

9. Jesus' sacrificial self-giving fulfilled what the Levitical sacrifices and offerings portrayed and prefigured. God took no genuine pleasure in those priestly rituals, not only because of the iniquity of both priest and worshipper, but primarily because of their non-ultimacy. The blood of bulls and goats couldn't take away sin, and none of Israel's cleansing rituals could touch the defiled and troubled conscience of those who came before Yahweh. But all of this was by divine intent, devised to prepare for and point toward the One whose coming would see Yahweh's will for His cursed creation fulfilled; the Davidic priest-king whose coming and ministrations were pledged and unfolded in the sacred Scriptures.

Jesus' sacrifice was "better" (9:23) in that it fulfilled the divine will to redeem, purge and renew the creation from death and the curse – the will that God had made known from the time of the fall. Jesus' death accomplished that work, and His resurrection inaugurated the creational renewal that is its goal. This new creation is the final, everlasting "kingdom" God continually promised through His prophets, and that is proclaimed in the "gospel of the kingdom," first by Jesus Himself, and then by those He sent out in His name (cf. Isaiah 40:1-11, 52:1-10, 61:1-7 with Mark 1:14-15; John 20:21).

God has inaugurated His new creation by raising Jesus from the dead. But His resurrection wasn't the end of the story; Jesus has been exalted to take His place beside His Father as His enthroned High Priest. He now reigns over all rule, authority, power and dominion (Ephesians 1:18-21), but as a priest upon His throne, building God's true and everlasting sanctuary upon Himself as the cornerstone (ref. Isaiah 28:16; Zechariah 6:9-15; Mark 12:1-11; 1 Peter 2:4-10). But Yahweh's new temple isn't yet complete, and the work of building continues. Human "living stones" are still being added to it, and God has yet to incorporate the non-human creation into His everlasting dwelling place (cf. Ephesians 1:9-10 with Romans 8:18-22; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 21-22).

- a. And so, while Jesus' effectual work as great High Priest has enabled Him to "sit down at the right hand of God" (10:11-12; cf. 1:3), we do not yet see all things subjected to Him; there remain enemies that He hasn't put under His feet (10:13; cf. Psalm 110:1-2). Jesus condemned and conquered all enemies, including sin and death, by His own death and resurrection. But, as is the case with the satanic adversary they serve, sin and death continue to oppose the King and His people, though they are defeated and their time is short (1 Peter 5:8-11; Revelation 12).

This "already-but-not yet" dynamic is key to understanding the Hebrews writer's statements in vv. 12-14. On the one hand, some Christians have been guilty of an "over-realized eschatology" that perceives Jesus' present kingship and dominion in absolute terms. This perspective reads such passages as Matthew 28:18-20 and Ephesians 1:18-23 as if all things are currently in full subjection to Him. Thus the present state of Jesus' kingdom and reign is as it will be forever. Far more Christians have an "under-realized eschatology" in which Jesus' kingship will be instituted at His return when He takes David's throne and begins His global reign. But the Scripture insists (and the Hebrews writer understood) that Jesus has already assumed His reign as Lord over heaven and earth, but with enemies yet to be destroyed (1:3, 13; Psalm 110; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-58; Revelation 12).

This was the vantage point from which the writer declared that Jesus has, by the triumph of His own death and resurrection, “*perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*” By this statement, then, he was affirming two key aspects of the new-creational kingdom as it exists in its present, already-but-not-yet, form.

