

# The Earthly Ministry of the Old Covenant

- <sup>1</sup> Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.
- <sup>2</sup> For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place.
- <sup>3</sup> Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place,
- <sup>4</sup> having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.
- <sup>5</sup> Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.
- <sup>6</sup> These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties,
- <sup>7</sup> but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.
- <sup>8</sup> By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing
- <sup>9</sup> (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,
- <sup>10</sup> but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

- <sup>11</sup> 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)
- <sup>12</sup> 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.
- <sup>13</sup> 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,
- <sup>14</sup> 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."

Hebrews 9:1-14

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## Modern Anti-Worship

WE HAVE REACHED THE HEART AND SOUL of the book of Hebrews. We are now firmly in the middle of several chapters explaining why the new covenant is better than the old and why this matters. In the beginning of chapter 9, the focus turns to [the place of worship](#). In olden days they were called "[temples](#)." Hebrews has in mind the predecessor: the [Tabernacle](#). Before digging in, we need to relocate ourselves in the ancient world and brush off the chronological snobbery of modern people. Otherwise, we

will truly not be able to understand how radically different the world of today is than yesterday and why it is so.

It really is difficult for modern people to wrap their minds around just [how different religious life](#) in the ancient world looked in literally every culture on planet earth. I'm not talking about common life. If you were a commoner, you would have lived outside the city, owned a small plot of land, and lived in a modest little hut of grass or clay. Your daily activities may have included raising your animal, farming your wheat, laying your bricks, carving your stone, catching your fish, enlisting in the military, eating your breakfast, sowing your clothes, raising your children, and other mundane activities. Things are not much different here than they are today.

Rather, I'm talking about religious life. First, you would know and understand that while you could pray to God (or the gods) at home or on the job (for pagans, it would be through an idol), if you wanted to worship that deity, you would have to go into the city. [Cities](#) served three main functions in the ancient world. They offered [protection](#), they housed the [elite](#) classes (consisting of nobility, priests/priestesses, free commoners, clients of the nobility,

craftsmen, temple slaves, and others associated with temple work), and they were built entirely around the temple/ziggurat complex which was the heart and soul of the city. Cities were the religious centers.

Depending upon where you lived in the world outside of Israel, many cities had their own gods. But every city had its temple. The biggest cities had the biggest and most important of the temples. These temples were thought to be the houses of gods. Israel was no different. “You shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there” (Deut 12:5). It is truly remarkable that every single place on planet earth had this idea that gods dwelt in temples, and that you had to come to the god to worship. This worship involved everything from simple grain offerings and dedicated, orderly, daily priestly activities in the temple precinct, to darker things such as temple prostitution and human sacrifice.

Perhaps no culture embodies (or disembodies as it were) this macabre spectacle as that of the Aztec Empire at the time Cortez came rolling in from the sea. It is said that 500 years ago in the re-consecration of the Great Pyramid of

Tenochtitlan that 80,400 prisoners were sacrificed on the pinnacle of the pyramid over a four-day span. This would mean there were 14 human heads rolling down the dual serpentine “stairways to heaven” per minute—every minute—24 hours a day. Such carnage is almost impossible envision. Yet, we know that **human sacrifices** were offered all around the world in temple ceremonies just like this one. But why, and why here?

The answer to “**why**” is simply that the belief was that the gods (the True God did detested human sacrifice for reasons we will see later) demanded blood as payment for their protection and as atonement for their sins. The more appeasement that was needed or the greater the worship, the higher blood price that was exacted, with humans being the top of the chain.

The answer to “**why here**,” is that the temple was sacred space that connected heaven and earth. They built their temple complexes to image the stars. They built their buildings to replicate spiritual realities. They had priests who would mediate between the worlds. If you wanted to truly worship, if you really wanted God’s favor, you had to go to the place where he dwelt.

