

Text: Heb 9.6-10

Once again, we come to a longer portion of Heb 9 which will require some structural explanation, so you understand the way the author is making his argument.

First, let's recall the structure of the passage overall:

On the one hand we have the first covenant and its regulations (1a)

The earthly sanctuary and its preparations (1b-5)

The earthly tasks of divine worship (6-10)

On the other hand, we have the appearance of Christ (11-14)

Last week we talked about the earthly sanctuary and how its use prevented access to God, it presented a barrier between man and direct communion with God.

This week we are going to talk about:

The Obsolescence of the Old Way of Worship

Read Heb 9.1-14, text 6-10

The focus of our text shifts from human access to God to the life of the inner man. We see the term "conscience" in these verses.

One of my commentators observed about the conscience:

"It is not engaged in moral decision making, but in remembering."¹

What does that mean? Let's think about our personality. We will often say that the human personality is made up of:

- Mind
- Will
- Emotions

The mind thinks, the will decides, the heart feels: mind, will, emotions — that is our inner man.

What is the conscience? It is that faculty that looks back at what we have done and either approves or disapproves of our actions.

¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 225.

Can you remember a time in your life when you did something to someone else that you know was wrong?

What happens when you meet up with that person again?

- Your mind recognizes the person
- Your emotions register a feeling about that person
- Your will responds to how you feel, and decides how to greet the person (or to cross the street and avoid the person)

What does your will in that matter depend on? It depends on your conscience, clear or unclear.

How does one get a clear conscience, not just with men, but with God? That is what our message is about today.

Proposition: Christ allows our worship to be direct access to God with a clear conscience.

I. The structure of the passage

A. Structural markers set out the argument [Two Genitive Absolutes] (6, 8)

1. The clauses that begin v. 6 and v. 8 stand apart from their main sentences
 - a. “Now when these things have been so prepared” (6)
 - b. “The Holy Spirit is signifying this” (8)
2. The main points of the two sections
 - a. The OT worship summarized (6-7)
 - b. The Divine [Holy Spirit] lessons outlined (8-10)

B. One Chiasm (6-7)

The priest enter [on the one hand]

The outer tabernacle

The second (tabernacle)

The high priest enters [on the other hand]

1. The focus of the chiasm is the holy tabernacle (the holy place and the holy of holies)
2. The action of the chiasm is performed by others, not the self [the worshipper]

This compares to the structure of the first five verses, but they emphasized distance from God; this emphasizes that worship is impersonal, the actions performed by someone else on my behalf.

II. The functions of the first covenant worship (6-7)

A. Even the priests are limited in their access

1. Any priest assigned to the tabernacle service could perform its rituals

a. Daily:

1) Trimming the lamps (Ex 27.20-21)

Ex 27.20-21 ¶ “You shall charge the sons of Israel, that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually.²¹ “In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel.

2) Burning the incense (Ex 30.7-8)

Ex 30.7-8 “Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps.
8 “When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. *There shall be* perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

Notice that these actions occurred at prescribed times, not all day long.

b. Weekly: replacing the consecrated loaves (Lev 24.8-9)

Lev 24.8-9 “Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel.⁹ “It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD’S offerings by fire, *his* portion forever.”

2. Only the High priest could perform the ritual of the Holy of holies one day each year (see Lev 16 for details)
 - a. He first sacrificed a bull on the great altar, taking of its blood and entered the holy of holies to atone for his own sins (and his household)
 - 1) Sprinkled blood on the front of the mercy seat [the top of the ark]
 - 2) Carried a censer of incense to “enshroud” his person as he entered
 - b. He then sacrificed a goat for the sins of the people, returning to the Holy of holies to atone for the sins of the people
 - 1) Over the past year
 - 2) By sprinkling its blood
 - c. Then he exited the tabernacle, laid his hands on the “scape goat,” confessed the sins of the people, and consigned it to the wilderness

Our author isn't concerned with this part of the ritual, he focuses on what goes on in the sanctuary.

“Only the high priest” and “once a year” emphasize that this ritual was also restricted — even the high priest had limitations in worship.

- B. The most important restriction of first covenant worship: “not without blood”
 1. A double negative, emphasizing how essential this was: “he surely takes blood”
 2. He enters “only in the power of another life”²
 3. This implies impurity:

“Sin is, among other things, defilement that creates ritual impurity which must be cleansed by blood.”³

² Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 253.

³ Allen, *Hebrews*, 464.

4. And finally, the Old Covenant worship could not fully cleanse: it must recur every year

III. The lessons of the Holy Spirit (8-10)

An incidental lesson: all these regulations were given by the Holy Spirit through Moses (verbal plenary inspiration).

A. Access to God is restricted in the Old Covenant (8)

1. In OT worship, God is present, but distant

Pillar of cloud over the wilderness tabernacle, symbolized presence of God

2. Rebellion of Korah, “Why only Aaron? What are we? We are Levites, too.” — but God clearly chose Aaron
3. But not just restricted: “not disclosed”
 - a. There is a way
 - b. The way is “invisible” — not shown, not manifest ... until

Mt 27.51 ¶ And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

4. This is a “parable” — “symbol” for the present time (9a)
 - a. Before Christ’s death on the cross and the rending of the veil, the way was hidden
 - b. After Christ’s death and the rending of the veil, the way was manifested

B. Cleansing of conscience is impossible in the Old Covenant (9)

1. The Old Covenant gifts and sacrifices could not purge the conscience
 - a. The barrier is not simply the physical limitations of the tabernacle/temple
 - b. The barrier is internal — it is in the conscience
2. It is one thing to have a guilty conscience in the presence of a person you’ve offended
3. The problem for man is that he has a guilty conscience before God

Earlier, I said of the conscience, “It is not engaged in moral decision making, but in remembering.”⁴

Here is more from the same commentary:

“the term has negative connotations: it is the ‘uneasy conscience’ with its internal witness that defilement extends to the heart and mind.”⁵

“The Levitical offerings were able to secure an outward perfecting, the admission of each worshipper to a full participation in the privileges of the ancient commonwealth of God, which depended on the satisfaction of ceremonial conditions. But they could not bring a spiritual perfecting.”⁶

But see this:

Heb 9.14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **cleanse your conscience** from dead works to serve the living God?

C. Regulations of Old Covenant worship are only external and thus symbolical (10)

1. The last verse explains the reason for the conscience problem
2. They only relate to physical things: symbols, not matters of the Spirit, not spiritual
3. They are imposed (word implies “burden” or “a yoke”) on the body
4. They have no effect on the spirit

Jesus said to the woman at the well:

Jn 4.23-24 “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.²⁴ “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

⁴ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 225.

⁵ Lane, 47B:225.

⁶ Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 255–56.

Conclusion:

Proposition: Christ allows our worship to be direct access to God with a clear conscience.

- When we sing, we voice our adoration and fellowship with God, speaking directly to him (and one another)
- When we have prayer times, we speak directly to God as a congregation (and in our personal devotions)
- When we read the Scriptures, we hear the voice of God
- When the preacher preaches, expounding the meaning of the word of God, we hear the oracles of God direct from God's mouth to our ears (**if** the preaching is faithful to God's word)

For the unbeliever, even the spiritual worship of the New Testament is a barrier:

- Foolishness to the Greeks
- A stumbling block to Jews

What is it to you? Is God *your* God? Is Jesus *your* Lord?