



22: Better Cleansing

We've come to chapter 9 in the book of Hebrews and the writer is still intent on convincing us that Jesus is a far far better high priest than any of the high priests of Old Testament times. He's going to show us that, unlike them, Jesus didn't go into a tent where the presence of God was represented by ornaments; He went right into the real presence of God and, again unlike them, Jesus took a perfect sacrifice with Him.

"Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Hebrews 9:1 – 14

The Old Way

In the first seven verses there's a brief description of the Tabernacle: the Tabernacle that was erected in the camp of Israel in the days of Moses. We also have a summary of what happened there on the Day of Atonement. The ritual of that day is described in more detail in Leviticus 16.

- ◆ *In your own words, describe what happened on the Day of Atonement.*

In verses 8 to 10 the writer tells us what purpose the Tabernacle and the rituals of the Day of Atonement were meant to serve: what the Holy Spirit intended people to learn from them. The Tabernacle was a symbol (verse 9). It *represented* the way into the real presence of God. That way hadn't yet been revealed (verse 8) like it has been now in the present time, but the Tabernacle showed what it would be like.

Because the Tabernacle was only a symbol, the sacrifices offered there didn't actually do anything. They couldn't make anyone's conscience clean: they couldn't set anyone who offered them free from his burden of guilt.

Verse 10 goes further in explaining why none of the rituals of the Tabernacle were effective. They only had to do with temporal things — food, drink, washings, and the like. As well as that they were only imposed for a limited period of time — "until the time of reformation." That is, they were only ever intended to be observed until a time would come when everything would be set straight: the time of a new order.

- ◆ *How would you answer someone who asks, what was the purpose of the Tabernacle and the things that happened there on the Day of Atonement?*

The Better Way

The word "but" at the start of verse 11 introduces Jesus as the High Priest of a contrasting and far better way.

- ◆ *In what ways, according to verses 11 and 12, does what Jesus has done contrast with and it what ways is it better than what was done by the high priests of Old Testament times?*
- ◆ *Most of the commentaries on this passage point out that the words "with His own blood" in verse 12 would be better translated "through His own blood." Why do you think that is significant?*

Verses 13 and 14 pose the obvious question that the writer wants his readers, who were being tempted to return to the Old Testament ways, to think about: How much more will Jesus blood cleanse your conscience? And he shows that as far as cleansing of the conscience is concerned what Jesus has done is far far better on three counts.

1. Jesus offered Himself. His sacrifice was a voluntary act of obedience to God and love for His people.
2. Jesus offered Himself "through the eternal Spirit." It is not clear what exactly is meant by that. Some think it's a reference to the Holy Spirit who indwelt Jesus and guided His thoughts and actions and others say that the word "spirit" is just used to make the point that Jesus' sacrifice was a spiritual sacrifice (as opposed to the material sacrifices of the Tabernacle) and therefore of spiritual and eternal value.
3. Jesus offered Himself "without spot."

Verse 14 finishes with a reminder that Jesus' sacrifice is able to cleanse your conscience from the guilt of dead works — works that lead to death — and also that the cleansing it brings sets us free to serve the living God.

"The ministry of Aaron and his sons as high priests was effectual for removing ceremonial defilement, and fitting men for ceremonial worship: His is effectual for removing the impurities of the conscience, and for fitting men for spiritual worship."
John Brown

- ◆ *What kind of service do you think the writer has in mind here?*
- ◆ *What would be an appropriate response to this passage?*