Fast forward to today. We are Modern Man. We are Evolved Man. We are Rational Man. We are Scientific Man. We are people who no longer believe in superstitions, in religion, and in gods. “Imagine there’s no heaven, it’s easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky. Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too.”

Sacrifices are gone. Temples are no more. We have done away with our childish need for deity. We are materialists who believe in only what we can see and test, and we have set aside the old ways for enlightened reason and scientific sophistication. Or have we?

Maybe all we have done is exchange one building for another. Take for example the new multi-billion dollar sports complexes that are popping up all over America. They are the new centers of our new city anti-religious lives. Around them, industry and residential booms, giving new life to dying neighborhoods. Modern craftsmen of commerce offer pleasures up and down the streets. Enter the hallowed grounds on sports day. Come and buy your sacred hotdog and beer. Arrive early for your announcements. Join in the invocation of the heroes as their names are called one by one. Shout with joy in cheers of celebration. Find your

seat, then stand for the first stanza of the liturgical songs of country and team. Safety is found here, among your comrades inside the walls. Watch as a new drama unfolds before you. Participate a sacrifice of another kind, the sacrifice of bodies in the heat of passion. Watch and listen to the modern priestly mediation on your behalf: the replay and the broadcaster. Time out! Time for the sacred creeds to be chanted back and forth across the stadium to one another. And you think we aren't a religious people? We have just replaced one kind of God for another.

God made people religious. And of course, while you can go to a football or baseball game and not worship (and can do the very same thing in a church), it goes without saying that where a culture's money is, that is what it worships. Where a culture's heart is, that is what they worship. It is easy to pick on sports, but the same could be said of many things these days: malls, movie theaters, political rallies, you name it, and it wouldn't be hard to replicate my analogy.

While Modern Man thinks that he has gotten rid of God, the truth of why things look so different from those overtly religious sacrificial temples is a very different story. This is

the story of Hebrews 9.

## The Holy Place and the Priests

Though people don't like this thought, the fact of the matter is that **all worship follows preset order and forms**. We saw this even with the idea of a ball game. Even the most chaotic, anti-ritual, anti-liturgical churches follow this pattern. Their pattern just happens to be the weekly practice of chaos or anti-ritual ritual and anti-liturgical liturgy that is the same from week to week. God designed it this way in part because of how he made human beings as worshippers with the need for regularity and familiarity, and in part because there is a way to approach him and a way (or many ways) not to.

“Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness” (**Heb 9:1**). With this verse, the Apostle dives into **some of the specific religious forms of the old covenant**. The phrase “first covenant” was introduced in the law chapter where it was contrasted with the “new covenant” that is made in Christ. Hebrews clearly has in mind the religious temple regulations



that are found throughout the Levitical covenant in the writings of Moses.

He divides his discussion into **two sections**. The first (**Heb 9:1-5**) deals with the furnishings of the tabernacle. The second (**6-11**) talks about the ministries of the priests and the high priest. If you were going to preach a sermon on these things, how would you craft it? What would be the point that you would make? Would you talk about the law? Would you talk about being a good person? Hebrews telegraphs its purpose in **vv. 9** and **11**. He says that these things are “**symbolic for the present age.**” That makes his focus on eschatology. Would you have thought about eschatology in preaching these things? Then he says, “**Christ appeared**” as the fulfillment “**of the good things**” that have come. In other words, his reason for talking about the furnishings of the tabernacle is to point you to the Lord Jesus.

As we look at the passage, the first thing we want to do is consider the furnishings of the tabernacle. He begins in the “**tent**” (**9:2**), which had three things in it as Hebrews describes it. There is a **lampstand**, a **table**, and the **bread of Presence**. “Tent” is what he called it in Ch. 8. This refers to

the Tabernacle. When people normally talk about the tabernacle, they talk about three sections, but Hebrews has in mind only two. He does not describe the courtyard with its bronze altar and bronze laver and east door.

