

Heb. 10:1-18

The Blessing of a Perfected Conscience

For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified – v. 14

Intro. I dare say that no other epistle in the New Testament is so well suited to our time around the Lord's table as this epistle to the Hebrews:

It is in this epistle that the Lord is pleased to pull back the veil and allow us to see Christ in His glory. The epistle begins with such a view. Christ is first described as the *brightness of his glory, and express image of his person*. And we behold Him in that glory being seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. We are made aware in the opening chapter that this is a position of exaltation that Christ has earned. It was not until he had by himself purged our sins, you see, that He then sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

We know, of course, that this action of purging our sins came through His atoning death. It is in this epistle, especially, that it's explained to us that all those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament were shadows pointing us to the greater sacrifice to come. And just as Christ in His person is superior to angels – and Christ in His person is superior to Moses or to any other character in the Bible for that matter – and Christ in His priestly ministry is superior to the Levitical priests – so Christ in the sacrifice of Himself is superior to all those animal sacrifices that were offered by the Levitical priests.

The portion we've read from in chp. 10 serves to emphasize the contrast between the Old Testament sacrifices which could never take away sin and the sacrifice of Christ which could and did take away sin forever {**cf. 10:11,12**} – **note contrast between the priests standing and Christ sitting.**

The superiority of Christ's sacrifice is further brought out by what that sacrifice accomplished. Would you note from our text that *by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified*. Here is an accomplishment indeed – both in terms of what it brought about as well as the durability of the accomplishment. It has brought about perfection – *by one offering he hath perfected*. And this perfection is something that will endure throughout the ages – *he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified*.

Aren't you glad that Christ's atonement has perfected forever them that are sanctified? The church of Rome may have you believe that the benefit of Christ's atoning death is temporary – only as durable as the next time you sin. The mass would make Christ's atoning death no more effectual than those animal sacrifices of Old Testament times – hence the need to offer it up again week by week and day by day. Better by far to lay hold of a sacrifice that perfects – and that perfects forever.

The benefit of this offering is said to be applied to those that are sanctified – i.e. it is applied to those that are set apart from the world and consecrated to God. The Christian's sanctification in this instance can be said to be his union to Christ in Christ's sanctification. So we read in Jn. 17:19 *And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth*. Just as surely as Christ separated Himself from the

world and consecrated Himself to God in His atoning death – so are those whom He represented set apart from the world and consecrated to God in Him.

But the thing I want to draw your attention to this morning is a very particular sense in which we are perfected forever by Christ's one offering. There are a number of ways in which it might be said that we're perfected. We're perfected with regard to our justification. Nothing can be or needs to be added to the righteousness that has been imputed to us. It's a perfect righteousness because it's Christ's righteousness.

And even though we still wage war against the flesh and suffer setbacks and defeats we are nevertheless perfected in the sense that the outcome of the battle is determined. We will be glorified. Just as surely as our calling and justification have been predestinated by God on the grounds of Christ's atoning death – so has our glorification likewise been predestinated (Rom. 8:30).

But the thing I want to focus on this morning is the perfection of your conscience before God. Verses 1 and 2 tell us that those animal sacrifices in Old Testament times could not perfect the conscience of the offerer {10:1,2}. In contrast to the shadow sacrifices, however, Christ's once for all offering of Himself can make our conscience perfect – i.e. our conscience can be satisfied that God is doing the right thing in forgiving our sins and receiving us to Himself. Without a satisfied conscience the gospel carries no credibility to our minds and hearts. We know that God will not compromise His character to rescue sinners worthy of death. Our conscience needs to be satisfied that our salvation can be accomplished in a way that enables God to be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

In his sermon on this text, Hugh Martin elaborates on 3 aspects of Christ's atoning death that are essential to a perfected conscience. I would like to borrow those points today in preparation for our time around the Lord's table.

3 Aspects of Christ's Atoning Death that Serve to Perfect Our Conscience

I. The Voluntariness of Christ's Sacrifice Perfects Our Conscience -

The voluntariness of Christ's sacrifice is revealed to us clearly in v. 7 – *Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.* And again in v. 9 *Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.*

Christ was not forced to come. We know of course that no force in earth or hell could force Christ to do anything. But neither was it a matter of His Father insisting on something that Christ was reluctant to do. He entered into this covenant engagement freely.

We should note also that His Father sent Him freely. God the Father was not reluctant to send His Son. There was no discord of any kind between the members of the trinity when it came to forging out the sinner's salvation. Had there been discord of any kind the atonement would not suffice to perfect our conscience.