- 1) Those who have been set apart to God (“sanctified”) by sharing in His life through union with Christ by the Spirit are *truly* perfected. That is to say, they are *complete* – made authentically human – in the glorified Messiah (cf. Colossians 2:9-10, 3:1-4). And not because Jesus’ moral perfection has been reckoned to them as an external transaction of “imputation,” but because they partake in His life and likeness by His Spirit. Jesus is the *substance* of their life, not merely their provision or pattern.
  - 2) God’s sanctified ones are already raised up in Jesus and seated in the heavenly realm in Him (Ephesians 2:1-6). And yet, it doesn’t presently appear what they shall be (1 John 3:1-3); they are sons and heirs, but heirs who haven’t yet received their full inheritance (cf. Romans 8:9-10, 15-25; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 5:1-10).
- b. Those who’ve been sanctified in the resurrected and enthroned Messiah are perfected in Him as sharing in His life as God’s consummate Image-Son (ref. again 2:5-15). As such, they are joint heirs of all He’s heir to, and His Spirit is the *earnest* (pledge) of this inheritance (Ephesians 1:7-14). And being the substance of Christ’s indwelling presence (John 14:16-20; Romans 8:9-10) and His personal pledge to His people (John 15:26-16:15), the Spirit is the most compelling witness to the believer’s consecration and perfection. This testimony has its most profound expression in the Spirit’s personal, internal witness (Romans 8:15-17), but He was already testifying to God’s intent for His creation and image-children long before the Messiah came into the world. The Spirit bore that testimony through word and deed, in mighty acts as well as prophetic utterances, both of which were set down in Israel’s sacred writings (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The Hebrews writer recognized this ministration, and turned again to Jeremiah’s prophecy to underscore that the prophet’s promise of a new covenant was the sure word of Yahweh’s Spirit – *the same Spirit that had led and preserved the Israelite people throughout their generations* (10:15-18). The Spirit mediated the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and in the midst of its failure He pledged a future day of covenant renewal. That day came when the Son entered the world to accomplish the Father’s will to take to Himself (“sanctify”) sons and daughters, not just from the house of Israel, but from every tribe, tongue, nation and people.

Yahweh’s Spirit had promised that He would renew the covenant, but this could only happen if He addressed the endemic infidelity that had fractured the relationship in the first place. Covenant renewal – the making of a “new covenant” – meant *forgiveness of sin*, and that’s why the writer focused on that aspect of Jeremiah’s prophecy as the outcome of Jesus’ self-sacrifice (10:17-18).

- c. Starting from this perspective, there are several things that stand out in this passage and the writer's use of Jeremiah 31:33-34. First and foremost, he presented this citation as the Spirit's long-standing affirmation of what he himself was asserting, namely that Jesus' offering "*has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*" (vv. 14-15). The marrow of his argument is that the Spirit's promise through Jeremiah of a coming day of forgiveness and covenant renewal – forgiveness in which there is no more remembrance of unfaithfulness and violation – was His tacit assurance that Yahweh would yet gather to Himself a people fully and permanently consecrated to Him. The Hebrews writer recognized that that day had come in Jesus, such that God's will to have a truly sanctified people had been realized through the incarnation and self-offering of the Son (10:8-10). There is a subtle grammatical shift from verse 10 ("*we are having been sanctified*") to verse 14 ("*we are sanctified*"), but together these statements underscore that this consecration is fully realized and permanent, grounded in the forgiveness and renewal that have resulted from Messiah's sacrifice.

A second thing to note is that the writer was here treating forgiveness of sin as a *covenantal* issue rather than a personal one. This is not to imply that Jesus' sacrificial death doesn't pertain to forgiveness of personal sin, but the Jeremiah citation concerns forgiveness as the basis of covenant renewal. The Hebrews letter was penned to a Jewish audience, and they understood that a person's individual status and relationship with God exists in a covenantal framework, and therefore a *corporate* one. This was true of Israel under the Sinai covenant, and the same holds for the new (renewed) covenant and the community of individuals related to God through it (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:1-13; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5).

Finally, the fact that this consecration is grounded in complete and permanent forgiveness implies that the circumstance necessitating forgiveness has been fully and permanently addressed. In the context of Jeremiah's prophecy, this forgiveness pertained to *Israel's* covenant infidelity and the renewal of its covenant relationship with Yahweh (ref. chaps. 31-33). But Israel shared the alienation and rebellion that mark all of Adam's offspring; Israel's plight was *mankind's* plight. So also, Israel's covenant sonship pertained to God's purpose for the entire human race; the goal of Israel's fidelity was God's blessing going out to all the earth's families. And so, Jesus embodied *Israel* as the true seed of Abraham for the sake of Israel (Isaiah 49:1-6; John 1:47), but as a son of Adam (Luke 3:23-38; Galatians 4:4-5). Thus forgiveness and covenant renewal on behalf of Israel meant forgiveness, reconciliation and ingathering for the Gentiles.

Jesus resolved the human dilemma by bearing it in Himself and overcoming it by His death. He secured full and everlasting forgiveness – not as simply removing human guilt, but as restoring man to right relation with God. This forgiveness finds the sons of the new covenant becoming children indeed: *true image-children who have God's torah written onto their hearts and minds* (10:16). Thus the fruit of the Son's embodiment and accomplishment of God's will (10:5-7) isn't simply atonement and forgiveness, but *new creation* – the formation of a new human family sharing the life of the true Image-Son.