Instead, he is focused, literally, on the tent itself. The tent had two sections. The “first”<sup>1</sup> is called the “**Holy Place.**” Hebrews talks about three things being here. The first is the **lampstand**. The lampstand was made of gold. It had seven lamps on it, which when lit would have illuminated the entire room, which was also plated with gold. We we have seen, these things are symbolic, and there is plenty of symbolism in the lampstand. It was a light “**all night**” (**Ex 27:30**), thus reminding Israel that God is the light-giver.<sup>2</sup> Its seven lamps may represent the seven visible planets, also going back to God as the creator. The lampstand also looked like a tree, with blossoms on it, and thus takes the mind back to the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life, which Jesus reopens the way to in Revelation (**2:7; 22:2**).

Two other things are worth mentioning here. The first

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<sup>1</sup> The ESV has “section.” This is an added English word. It could just as well be “room,” given what he is talking about. But the Greek literally just reads “the first.”

<sup>2</sup> Some of these are from Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses.* Others are from Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus.*

is that Revelation specifically links the seven lamps to the seven-spirits of God (the perfect Holy Spirit; Rev 4:5), which is burning before the throne of heaven. Thus, the lamp is symbolic of heavenly things. Finally, the Scriptures link the lampstand direction to Jesus—who is the “sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2). Isaiah 11:1ff says that out of the stump of Jesse will come a Branch who will have the seven-fold Spirit of God resting upon *him*. Then Revelation again discusses the seven eyes (same language as 4:5) of the Spirit in the risen Lamb of God who is sent out to judge the earth. The lampstand is thus a symbol of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It pointed people to them.

Second, there was a table. This table was on the right side of the room, across from the lampstand, which shown light upon it. Third, upon this table is the bread of the presence. The “Presence” is the presence of God himself. This table was a covenantal table and it represented God coming to the Israel in friendship and personal communion through a holy, covenantal meal. In Ex 24:9-11 for example, the seventy elders with Moses and Aaron “saw God” and ate with him (even as Abraham may have done with Melchizedek-Christ in Gen 18). Which Person do you

suppose they saw and ate with?

If we move down to the second section which talks about the priests, we find that the Holy Place discussed in **Heb 9:2** corresponds to **9:6**. “These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties.” The priests had to regularly attend to the lamp, constantly replacing the wax and wick. Relighting the candles. They had to change out the showbread on a regular basis. They were allowed to enter through a curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Courtyard. There were very specific commands that had to be obeyed here, as Aaron’s son Nadab and Abihu found out. For when they offered “**strange fire**,” which the Lord had not commanded them to offer, fire from heaven came out from the Presence and consumed them both, and they died. This was the seriousness of the priestly work of the Holy Place, priestly work which represented heavenly work and which had to be done perfectly.

This reminds me of the time when David went in to get some showbread for his starving army, though he was not a priest. When people talk about doing the law perfectly, they often only go to the letter, and not to the spirit of the thing.

But the spirit of the thing allowed David to enter because he was God’s chosen king and was about to starve to death. Jesus tells us what the spirit is. “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matt 12:7). That is why David was allowed to enter. The Son of man then says that something greater than the temple is here—and the context again is the showbread (Matt 12:6).

## The Most Holy Place and the High Priest

Hebrews moves now from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place. It says this is behind the “second curtain” (Heb 9:3). The second curtain implies a first, which is the one the priest entered through from the courtyard. The curtain had the obvious role of separating space from space. In temple theology, sacred space is everything. As a person moves inward, they come to progressively more sanctified space. The courtyard was, in a sense, for all the Jews (by the time of the temple, there was even a fourth space where Gentiles could walk). We have seen that the Holy Place is for the priests. The Most Holy Place is the most sacred and holy place in all the world in the OT. It is so holy that in the

corresponding part of Hebrews 9, “only the high priest goes” here, “and he but once a year” (Heb 9:7). Why is this place so holy?

