



## Closing Arguments

Series: *Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 10:1-18

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

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The text that we are coming to this morning, beloved, is what you might call the closing arguments in the writer of Hebrews' case that Jesus is superior, magnificent, and matchless in His worth and power as our Savior and Lord. In this section, the goal of the writer is to put to rest, once and for all, any idea of leaving Jesus Christ, any idea of the Hebrew Christians returning to the Jewish religion in order to avoid persecution and hardship, public and private rejection and any idea of us departing from Christ to any other religion, especially a "Christless, crossless, conversion-less Christianity," what has been called by some – "Christianity lite" but is not Christianity at all, in order to escape much of the same.

So, like the seasoned preacher that he is, at the close of the teaching part of this sermon, before he begins to make application to the lives of these Hebrew Christians, the preacher of Hebrews is going to make his closing argument, not based in emotion, or feeling, or sentimentality, but resting on absolute, divine truth and irrefutable fact. This is a tightly constructed argument – no holes at all, and it is masterful. Check this out. He is going to start again by highlighting what he has just proven...

**The Inherent Weakness of the Old Covenant (1-4)** His focus, because he is dealing with these Hebrew Christians who are being tempted to go back to the Jewish religion, is the old covenant. But understand this -- anything, any attempt, any religion, any spirituality that is absent the centrality of Jesus Christ, and faith in His work on the cross to bridge the gulf of sin, any religious beliefs that are not laser-focused on Jesus Christ are equally worthless. Look what he says in verses 1-4: ***"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. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every***

**year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:1–4, ESV)**

Here’s what the writer of Hebrews is getting at. The law and all of the sacrificial requirements of the law were just a shadow of the better things to come, just a shadow of Jesus Christ and the new covenant that he inaugurated with His blood. Now, we all know that there is a vast difference between the shadow of something and the real thing, right? When I was growing up in Northern Pennsylvania, our home town in the Appalachian mountains was right along a corridor that the Air Force used for flight testing. One day I was out in my backyard mowing my lawn with my Walkman on, blasting Bon Jovi so I couldn’t hear anything around me, when all of a sudden this strange, cool-looking shadow passed over me, low and fast. Then another. I looked up in time to see the last two aircraft of a flight of four and I was transfixed. It was four of the early F-117 stealth fighters and it was awesome. From that moment, the shadow as amazing as it was, held no fascination for me at all because it had been superseded by the vision of the real thing. And that is the point the writer of Hebrews is making. When you have the real thing – Jesus Christ and the new covenant in His blood – the shadows of Christ lose their significance.

The old covenant, all the sacrifices of the blood of bulls, goats, and lambs, was never intended to actually put away sin, never intended to actually bridge the gulf of our separation from God by our rebellion, but was designed to point the Hebrews, and all of us, to the one true Lamb of God who can take away the sins of the world.

These things ***can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.*** They cannot do what they were not intended to do. They could not make anyone perfect. That word perfect doesn’t mean sinless or flawless. What this word perfect means in to place someone in a right relationship with God in which the worshippers in the eyes of God are once and for all cleansed from sin. That is what these sacrifices could not do. They could cover sin but they could not take it away. We have seen that, right?

The very fact that they could only cover sin but not give eternal forgiveness is seen in the fact that they had to be repeated over and over again, every year. The writer of Hebrews

asks, **Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?** Good question and it is meant to make you say, “Yeah, that makes sense. If sins were fully forgiven by these sacrifices and our consciences were cleansed as a result of knowing that our sins were all paid for once and for all, then what would be the purpose of doing the same thing over and over again?” By the repetition of the sacrifices, we see their ineffectiveness to actually take away the guilt of sin. So what was the point? He tells us.