How could we approach God if we thought that He had no real interest in us? If we thought even for a moment that God the Father was bent on condemning us but His Son somehow intervened in spite of His Father to prevent it – how could we approach God under that setting? We would be approaching a God that we would feel resented us. After all we would have cost Him the blood of His Son. We would have been the ones to come between Him and His Son. This would not do to perfect our conscience.

But if we see the Father and the Son entering into covenant with each other freely – neither being forced or manipulated by the other – then can our conscience be perfected in the sense that we're able to read the love of the Father and the Son behind our salvation. We see the love of the Father in freely sending His Son – *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.* And we see Christ freely coming – having been sent by His Father. And so we read *Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.*

And in coming to do His Father's will Christ voluntarily came and went all the way to Calvary's cross. Nobody forced Him. Nobody could have taken His life from Him. Jn. 10:18 *No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*

Had Christ been reluctant to take on this task of atoning for our sins – had he somehow been forced to Calvary's cross – Had he been anything but free in His action then His atonement could not perfect our conscience. Picture with me, if you would, Simon the Cyrenian. We find him in Luke 23. He is compelled to carry the cross of Christ because such has been the beating and scourging that Christ has already endured that He does not possess the human strength to carry His cross.

Now imagine for a moment that this scene is not the scene of Christ's atoning death. See it rather as being a typical Roman execution. We know that crucifixions were cruel and that they were typical of the Roman empire. Picture a common criminal being too weak to carry his own cross – and so Simon the Cyrenian just happens to be standing in the wrong place at the wrong time and so he ends up carrying the cross of a common criminal.

Then due to some bureaucratic mix up and a spirit of careless indifference to everything let's say they reach the place of crucifixion. But through haste and carelessness, Simon, who carried the cross, ends up being the one nailed to the cross. The criminal who had been sentenced to death is overlooked and manages to escape crucifixion.

You might argue that one took his place – that a substitute died and that he was set free. But would he be free? He might be free in the sense that he escaped a fate that was his due but he certainly wouldn't be free in the sense that his conscience would be perfected. Would not his conscience rather condemn him for allowing a victim to die in his place? Would he not indeed be plagued by the guilt of his deed that allowed an involuntary death to be allowed as his death? You begin to see, then, how important the issue is of Christ's death being a voluntary death.

Hugh Martin raises another important point that makes reference to Christ's death being voluntary. He points out that in order for a sinner to be saved that sinner's awakened

conscience must be in full agreement with the righteousness of God – i.e. he knows that his condemnation is just and that God is righteous in condemning his soul to hell. And in spite of this knowledge he must, nevertheless, approach God voluntarily – knowing as he does that in going to meet God, he’s marching straight into the wrath of God.

Oh but who shall surrender himself voluntarily into the wrath of God? Who shall obediently go forward to dwell with everlasting burnings? Let me consider the gospel tidings of a substitute. I have to go forward voluntarily towards an offended and angry God, to a judge armed with his almighty malediction to meet my approach. But if I am not adequately convinced of sin, if repentance has never visited my heart, if I need to be dragged into his presence, I cannot go willingly in a day of his power. There can, therefore, be no suitableness in a substitute who does not go voluntarily. He cannot meet my case unless he goes as I should go, with me, before me, instead of me, of his own proper will – spontaneously, freely, because his heart and good pleasure are in it.

And so just as certainly as salvation requires our voluntary return to an offended God – so does that salvation demand that the sacrifice of our substitute be voluntary. And thank God, today, that the sacrifice of Christ is voluntary. We’re to remember that around this table. There’s a sense in which we return to God voluntarily this morning acknowledging our sins and our unworthiness before God. But we also remember and pledge our faith in the One who through His broken body and shed blood voluntarily acted on our behalf.

So this one offering for sin perfects our conscience on account of the voluntariness of it.

II. Consider next the Divinity of this offering.

And by Divinity I mean the God-like characteristics of this offering. The divinity of this offering meets another longing of the trembling and guilty conscience, looking out for perfection.

It’s the consistent testimony of Scripture that when men become aware of the glory of God they also become aware in greater measure of the greatness of their sin. So when the angel of the Lord appeared before Samson’s parents before Samson’s birth – Manoah, Samson’s father proclaims – *We shall surely die, because we have seen God* (Judges 13:22).

And when Isaiah beholds the glory of the LORD in Isaiah 6 we read his response to the vision in Isa 6:5 *Then said I, Woe [is] me! for I am undone; because I [am] a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.*

The same thing can be said of Ezekiel, or Daniel, or the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos – *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead* John writes in Rev. 1:17.