We get the answer when we start to think about what is in this place. Hebrews is a bit confusing here. Clearly, the furnishings of this space are discussed in 9:4-5. But there is a question about the first thing mentioned. “Having the golden altar of incense...” Much discussion exists over this phrase. The problem is that the altar of incense is actually in the Holy Place, not the Most Holy Place. What accounts for this language? Perhaps the author made a mistake. This is a good liberal answer. Perhaps he is just generalizing. After all, he has missed the courtyard altogether, though he will mention things that must take place in the courtyard a little later. This is possible.

A different solution is that the word “having” (active present participle) does not refer to space, but to use, so that it could be translated “associated with it” or something like that.<sup>3</sup> The idea would be that Hebrews is not saying that the altar of incense is *in* the Most Holy Place (space), but that it

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<sup>3</sup> David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 460.

has a *function that pertains to* the Most Holy Place (use), which was true. How so?

First, **the altar of incense**, which was the thing that Nadab and Abihu apparently lit in an unholy manner, was directly in front of the curtain. It was thus the closest thing in the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place. When its smoke would rise, it would fill the whole room like a cloud, and thus was an image of the Holy Spirit who descended upon the tabernacle in days of old in a cloud. It was also from this altar that the High Priest would bring incense into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (**Lev 16:12**).<sup>4</sup> If he is bringing in incense to the MHP, then it the censor obviously has a function in that place.

Thus, whenever there is a reason to think that Scripture is contradicting itself, always look for alterative explanations before coming to that conclusion. You will always find that there are other, good solutions. A problem with Liberal theology here is that they are too lazy to do the work, and they too often default to the “contradiction” view because it suits their theology. Pray and offer up the

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<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 200-01.

incense of prayer (**Rev 5:8**) as you study and work, and God will give illumination through his word.

At any rate, as the High Priest walked in, he would find himself inside a brilliantly shimmering golden room (**Heb 9:4**). The gold represents the incorruptible heaven where God dwells. As he looked before him, he would see that most amazing of ancient artifacts—the **ark of the covenant** (**9:4**). I've seen this verse used in trivia games, though there is nothing trivial about it: What was inside the ark of the covenant? The Nazis wanted to know and so looked inside and were melted like wax, but Indiana Jones closed his eyes and was saved. But, of course, that's just Hollywood. Hebrews tells us what was inside the ark.

First, there was a **golden urn** that held **the manna** (**Ex 16:33**). While there was showbread in the Holy Place, God miraculously preserved his miracle food from heaven from spoiling, and Moses had taken a portion of it to save throughout the generations as a witness in the Most Holy Place. It came raining down upon the grumbling people in the wilderness as a blessing from God. It was sweet to the taste, but they had no idea what it was, so it was named “manna,” meaning “what is it?” The Psalms call the manna



“the bread of angels” (Ps 78:25). Of course, Jesus says that he is bread come down from heaven (John 6:41), and if anyone eats this bread he will not die. Thus, again, we see Christ represented in the imagery of the tent.

The second thing here (see Num 17:10) is Aaron’s rod that budded. The rod that buds is the counterpart of the lampstand, and both represent almond trees (Ex 25:33-34; Num 17:7). Aaron’s staff became a serpent and swallowed up the serpentine staffs of the Egyptians (Ex 7:12). Aaron’s staff turned the water of the Nile into blood (7:19). It made frogs (8:5) and gnats (8:16) appear on the land. And of course, it budded into almond flowers in the Korah rebellion, when those sons of Levi dared to challenge Moses and Aaron before the Lord.

It is a curious thing that you therefore have food in both spaces and a tree in both spaces. If we had time, we could talk about how the Garden of Eden was a temple. In fact, the tabernacle and temple of Israel were patterned after the Garden, which is why they have motifs of animals and flowers throughout the embroidery and engraving. While the lampstand would represent (probably) the Tree of Life, Aaron’s rod represents God’s law being obeyed or the Tree

of the Knowledge of Good and Evil taken rightly. This tree belongs to Wisdom (Dt 4:5-6; Ps 19:7). Wisdom is a separate Person from the Father in the Godhead, a master craftsman working beside “him” at creation. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col 2:3).

