

# Perfected for All Time

SERMON

By

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**TEXT:** Hebrews 10:1-14

**PROP:** Christ by his single offering has perfected for all time us who as his own possession are being sanctified. We are chosen by God to be vessels of mercy and priests whom God uses for his special service in the world about us. As God's vessels of mercy let us not put ourselves to any unholy use.

## Hebrews 10:1-14

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. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

**5** Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“ Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;

**6** in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.

**7** 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.’ ”

**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), **9** then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. **10** And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

**11** And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Our focus this morning is on Paul's teaching in verse 14 of the text before us. By means of a single offering the Lord Jesus perfected his people for all time. His death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice for sin and with it he perfected his people for holy use in his kingdom. In order to put the sacrifice of Christ in the proper perspective we must consider what his people were required to do to deal with their sin before his death.

Throughout the entire history of mankind people have sacrificed to their gods. Some people offer sacrifices to their gods as a gift in order to obtain their favor. Others believe that sacrifices are a sort of magic, which serves to drive evil spirits out of sick people and into sacrificial victims, which were then destroyed. Another view is that sacrifices promote a bond between a person and his gods which serve to establish fellowship and communion with them. By eating a sacrifice a person eats the gods as it were and thus receives the strength and power of the animal-god. Some believe that sacrificing shows homage and obedience to their gods, gaining their favor and many in ancient Judah and Israel viewed sacrifices in this way. However, when we study the Bible, it becomes apparent that pagan nations had no understanding of the proper rationale for sacrificing to the true God.

The Bible teaches us that instead of currying the favor of God or appeasing his wrath, sacrifices make atonement for sin so that God's people can approach him. Sacrifices were to be offered as a vicarious and substitutionary punishment for the sins of his people, which were symbolically transferred to animals used to make atonement and propitiate the wrath of God. Israel was to sacrifice animals for the purpose satisfying the justice of God. As we read,

### **Leviticus 17:11**

**11** For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

Our greatest need as human beings is the forgiveness of our sins because the punishment of unforgiven sin is eternal condemnation and separation from God in hell. Furthermore God does not simply overlook sin because he is a God of justice and merely saying the Rosary or saying a number of "Hail Maries" in no way satisfies his justice. Islam teaches that Allah their god is holy and just but that there is salvation for those who have unforgiven sin. The Muslim is saved by works and Allah who is supposed to be holy and just and cannot tolerate sin, simply ignores it and in the end, being all-merciful, does not punish it. The good works of the faithful Muslim are said to outweigh the bad works no matter how bad they are.

However, the true and living God does not simply overlook sin. All sin must be forgiven on the basis of a blood sacrifice. We read,

### **Hebrews 9:18-22**

**18** Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. **19** For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, **20** saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." **21** And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. **22** Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Before the coming of the Messiah, God's people dealt with their sin by means of animal sacrifice and these sacrifices had to be made every day through every year. The shedding of blood had to be made continually to make atonement for their sins. But the sacrifice of Christ, the shedding of his blood, was done only once. As the apostle Paul notes, "-- *we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*" (Hebrews 10:10, ESV) Not only that, but all the previous sacrifices were made efficacious by the death of Christ. Again, as Paul points out, "*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*" (Hebrews 10:4, ESV) That is to say, without the blood of Christ, all the blood of animals shed for those thousands of years is worthless. Can we not therefore understand the infinite worth of the blood of Christ? The blood of Christ is infinitely better than the blood of bulls and goats and that by one sacrifice of himself we are perfected for all time. But with regard to the efficacy of animal sacrifices the apostle notes,

### **Hebrews 10:1-3**

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. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year.

Instead of promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover lamb, the tabernacle and all the rest, our relationship with God is now administered with the preaching of the word, baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances are fewer in number and far more simple. However, these ordinances are far more glorious, far deeper and richer in meaning and they apply to all nations not just Israel and Judah. In this manner the covenant of grace is new but its substance remains the same as it was in ancient times. God establishes himself as God to all his people throughout all of human history even as he said to Abraham, "*And I will establish my covenant between me and you and*

*your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."* (Genesis 17:7, ESV)

What does all this mean to us? The sheer magnitude of the number of sacrifices requires that we take our sin seriously. Consider what was necessary to effect the atonement for our sins. Millions of animals were put to death over the years to deal with the problem of sin. On the occasion of the dedication of the temple alone Solomon sacrificed 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep.

Speaking of the High Priestly prayer of Christ, John wrote, "*When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.*" (John 18:1, ESV) In commenting on this verse L. Kent Hughes wrote: "A drain ran from the temple altar down to the Kidron ravine to take away the blood of sacrifice. Since it was the Passover, more than 200,000 lambs would be slain in the next day. When Jesus and His band crossed the Kidron, it was red with the blood of the lambs prepared for sacrifice."