**But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.** The point of these sacrifices offered over and over, the point of the Day of Atonement that we looked at last week being annually observed was to serve a reminder of sins. Every year that the nation of Israel observed the Day of Atonement, there was a reminder of their sin. Every time they saw the tabernacle, and later the Temple, they were reminded of their sins. Every time they watched the high priest slaughter yet another animal, the blood of the sacrifice spilling on the ground, they were reminded of their sins. Instead of removing their sins, the system of sacrifice reminded them of the sins that still stood between them and God, and His mercy to accept the sacrifice of yet another animal to cover their sins for yet another year, until the day when the perfect sacrifice that could bring real forgiveness would come.

Now, listen, that is not necessarily a bad thing. It’s not. The sacrificial system did not allow the Israelites to ignore their sin, or to just not think about them, to deflect conviction through busyness or by doing good deeds or anything like that. They could not avoid the seriousness of sin. That is a good thing. In a world where we are more concerned about what we wear or what’s for dinner than we are about the seriousness of sin before a holy God, this is a good thing. Feeling the weight of sin makes you long for a solution, right? Feeling and knowing the sinfulness of sin, the offense that it is to the Holy God, and the accountability that we all have before Him makes us long for something, for someone, to take away our guilt. As for the sacrifices under the old covenant, **it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.** That is the whole point. There must be something better. And there is. From the weakness of the old covenant, he moves to

**The Glorious Power of Christ (5-10)** Like he has already done before in this sermon, the writer of Hebrews goes to the Old Testament to prove his point. He goes to Psalm 40, from the Greek translation of the OT, and he takes the words of David and puts them in the mouth of Jesus Christ. He writes: **“Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,**

**“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 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.’ ”** (Hebrews 10:5–7, ESV)

Now stay with me because this is amazing. When the writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 40, and puts these words in Christ’s mouth saying, **Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired... in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure**, he is getting to the very heart of the inadequacy and weakness as it regards the OT sacrifices. When he says that God did not desire and was not pleased with the sacrifices that were made to cover sin, you have to understand his point. It is not that God was displeased in them in the sense that He did not want the Israelites to offer them. He gave them the sacrificial system. He commanded them to offer sacrifices to cover their sins. What he means is that God’s holiness and His heart was never fully satisfied by them. This is not what God ultimately wants from His people. God desires intimate fellowship with all His people; He desires that sin be dealt with finally and fully so that His people can approach God in confidence and enjoy Him fully; He desires that man’s heart be changed and turned toward obedience and love for Him. That’s what God wants and what the sacrificial system could not give. In that sense, God was not pleased with sacrifices, and burnt offerings, and sin offerings.

Look, there was a sense, even in the OT, that that repeated sacrifices were not the final step in the relationship between God and man, not the highest relationship between God and man. Let me just give you a couple of examples among many in the OT. Back in I Samuel 15, the king in Israel was a guy named Saul. Saul had disobeyed an explicit command from God not to take any of the livestock from the Amalekites whom Israel defeated in battle. When the prophet, Samuel, confronted him for his disobedience, Saul made the foolish excuse that he disobeyed God and kept the best of the livestock to offer to God as sacrifice. And it was then that Samuel gave him the stinging rebuke saying, **“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”** (1 Samuel 15:22, ESV) With that, Samuel stripped Saul of his kingship and gave it to David, the man after God’s own heart. Here’s the point, even though God established the system of sacrifice, that was not the truest desire of God’s heart. What God desires from us is obedience from the heart, not sacrifices to cover our disobedience. What makes God’s holy heart glad is obedience from the heart, from his people who have been purchased by His love.

Another classic example comes from Micah 6, where the prophet asks if sacrifices are what God really wants. He answers, saying, **““With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”** (Micah 6:6–8, ESV) God wants a life of intimate fellowship with and obedience from His people, a life of love and joy and mutual delight. That’s what God wants.