Thus, the rod is right next to the “tablets of the covenant” (Heb 9:4), the third and final thing in the ark of the covenant. These tablets are the Ten Commandments, and they were kept in the ark, under two things. The first is the “cherubim of glory” (5) and the second is the “mercy seat” (5). Both of these things refer to the lid of the ark of the covenant, and this in turn represents heavenly things where the cherubim surround the glory of God’s throne in the heavenly temple. The mercy seat would then be the throne of God inside the Most Holy Place. The Lord himself sits upon this place inside the Most Holy Place. This is his throne room. He literally dwells there as the Angel of the LORD in the midst of Israel. This is why it is the Most Holy Place. Here, the King of the universe sets up his residence in the OT camp of Israel, to dwell among them, to give his law to them, to generate life in them, to feed them with the

bread of heaven. Can you see, then, how these things all point to the Lord Jesus Christ? These things are the Shadows of Christ in the Law of Moses, as Vern Poythress puts it in his book title.

It is into this place that one priest, one time a year enters. This is the high priest of Israel, one of the sons of Aaron who served as high priest in that particular year. Why did he enter? There was only one reason. He had **to make atonement for sins**. You see, the sin of Israel, even though it never literally entered his place, still affected it greatly. God cannot dwell in the midst of sinners, even though God chose to dwell in Israel. Therefore, atonement had to be offered to cleanse the place from the vile, putrefying black ooze of sin.

It says that the high priest enters, but “**not without taking blood**” (**Heb 9:7**). He gets this blood from the Day of Atonement sacrifice that was offered in the courtyard and brought inside the tent. He offered it, it says, “**for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.**” Hebrews says something here that is not said in the OT Day of Atonement. It talks about **unintentional sins**. Why?

Perhaps you remember the story of **Martin Luther**. As a monk, this man was plagued with fear over his sins. He

would spend literally hours in confession with his priest. It got so bad that his priest finally told him to come back when he had something important to confess. But to Luther, every sin was important. He was under such guilt that he had to think of every single thing he had done and confess it, otherwise, he feared that God would judge him. This is the tyranny of living under law. Some people think it would be the deliberate sins that would be harder to atone. Luther was worried about those he couldn't even remember doing.

Luther has it more right, because it is easy to confess the sins you know about. But what if you forget a sin or don't even know that you are sinning by breaking God's law in some way? Each week, we confess that we have sinned not only in what we have done, but in what we have *not done*. How many things are there that we have not done as we ought? These include caring for the poor and widow, looking after the orphan, feeding the hungry and giving the thirsty something to drink. Some people, many who are not even Christians, often go off to things like the peace corps in order to do these very things in order to appease a guilty conscience just like Luther had. The people of Hebrews, as we have seen, are guilty of committing sins, not that are

grave apostasy and giving up the faith, but of simply failing to believe God and rest in his promises. Perhaps, then, Hebrews puts the wording in this way in order to help them know that the Day of Atonement was there to cover even unintentional sins, which the law does talk in about in other places as being different from intentional sins (cf. **Num 15:22-31**).

You might think that this would actually work against his point that Christ and his new covenant are greater than the old covenant. In actuality, it strengthens his cause. By helping the people know that the old covenant actually provided a way to have all of your sins covered, something that Martin Luther could not conceive of under the Roman System that had forgotten justification by faith alone, Hebrews prevents a straw-man from being erected. The point is, even though the old covenant could cover all of their sins, the new covenant and its High Priest are even better!

