:18-20). Do you hear the forgiveness there—not counting men's sins against them? Yet, not all are reconciled to God. You must be reconciled to God. When you are, you must not count other men's sins against them. Forgive us our debts *as we forgive our debtors*.

We come to church to worship. Jesus reminds us that we come to worship by offering gifts. But he says, "If you are

offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23-24). Do not come to worship the Holy One angry with your brother. Learn what it means to forgive. Do not come to worship the Prince of Peace with hatred in your heart for your neighbor or yourself. But learn what it means that the True Form has done away with the shadows of the sacrificial laws. Come out of the cave and into the light of the Sun of Righteousness. May he rise in your hearts. May you find refuge in the shadow of the wings of the Almighty. May he bore a hole in your plugged ears. May his body prepared when he came into the world be all you need to know the love and forgives of God, and to learn to extend it to others.