And this is exactly what the sacrifices under the old covenant could not produce. In order for the gulf of sin that separated God and man to be dealt with, in order for God and man to be brought together, two things had to be joined together in the perfect sacrifice – an offering of blood for the forgiveness of sins that could satisfy the justice of God coming from a righteousness-producing obedience that could make man holy and which would produce a life of obedience from the heart. Let me say that again: two things had to be joined together in the perfect sacrifice – an offering of blood for the forgiveness of sins that could satisfy the justice of God coming from a righteousness-producing obedience that could make man holy and which would produce a life of obedience from the heart.

And that is just where the sacrifices under the old covenant were so weak. Look, here was the thing about these sacrifices. First, they were not equal to the penalty required for sin. The payment of sin is eternal death. The death of an animal in that it is not an immortal being could not be a sufficient payment. Neither were these animals an equal substitute for the sinner. An animal does not have a soul or spirit like a man, it is not a human being, and therefore they were not an adequate substitute. Moreover, the animal being slain did not enter into the sacrifice out of an expression of obedience to God, or by having any kind of righteous standing before God. Animals are not holy. It did not carry with it the power, through its death to satisfy the righteous requirements of God’s law or to actually make the worshipper righteous and give him a new heart of obedience. The sacrifice could not fully please God or satisfy for the sins of the worshipper and transform His heart. But what the animal sacrifices could never do, Jesus did!

**Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “... a body have you prepared for me... Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the**

**book.”** Oh beloved, here is the mystery and wonder of it all. God prepared for Jesus a body, the Son of God became incarnate in virgin’s womb, fully God yet fully man, so that he could do the will of God, so that He could accomplish what was written of Him to do – everything that Scripture said Jesus would do and be. Continually, what defined Jesus was the desire to be obedient to the will of the Father. **“Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” (John 4:34, ESV) ““I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” (John 5:30, ESV) “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.” (John 6:38, ESV)** Even on the night in which He was betrayed to the death of the cross, Jesus prayed, **“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39, ESV)**

What was the will of the Father concerning His Son? Perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice. The obedience that Christ offered on our behalf, as our representative, is the obedience from the heart that God desires from us. It was an obedience that earned the reward of perfect righteousness that Christ could give to us. But God’s will for His Son was also to die a death that He did not deserve in our place so that sin could fully and finally be forgiven – not just sin in general, but my sin and your sin, if you trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, in particular. This perfect sacrifice of both innocent and righteous blood, satisfied the demand of God’s holiness, that the sin of man be paid for, in a way that death of animals never could. Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself to redeem us from the death of sin and into eternal life. The perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice of Christ accomplishes the one outcome that was impossible in the old covenant, the once and for all sanctification of sinners.

Look what he says, starting in verse 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), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Hebrews 10:8–10, ESV)** The writer of Hebrews is saying in essence, “Like I’ve been saying, Jesus had done away with the old covenant, he’s made it obsolete. That was God’s plan all along. And by His obedience to the Father and by His atoning death, He has sanctified His people once and for all.”

Now what does this mean? Well I’ll tell you. The way that the word “sanctified” is used here means to make something that was once common, something that was once profane to be

holy, to be set apart from the rest of creation for the glory and pleasure of God. That is the way that he is using the word, “sanctified” in this verse. This is what true Christians are, what we have been made, in Christ. Because Jesus Christ lived the life that we were supposed to live, a life of perfect obedience before God the Father; because He earned righteousness for us in His obedience that God the Father counts as our own; because He died the death that we deserved and paid our sin debt in full, we are counted righteous and holy in the eyes of God, through faith in Jesus. We are no longer like the rest of the world in the sight of God. We are no longer children of wrath and under condemnation. We are holy in the sight of God all because of Jesus Christ. Jesus did for us what the sacrifices and the priests of the Jewish religion, or the rules and rituals of any other religion, for that matter could never do. Through the life and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been made right with God through a single act accomplished in a single point in time – a single act with significant results.