It is as we recognize the majestic splendor of the one we’ve sinned against that we know sin to be exceeding sinful. Hugh Martin again writes: *I am lost in my attempt to fathom the ill-deservingness of sin because I am lost in the attempt to appreciate the excellence and glory of him against whom I have sinned.*

What kind of atonement does it take to appease a God so glorious? Hugh Martin says in effect that if there's any limit to the worth of Christ's atonement then I can't have confidence in it. Sin against God is too high a crime.

This is one of the arguments, you know, for hell being everlasting in its duration. It's everlasting in duration on account of the magnitude of the crime. The crime of sin may not seem like such a big deal – indeed there are some that would attempt to argue that the punishment for sin far exceeds the greatness of the crime. All that means is that the person who reasons that way has way too dim a view of the glory of God against whom he's sinned.

But once a soul becomes awakened in some measure to the greatness of God's glory – then to the same degree he becomes aware of the greatness of his sin. *Against thee, thee only have I sinned* will be his confession.

This, of course, raises the question about what kind of atonement can be made for sin? *What kind of sacrifice can suffice to appease such offended deity? Such a sacrifice must be one unmeasured in its value – one whose worth and efficacy no creature can fathom and eternity itself can never wholly disclose. What bleeding lamb upon thine altar shall truly put away my sin? But let the sacrifice be divine, then just as deity gives unsearchable depth of ill-desert to sin, so unsearchable depth of well-deserving merit is given to the sacrifice.*

Let God be found manifest in the flesh, in the form of a servant, and be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Let this be the priceless, the immeasurable sacrifice for sin, awakening the songs of angels and the echoes of all eternity to say 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.' Let my conscience of sin, immeasurable in its evil and its evil desert because it is against the glory and the rights of unsearchable Godhead, be confronted with a sacrifice immeasurable in its worth to the same unsearchable Godhead and the case is then truly met – i.e. our conscience becomes perfected or satisfied that the sacrifice is sufficient to answer an offended God.

So the offering perfects our conscience forever. The voluntariness of the offering perfects our conscience and the deity of the offering perfects our conscience. Would you consider lastly:

III. The Oneness of the Offering Perfects our Conscience

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14). But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God (10:12).

This is a point that receives great emphasis throughout this epistle to the Hebrews. Christ offered Himself once. Such is the glory of that offering that to suggest that something needs to be added to it – or that it needs to be repeated is tantamount to saying that the one offering of Christ is insufficient for our sins.

This is what makes the Roman Catholic mass so blasphemous. They purport to offer Christ again. They purport to sacrifice Christ each time they minister the mass. What they are saying in effect is that Christ has not succeeded in putting away sin by His once offering of Himself. Christ has somehow failed. And so this action must be repeated in order to make up what is lacking in the previous offering.

This is true, of course, for those animal sacrifices that can never take away sin. It's probably for this reason that Judaism today can more closely relate with Catholicism than Protestantism – both Judaism and Catholicism profess sacrifices that are insufficient for the absolute removal of sin.

But let the value of this sacrifice be recognized by the value of Christ Himself and we can affirm with Hugh Martin – that *by the oneness of this offering – and the heavenly, divine, eternal perfection therein implied – he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. It is irrevocable peace with God which he has thus established, eternal redemption he has thus procured. One everlasting covenant he hath thus sealed and made sure: an all embracing pardon, an unchangeable acceptance, an inviolable adoption. By this one sacrifice he perfects you now; instates you in perfect friendship with God in perfect acceptance, perfect pardon, perfect peace. Whatever conscience of sin you now have, he perfectly and at once removes it the instant you believe in him.*

And the sin that dwelleth in you still, and makes you in yourself guilty again and still a sinner, does not make void the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ makes it void. The one offering has perfect, perpetual power. And what is that power? It is the power of making your perpetual unworthiness because of sin void perpetually.

Most gladly then do we remember around this table today the once for all sacrifice that Christ has made for our sins. We offer our praise to Christ for His willingness to come voluntarily into this world in order to endure shame and scoffing rude. We pledge our faith in the inestimable value of this sacrifice because it has been made by one who is both the Son of God as well as the Son of Man. And we bask this morning in the glorious work of a finished atonement. Thank God for Christ's proclamation *it is finished*. When He made that announcement – He made it clear that one sacrifice was enough and that His sacrifice was altogether glorious and altogether just and therefore altogether sufficient to purge our sins.

Let us then glory this morning in the truth of our text that *by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*.