

**HEBREWS 9-10 REFORMING THE OLD COVENANT WITH THE NEW**

In Hebrews chapter 8, we saw Paul introducing the concept of the New Covenant, which permits God's spiritual laws to *begin* to be written in our hearts. So if these laws don't need "reforming," which actually do? Paul will now clearly explain they are the laws dealing with the *Levitical system* and its *Tabernacle, priesthood and sacrifices*.

As he says, "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* [or sacrificial laws] imposed until *the time of reformation*" (Heb. 9:1-10).

So we see *what laws* are changed under the New Covenant—they are the ceremonial laws "imposed until the time of reformation." God's *other laws* could not begin to be written in one's heart by these "fleshly ordinances," but they could through Christ's sacrifice and by receiving the Holy Spirit.

Robertson says, "[This is the] definite statement of the *temporary nature of the Levitical system* already stated in Heb. 7:10-17; Heb. 8:13 and argued clearly by Paul in Gal. 3:15-22." As Barnes' *Commentary* points out, "The word 'reformation'

(Gk. *diorthosis*,) means 'emendation, improvement, reform'...putting a thing in a right condition; *making it better*...The reference is undoubtedly to the Gospel as being *a better system* – 'a putting of things where they ought to be.' The idea here is that those *ordinances* [laws] were only *temporary* in their nature, and were designed to *endure until a more perfect system* should be introduced. They were of value 'to introduce' that better system; they were not adapted to purify the conscience and remove the stains of guilt from the [heart]."

So when people ask what "law" is Galatians talking about, they should go to Heb. 9:9-10 for the answer. It was *the temporary ceremonial law* that was "*our tutor* to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by [the new system of] faith. But after faith has come, *we are no longer under a tutor* [the old Levitical system of works]" (Gal. 3:24-25). So we have a "reforming" of the Old Covenant through the New Covenant system of faith, where there are better promises and a better sacrifice, but it's vital to note *God's spiritual laws* are included in *both* of these covenants, for as Paul says, *these laws* will be written in our hearts! Also, as Heb. 11 will mention, the men and women of "faith" in the O.T. will inherit *the same promises*.

He now again notes the many advantages of the New Covenant: "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?" (Heb. 9:11-14).

Again, notice all these elements that are being reformed of the Old Covenant deal with *the Levitical system and its sacrifices*, and Paul shows how superior this new system is to the old, with a better priesthood, a superior tabernacle and an infinitely better sacrifice--which not only cleanses outwardly, but also inwardly--or the conscience.

*Expositor's* makes a vital point on Heb. 9:11, saying the New Covenant is not wholly fulfilled and translates the verse as, "the good things *have begun* to come into existence.' There is *more* to come than we now see. Because the New Covenant has been established, the past tense is fitting. Yet *the full realization* of what this means *is yet to come*." So it is clear the New Covenant is not totally fulfilled now, but only at Christ's coming.

Paul continues, "And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.' Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Heb. 9:15-23).

It is important to note that the terms "covenant" and "testament" in the Greek come from the same word, *diatheke*, and Paul uses this double meaning to mention how *both* apply to the New Covenant.

*The Knowledge Bible Commentary* explains, "In opening the new unit of thought, the writer employed a swift semantic shift [a change in the meaning] in which he treated the Greek word for 'covenant' (*diatheke*) in the sense of a will [or testament]. While 'covenants' and 'wills' are not in all respects identical, the author meant that in the last analysis the New Covenant is really a testamentary disposition. Like human wills, all the arrangements are secured by the testator and its

beneficiaries need only accept its terms. Treating the New Covenant in this way, the author argued that its force, like that of all human wills, depends on the death of the one who made it. That is when it takes effect."

Paul then adds, "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, *He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*" (Heb. 9:24-26).

Here again we see how superior and complete is Christ's sacrifice. As *The Knowledge Bible Commentary* brings out, "Christ was appointed as High Priest of the New Covenant to represent sinful people in heaven itself, that is, in the presence of God. So His sacrifice had to be greater than that which allowed entrance into a mere man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. Nor could Christ offer repeated sacrifices as in the Levitical institution, for that would have required Him to die many times since the Creation of the world. Instead, the heavenly ministry of Christ called for a thoroughly sufficient, one-time sacrifice. This is precisely why He appeared once for all...to do away with sin, which the priests in the old arrangement could not do. By the phrase 'end of the ages' the writer evidently meant the climax of the Old Testament eras as well as the imminency of the climax of all things. He will shortly refer to Christ's Second Advent."

He then says, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb. 9:27-28).

Paul says all have been given *a life* to live and then will come a resurrection with a *judgment* (Gk. *crisis*) which is an *evaluation* that can be positive or negative. Notice it is *only* for those who "eagerly wait for Him," or those called, that He appears "for salvation." It shows the rest *will not be part* of that salvation, or the First Resurrection, which is later called in Heb. 11:35, "a better resurrection."

Paul now further elaborates on the temporary nature of this sacrificial law. As Bruce brings out, “our author is thinking *more especially of the law prescribing matters of priesthood and sacrifice* in relation to the wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple...now *that cultic law* is to be *superseded* by a new order, inaugurated by Christ’s *perfect obedience* to the will of God.”

Paul then says, “For the law, having a *shadow of the good things to come*, and not the very image of the things, can never *with these same sacrifices*, [that law!] which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have *had no more consciousness of sins*. But in *those sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins every year. *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but *a body you have prepared for me*. In burnt offering and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure.’ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of me—to *do your will*, O God.’ Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin you did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come *to do your will*, O God.’

“He takes away the first [the sacrificial law] that He may establish the second [based on Christ’s sacrifice]. By that *will* we have been sanctified through the *offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had *offered one sacrifice for sins forever*, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. *For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*” (Heb. 10:1-14).

So what is being replaced is *the sacrificial law*. As *The Knowledge Bible Commentary* brings out, “In the words He sets aside the first to establish the second, the author referred to the *setting aside of the Old Covenant sacrifices which did not ultimately satisfy God*. What was established was *God’s will*, and it was by that will that we have

been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all [in the New Covenant].”

It is also important to note that “those who are being sanctified” means this is *a process*, not a moment in time. As *The Anchor Bible Commentary* stresses, “Sanctified means ‘holy,’ ‘cleansed from sin,’ ‘ritually pure’...and ‘made perfect,’ because those who ‘are being sanctified’ are those who are the recipients of the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice.” Yet, it is *conditional*, for as Heb. 6, and later in this chapter, state, one can *forsake* being “sanctified.”

Paul underscores again that the New Covenant involves *internalizing God’s laws*, and says, “But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then he adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by *a new and living way* which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our *hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:15-23).

We see the New Covenant way to be sanctified is far better than the Old Covenant method, with its tabernacle and sacrifices. Instead of the sprinkling of blood during the Day of Atonement to “purify” the people, we have our “hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” by Christ’s sacrifice of his shed blood, and we have our bodies washed with pure water” which means by the ceremony of baptism.

As *Expositor’s* says, “The washing of the body with pure water is...a reference to baptism. It is the outward sign of an inward cleansing...The sprinkling of the hearts signifies the effect of the blood of Christ on the inmost being. Christians are thus cleansed within by His shed blood.” Brethren, what an honor it is to have been baptized and to receive this cleansing and forgiveness of sins!