**The Work of Christ – Single Act with Significant Results (11-18)** Now here is what we are going to see, ok? The writer of Hebrews wants us to see that the sacrifice of Jesus was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. The work of Christ – His obedient life and sacrificial death – saved His people for all time. Our salvation was accomplished in a single point in time, but that salvation has significant results. Check this out. The writer of Hebrews says: ***“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 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.”*** (Hebrews 10:11–13, ESV)

Now, do you see what the writer of Hebrews is doing? He is comparing Jesus to the priests in Israel, to the priests who are actually serving in days that this letter is written and he’s basically saying, “Look you have these priests and every day they are running around, making all these sacrifices that never take away sins, that never accomplish anything, right? And then, on the other hand you have Jesus, whose single sacrifice for sins – one sacrifice – Himself, truly accomplished the salvation of sinful men and women for all time. He is not running around like the priests; He is sitting at the right hand of God. His sacrifice is complete. And He is waiting to return for His church until all those for whom He died come to saving faith and till the day when His enemies – those who oppose Jesus Christ and His gospel, all who reject the sufficiency of His atoning death before God, and all who are content to live in rebellion against Him – become His footstool.

And He is content to wait for that day because, while He sits at the right hand of God, He is not idle. **“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:14, ESV)** Now it may not seem like it on the surface, but this is one of the most significant statements in this whole book. What he is saying here is incredible. This statement captures the power of Christ unto salvation in its totality. It is the central point of this whole text.

In fact, there are two parts to this that I want you to see, ok? Two parts that make this incredibly good news. Here is what Jesus Christ has done for the Christian, for the person who looks to Him and trusts in Him – who He and what He has done – to be saved from God’s wrath against sin and be made at peace. First, by the offering of Himself, He has perfected the true Christian for all time. It is accomplished. In the eyes of God, you are completely forgiven and absolutely holy. You have once and for all been cleansed of your sins – all of them – and been placed in a right relationship to God that cannot ever be severed. That’s what this word, “perfected” means. The word “perfected” is written in the perfect tense in the Greek, which speaks of something that has been accomplished in the past that has continuing present day results or effects. What Christ has done in the past has present day effects, present results.

Now I want you to think about that for a moment so you can understand what the writer of Hebrews is saying. Every other religion in the world, you name it, is all about what you can do for God, your ability to make amends, your ability to do good things, your ability to reform yourself, your ability to perform some ritual – every other religion puts on you the impossible task of fixing your sinful condition. And that is why Christianity is such good news. Christianity is never about what you have done, what you can do, your power or your ability. Only the gospel is concerned with what has been done for you – what Jesus Christ has done for you. We are a religion of one sacrifice offered by one person on behalf of us all, that can never be repeated. Only Christianity says. “Look back...” Look back to the cross and see what was accomplished for you there and still applies to today.

Lots of times, I hear people talking about “atoning” for their sins or when they treat someone wrongly, “trying to make it up” to somebody. Sometimes you hear it from public personas – politicians and athletes – who get caught doing something illegal. Listen, you



can't atone for your sins. You can't do anything to make up for your transgressions. You cannot erase them by any amount of do-gooding, or personal reformation or, if you are rich, by establishing foundations or donating to causes.

Look, when I commit sin, there is nothing I can do – nothing – nothing to take it back or correct it on my own. All I can do is depend on the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered once and for all, to take away the guilt and judgment I deserve for my sins. I can only turn to Jesus Christ and the sacrifice in which I trust and on which I depend for the forgiveness of sins. I am perfected in Him, all of my sins gone, perfectly holy in the eyes of God. That is my position and that is your position before God if you truly believe the gospel. It is a radical thought, isn't it? Sure is, but it is the very center of the gospel.

But here's the second part. Those whom Christ has made perfect in position before God, He is in the process of making in practice what we are in position. Who are the ones that he has made perfect before God for all time by His sacrifice? ***Those who are being sanctified.*** In other words, the power of Christ to save is also the power of Christ to transform. In the way that the writer of Hebrews is using this word, "sanctified," here in this context, he is speaking of our becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. The two always go together.