## **Tearing Down of Earthly Things**

This takes us away from the OT tent and moves us into

the NT economy in our passage. The transition is vs. 8-9a. “By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age).” His focus here is not on the kinds of sins that can be atoned in the old covenant, but upon the way they were atoned. Where we saw parallels with the Holy Place and the priests and the Most Holy Place and the high priest, so now we see parallels with these things and the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were atoned for in a building made by human hands. He has been talking about this building with its furnishings. We have seen that these things point to Christ, but they are not Christ. They are mere shadows of him. They are not the sun, but the moon reflecting its light. The parallel here occurs in Heb 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)...” As we saw in Ch. 8, the Lord Jesus is the new covenant temple. At his death, the temple curtain, which separated the spaces, ripped in two, thus showing that the shadows have faded away. The same thing is being said here. In that story with David and the

showbread and the confrontation with the Pharisees, this is where Jesus tells them, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here” (Matt 12:6).

This right here is the single most important reason why the modern world looks so different from the ancient world. Where the heavenly temple has come down, there is no more need for earthly types. It is for this reason—and not because man somehow evolved or outgrew religious superstitions—that we no longer see temples erected wherever Christianity has gone. When the Gospel goes, the altars of the gods crumble to dust. Yet, we still see such temples in places that the Gospel has never touched. It is not that man has grown out of religion, but that the Gospel of Jesus teaches people that the true temple has come, therefore the old have passed away.

But beloved, what does it say then about a culture that starts to embrace the old ways once more? In Iceland, for example, a place once touched by the Gospel, there is a very strong neo-pagan movement that is reviving the worship of Odin, Thor, Freyr, and Frigg. In an article titled, “First Viking Temple in 1,000 Years Coming to Iceland,” the author writes, “A neo-pagan revival of the religion practiced

by the Vikings has become one of Iceland's fastest-growing faiths. Now, plans are under way to build the country's first shrine to the ancient Norse gods since Iceland converted to Christianity more than a millennium ago."<sup>5</sup> Paganism is returning with a vengeance to the West. And mark my words. What is coming in its place is a return to a darkness this world has not known for a millennium. All because people no longer believe that Jesus is the temple.

People may think that the ball game I described above is a kind of religious darkness. But it pales in comparison to what is coming if the Gospel does not once again take hold in our land. You doubt me? Go and watch the PBS Nova special called "Ice Mummies of the Inca," and behold in transfixed horror as the narrator talks in an almost giddy tone about how the little mummy they named Juanita, found on top of a 20,000 Mt. Ampato in Peru, was sacrificed alive by the people because that was their culture. Christians have always been appalled by such barbarism. They find it "wrong." Pagan's find it a kind of adrenaline rush. Just ask abortion doctors or suicide bombers. There is no right or

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Kline, "First Viking Temple in 1,000 Years Coming to Iceland," *History* (Feb 18, 2015), <http://www.history.com/news/first-viking-temple-in-1000-years-coming-to-iceland>, last accessed Mar 31, 2016.



wrong. The gods must be appeased.

That leads to the second thing about Christ and the temple. Christians have erected magnificent church buildings, but they have never erected temples. Why? Because temples are for sacrifice. But Christ “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” (Heb 9:12). “Once for all” may be the most beautiful three words in Holy Scripture. This is what makes Christ’s sacrifice better. This is what makes his covenant better. No more do priests enter to make atonement for anything. Christ, the High Priest of heaven, entered heaven, and offered a sacrifice that forever cleanses any and all sin.

This “eternal redemption” has an objective as well as a subjective nature. Objectively, it is a sufficient sacrifice for every single person in the world. Just as the Day of Atonement covered any and all sins, so also Christ’s sacrifice covers any and all sins. There is no sin that you or I can commit that isn’t forgivable by the death and blood of the

Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> His blood is sufficient to cover every sin, if a person will believe upon him.