Then there was all the purification ritual of the priest before he could perform the sacrifice. Do we really have trouble with the declaration that every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God? Do we think our sin is a small matter to God? Well consider that all of the ritual and all the millions of animals sacrificed were not sufficient to atone for our sin. It was necessary that God's beloved Son be taken by wicked hands and be crucified and slain in order to take away our sin and the sin of all who have gone before. We need to constantly come to God for forgiveness and repent of the sins that so easily beset us.

*"For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."* (Hebrews 10:14, ESV) We have considered the single offering of Christ and its infinite worth compared with the myriad of offerings that preceded it but now let us consider the objects of the sacrifice of Christ. Those for whom Christ died are said by Paul to be those who are being sanctified but what does he mean by saying that we are being sanctified?

We usually say that there are two meanings to the term "sanctified." One is, "set apart." God has set apart his people from before the foundation of the world, to be his chosen and peculiar inheritance. We are sanctified or set apart by God the Father. The second meaning to the term "sanctified" implies not the decree of the Father, but the work of the Holy Spirit. We are being sanctified in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit when he does his powerful work of moving us away from our sinful lifestyles to be more and more like Christ. The Spirit of God inculcates in us the desire to cast out the old man with all of its sinful lusts and passions, and to put on the new man in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. That we are being sanctified, in the context of the verse we are considering ,

includes both of these senses. In the preceding chapter of Hebrews Paul speaks of the tabernacle with its lampstand, its table and its bread of Presence. He speaks of the golden censor, and the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold and the pot of manna; he is talking about priests, and about priestly things, and holy things; and he is declaring that all these things of which he speaks were sanctified things, but that though they were sanctified things, they needed to be made perfect by the sprinkling of blood. Our own being sanctified follows this analogy.

There were certain golden vessels that were used in the sanctuary which were never used for anything else but for the service of God. They were set apart, they were made holy, and they were kept strictly to be the vessels of the sanctuary of the Lord God. They were sanctified things. Again, in the sanctuary there were persons who did nothing else but wait upon the Lord. These were consecrated to their offices; for God chose the tribe of Levi, and out of the tribe of Levi he chose the house of Aaron. These persons were chosen, and then they were prepared. They underwent certain ceremonies, and many washings, and so they were made ceremonially holy; and these priests were therefore sanctified persons, because they were set apart, dedicated and reserved to the special service of the Lord God. And that is exactly what we who have been caused to be born again to a living hope ought to be. We are chosen by God to be vessels of mercy and priests whom God uses for his special service in the world about us. As God's vessels of mercy we are not to be used for any unholy purpose just as the priests of Israel and the vessels of the temple were not to be used for wickedness. Daniel records the fact that,

#### **Daniel 5:1-4**

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

**2** Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. **3** Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. **4** They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

We will remember that because Belshazzar took the cups, and the golden candlesticks, and so forth, and used them in his debaucheries, the judgment of God was written on the palace wall and he was killed and Darius the Mede received the kingdom. Thus we learn that God's people are not to be used for anything but for God. They are a set-apart people; they are vessels of mercy, they are not for the devil's use, not for their own use, not for the world's use, but for their Master's use. He has made them on purpose

to be used entirely, solely and wholly for him. That is what Paul is telling us in our text where he says, "*For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*" (Hebrews 10:14, ESV)

Look again at Paul's reference to sanctification. Christ has perfected for all time those who ***are being sanctified***. This translation correctly handles the Greek present passive participle that Paul uses. We understand clearly that a process of sanctification is going on being performed by a power outside ourselves. Though we are set apart by God for his own holy purposes we still struggle with sin in our lives. Our character is far from perfect being marred by a host of continuing sins yet the single sacrifice of Christ perfects us for his own holy use. Paul is not teaching that those for whom Christ died go on to live morally perfect lives. Whatever moral perfection is seen by God can only be the moral perfection of Christ that has been imputed to us by grace. But underneath the robe of Christ's righteousness we find a person that is in the process of being sanctified. Our **position** as a vessel of mercy set apart for God's exclusive use is of course perfect but our **persons** are not yet perfect.

We will remember the sons of Eli, who committed sin and iniquity before God. and yet they were set apart for God's service. They offered sacrifices as priests and because they had been washed with water and sprinkled with blood, they were officially accepted as being sanctified persons. In like manner we who have been converted by the power of God are sanctified persons, and we to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. We have no right to do anything else but serve God. We who Christ has perfected for all time by his single offering are set apart for his exclusive use. Therefore Paul says,

### **Romans 12:1-2**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We are not to wear the beautiful robe of Aaron nor the breastplate, yet we are to think of ourselves as being as much a priest as if we did wear the garments of the priest for we are priests. Peter tells us,

### **1 Peter 2:9-10**

**9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

So then we are chosen and set apart and reserved to be God's instruments and God's servants, and in this way we are being sanctified. Christ by his single offering has perfected for all time us who as his own possession are being sanctified. We are chosen by God to be vessels of mercy and priests whom God uses for his special service in the world about us. As God's vessels of mercy let us not put ourselves to any unholy use. As we come to the table of our Lord let us eat his flesh and drink his blood and go from the table with renewed zeal for Christ and his kingdom.