Now get this. Let me put it all together. What Christ has done has made our salvation actual and real. Our forgiveness is actual and real; our son-ship or daughter-ship actual and real; our righteousness in Christ actual and real. That is our position with God. But in practice we are becoming more and more holy, more and more like Christ in our thought, in word, and in deed. The position is granted to us at the moment of saving faith but the practice is worked out over a lifetime of growth in obedience. Christlikeness is our established destiny and so it is becoming our present reality. Again, saving faith and transforming faith in Christ are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other.

Here's why that's so important to grasp. In our decision focused age of modern evangelicalism, so many people see salvation in Christ as a decision that is made at some point in time that has very little effect on their day to day lives. They profess to know Christ but continue to live self-centered, self-focused lives. They profess to know Christ but there is no change in their disposition, no change in character, no change in what they love and desire, no change in how they live and invest their lives. Jesus Christ and His cross, the gospel, rather than being the central reality of their lives becomes an unreality to them and

faith in Christ becomes little more than a get-out-of-hell-free card. That is not real faith in the finished work of Christ. It can't be. It goes against everything Scripture teaches.

The saving work of Christ is always connected to the sanctifying or transforming work of Christ. Do you see that? Just so we cannot miss that reality, the writer of Hebrews quotes two verses that he quoted earlier regarding the new covenant and he attributes them to the Holy Spirit. He says, ***“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.” Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.”*** (Hebrews 10:15–18, ESV) Do you see what he does there? He makes clear the connection of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's death and resurrection to the transformation of the heart. This life of Christlikeness is the spiritual gravity of every Christian's life to which we are being pulled and shaped and sometimes shoved by the Spirit of God who lives within us.

And just so we see that the power for transformation of our lives does not rest on us but on God's power in us, God says, “I will make a covenant... I will put my laws in their hearts... I will write them on their minds...” just like He says, “I will remember their sins no more.” Yes, beloved, out of a heart filled with gratitude and love for Christ who saved us, we must read and believe and apply His word, we must walk by faith in Him and not our own wisdom, we must seek God and surrender to His leading, we must desire to grow up in Christ, we must hate sin and fight sin and seek to walk in manner that is pleasing to God – that's the point of the new covenant, BUT, as the saying goes, we are playing with house money. We cannot lose. God has done the heavy work of changing our hearts and writing His word on our minds.

With that, the writer of Hebrews rests his case. He has taken our eyes and our hearts, our entire spiritual orientation and focused it all on Jesus Christ, who sits in the heavens, reigning with power for our salvation, having accomplished everything necessary to save us, and ruling our hearts by His Spirit. Everything points to Him. Everything. To know Him, to love Him, to serve Him, to grow in our faith in Him, to become more like Him must become the great ambition of our lives or we have missed the point of all the writer of Hebrews has said. And how we do that is where the rest of the writer's sermon is going to go. But I want to bring it home today with the

## Question of the Day

I want to quote John Piper here as we bring this sermon to a close. This quotation goes hand-in hand with the one last week. He says, **Last week we asked: does your faith make you eager for the second coming of Christ. Today I ask: does your faith make you eager to forsake sin and make progress in holiness? That is the kind of faith that in the midst of imperfection can look to Christ and say: "You have already perfected me in your sight." This faith says, "Christ, today I have sinned. But I hate my sin. For you have written the law on my heart, and I long to do it. And you are working in me what is pleasing in your sight. And so I hate the sin that I still do, and the sinful thoughts that I contemplate. And in this hatred of my sin, and in my meager advancements in holiness I rejoice that, according to your promise in Hebrews 10:14, I have been perfected for all time by a single offering, your precious self."** This is the true and realistic faith that saves. It is not the boast of the strong. It is the cry of the weak in need of a Savior. I invite you and urge you to be weak enough to trust Christ in this way.

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