This objectivity speaks to the law. Thus, Hebrews says, “According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various washing (literally, baptisms), regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:9-10). Those things are legal things. You wanted forgiveness? Then certain demands of the law had to be met. You had to be

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<sup>6</sup> Here is Luther for example, “The gospel and all of Scripture present Christ as the high priest, who alone and once for all by offering himself has taken away the sins of all men and accomplished their sanctification for all eternity. For once and for all he entered into the holy place through his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption [Heb 9:12, 28; 10:12, 14]. Thus no other sacrifice remains for our sins than his, and, by putting our trust altogether in it, we are saved from sin without any merits or works of our own. Of this sacrifice and offering he has instituted a perpetual remembrance in that he intends to have it proclaimed in the sacrament of the altar and thereby have faith in it strengthened. But how can this be accomplished in the abomination of the papal ordinations?” (Martin Luther, “Church and Ministry” in *Luther’s Works*, 40:14). Also, “But by the true definition Christ is not a lawgiver; He is a Propitiator and a Savior. Faith takes hold of this and believes without doubting that He has performed a superabundance of works and merits of congruity and condignity. He might have made satisfaction for all the sins of the world with only one drop of His blood, but now He has made abundant satisfaction. Heb 9:12: “With His own blood He entered once for all into the Holy Place.” And Rom 3:24-25: “Justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood.” Therefore it is something great to take hold, by faith, of Christ, who bears the sins of the world (John 1:29). And this faith alone is counted for righteousness (Rom. 3:4). Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians,” in *Luther’s Works*, 26:132.

baptized or washed in water in the laver in the courtyard. You had to bring a sacrifice or a gift to God that would be put to death and have its blood spilt. These things purified you outwardly, because they met the demands of justice. Christ's death does all of these things for you, as one of you, only perfectly, which is why these things have passed away and are not longer done under the new covenant.

But they pointed at the need for something else, something subjective, something internal. Did you catch the language, “cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper?” The conscience is something that physical blood and water and food and drink cannot touch. But the blood of Jesus availeth much. He is the water of life. Whoever eats of this food will live forever.

Look at it again, only a couple verses later. “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” (Heb 9:13). The point is, they do sanctify or set apart or make a person holy ... outwardly, objectively, in terms of the laws demands. “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” (14).

This takes us right back to the new covenant and the work of the Holy Spirit. Calvinist’s love **definite atonement**, and for good reason. Calvin writes, “**He now clearly shows how Christ’s death is to be estimated, not by the eternal act, but by the power of the Spirit. For Christ suffered as a man; but that death becomes saving to us through the efficacious power of the Spirit.**” This is the whole point of the new covenant. Those in the new covenant are saved by the Spirit. This is what it means to have a “**new heart**” and for God to “**put a new spirit within you**” one which “**will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh**” (Ezek 36:26). Through this act, God will purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. This is what it means to be born again. We desire God’s law. We want to obey him, not out of guilt or fear of hell, but out of the fear of the Lord—loving, pleasing, serving him. The Children’s catechism asks, “**How can you glorify God?**” A. “**By loving him and doing what he commands.**”

How does this happen? It happens **first** through the perfect work of Christ. He is the one who offered himself “**without blemish to God.**” He was the perfect sacrifice, and

thus there is no more need for another. But **second**, through faith in that sacrifice. God does not apply the new covenant apart from faith. You do not have your conscience washed clean until your conscience is actually washed clean by faith alone in Christ alone. This happens by grace alone through the Spirit imparting the scripture alone into your hearts so that God might be glorified above all things for his kindness and mercy to sinners through Christ Jesus.

Truly, the earthly ministry of the old covenant is passing away. These things appeared only until the time of Reformation. That refers not to the Reformation of the 1500s, but to the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. He reformed all things. He is the one to whom they pointed. In him, all find their fulfillment. May the Spirit be pleased to impart the deep truths of these things into your heart, to give you faith, to increase your faith, and to cause you to obey his laws with a clean conscience, not by outward acts of works-righteousness, but by the inward work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ—the Light of the World, the Bread and the Water of Life, the Law-Giver and Law-Keeper, the King of Heaven and Earth. Amen.