

Text: Heb 10.1-4

We come now to Hebrews 10. The first 18 verses are the conclusion of the argument that began in chapter 7. We will see some repetition of themes we've already seen, but new emphases as well.

Let's read our text and look for some repeated themes:

Heb 10.1-4

- Year by year (1, 3)
- Perfection (1), cleansing (2), taking away sins (4)
- Sacrifices can never (1), it is impossible (4)

We've seen aspects of these themes in our study of Heb 7-9.

The passage today concludes this point: **the law can do nothing for me.**

That is not to say that the law did nothing, but by itself it cannot do what I need most to have done, have my sins permanently and forever removed so I can see God.

Now let me give you the proposition

Proposition: The Law, despite its virtues and source, cannot achieve permanent salvation.

Before the sermon proper, let's talk about the virtues and source of the Law:

1. The Law comes from God: perfect in its source, perfect in its expression
2. The Law addresses the root problem of man: sin
3. The Law demonstrates the barrier sin places between God and man
4. The Law restrains sin
5. The Law leads men to faith and to Christ (the "schoolmaster" function)

Rm 7.12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Rm 7.16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good.

1 Tim 1.8 ¶ But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully,

With the apostle, we confess the value of the Law. But the Law isn't enough, and it can't do what we need for permanent salvation. That is the message of our text.

I. The Law lacks substance (1)

A. The big words in our verse: "shadow" and "very form"

1. Shadow (σκιά)

- a. "an image cast by an object and representing the form of that object" (Thayer)
- b. "a mere representation of something real" (Bauer)
- c. The Gks/Roms thought of the dead in Hades as "shades" — something less than the real person

2. Very form (εἰκὼν)

- a. "that which represents something else in terms of basic form and features ... [the] *form of things* in contrast to their σκιά" (Bauer)
- b. In Colossians, Jesus is the Image of God

Col 1.15 ¶ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

- 1) God is the "invisible shadow"
- 2) Jesus is the visible image

B. The Law is the shadow of the good things to come

1. By Law, we mean the whole OT system, particularly the sacrificial system culminating in the Day of Atonement
2. The Law "having a shadow" is not unreal, but is incomplete
 - a. Plato: the things we see aren't the real things
 - b. Law: the things in the Law are shadowy prefigurings – a foreshadowing
 - c. The difference between the Temporal and the eschatological "a past witness to a future reality"¹

¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 259.

3. The good things to come

- a. Possibly these things are yet to come (kingdom, resurrection, eternal state)
- b. More likely, the things wrought by Christ
 - 1) The one sacrifice
 - 2) The present ministry as our advocate in heaven
 - 3) Personal access to God
 - 4) The blessed hope (this is yet to come)
- c. The same as the “very form of things”

C. The Shadow cannot effect the substance: no perfection (completion)

1. The shadow displayed “according to year,” *i.e.* “year by year”
2. The shadow of sacrificial system
 - a. Daily burnt offering
 - b. Individual offerings for devotion and cleansing
 - c. Great feast days
 - d. Culminating in the annual Day of Atonement

“Year by year, when all had been done only to be repeated, the powerlessness of the legal atonements was vividly set forth.”²

3. Perfection (completion)

“To make perfect does not mean to make sinless but to make acceptable to God. Jesus Christ provided perfect cleansing for us by His death, as the following verses show.”³

² Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 307.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Heb 10.1.

II. The Law requires repetition (2)

A. Implied condition: If the shadows could make perfect, then they would have ceased

1. Instead, by its nature, repetition must occur
2. Could you imagine applying NT faith into the OT system
 - a. Someone falls under conviction of sin, and is told, “just make a sacrifice to God and all your sins are forgiven forever”
 - b. Or even more parallel, the line is, “way back when, Abraham received a promise, he made an animal sacrifice, and God forgave sins with that sacrifice”

Can you imagine? Why would you need Christ at all, then?

B. If this hypothetical situation could be true, the worshiper would no longer have consciousness of sins

“This expression connotes the Hebrew sense of a burdened, smitten heart, which became most pronounced on the Day of Atonement when it was necessary to confront the holiness of God.”⁴

1. Everyone without Christ should have a consciousness of sin, a burden
There is one way out of it — turn to Christ
2. Christians have conviction of their sins, but they know there is immediate cleansing with confession

But the consciousness of sins points to the next fault of the Law

⁴ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 47B:261.

III. The Law points at the sinner (3)

A. The sacrifices remind us of sin

1. The whole idea of the Day of Atonement is yearly contamination of the land by sin
 - a. The Day of Atonement cleanses the land, people can have their prayers answered, their sacrifices accepted
 - b. Yet another year rolls around — there is still sin
 - 1) It is like there is a great spiritual cesspool
 - 2) Through the year, the sins of the people slop more and more impurity into the pool
 - 3) By the end of the year, the pool is full, it is about to overflow
 - 4) Another Day of Atonement is needed
2. Consequently, the fact of the sacrifices points to continued pollution and a need for covering

B. The ritual of the Day of Atonement emphasized the continuing presence of sin

1. The day was a day of fasting
2. Also of confession of sins
3. The high priest entered the Holy place first *for his own sins* (a reminder of sin)
4. Then he returned and sacrificed the goat for the sins of the people, taking its blood into the Holy place
5. He also laid hands on the scape goat which would be led out into the wilderness *bearing the sins of the people* (a reminder of sin)

All of this “brought to the consciousness of the worshipers the reality of their sins as an obstacle to fellowship with God.”⁵

⁵ Lane, 47B:261.

IV. The Law lacks potency (4)

A. This is the brute fact of inadequacy

“This impossibility has only to be stated plainly like this for its truth to be obvious. Moral defilement cannot be removed by material means.”⁶

1. More than merely material means, how can the blood of an animal substitute for the life of a man?

“The physical suffering and death of an irrational creature—unwilling and unconscious—can make no atonement for man’s sin. Man can have no true fellowship with such beings. Such a sacrifice cannot be more than a symbol, a sign.”⁷

2. There is no power for eternal life this way

B. The main issue: taking away the burden of sin

1. The deeply thoughtful OT saints realized this

a. David

Ps 51.10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Ps 51.16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I
would give it;

You are not pleased with burnt offering.

Ps 51.17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God,
You will not despise.

b. Jeremiah

Jer 11.15 “What right has My beloved in My house When
she has done many vile deeds? Can the sacrificial flesh
take away from you your disaster, So *that* you can
rejoice?”

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 238.

⁷ Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 309.

2. Yet... what about us? We celebrate communion once a month, twelve times a year — are we relying on something inadequate
 - a. The Day of Atonement pointed to the constant presence of sins, every year
 - b. The Communion points to the removal of sins, once for all

“This do in remembrance of me”

Not remembrance of sins!

“The gospel transforms *anamnēsis* [remembrance] from a remembrance of guilt to a remembrance of grace.”⁸

Conclusion:

Proposition: The Law, despite its virtues and source, cannot achieve permanent salvation.

Do you have permanent salvation? Don't dismiss it, be faithless to it!

Cling to Christ, obey him, honour him, serve him!

Do you need salvation? Run to Christ

⁸ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 394, cited in David Allen, *Hebrews*, *The New American Commentary* 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 495.