
The Final Perfection of Sanctified Saints

Hebrews 10:1-18

Introduction Jesus is superior in the book of Hebrews as both our Savior and our Sovereign. The superior and sufficient sacrifice of Jesus has brought us cleansing and forgiveness. This was seen in our salvation in chapter 9 and now in our sanctification in chapter 10. The sacrifice of Jesus is how sinners can be welcomed in heaven. The sacrifice of Jesus is also how sinners can be perfectly holy.

How can those who draw near to worship be made perfect? Do you ever feel discouraged by the difference between what the Bible says your Christian experience ought to be and what it really is?

Don't you want to be perfect? Now I am not talking about being a perfectionist. Not the kind of perfect that never wants to use an eraser, or lines up the edges of magazines or is frustrated at mistakes, oversights and lapses of memory. I am talking about the perfection of never sinning.

Now think for a moment.

- We often invest enormous thought and effort in being without mistakes or perfect in a fallen world. Heaven forbid that we should make some error in judgment that rattles the standards of perfectionists.
- We are too often rather casual about our holiness. Do you ever wonder what it would be like to live without sin? Have we become so used to the reality that we do sin that we do not even strive for it anymore?
- We are bombarded today with expectations *that have little to do with Biblical holiness*. We are seriously distracted into striving to achieve things as men and women, as husbands and wives that are more common sense than Christian sanctification.

Christians have always struggled with the distance between the holiness we desire and the sins we too often do. Even Christians in the New Testament era. A careful study of the New Testament shows us that Christians tend to resort to two different extremes.

- License – We redefine what sin is and excuse our practice of it. We stop focusing on the practice of believing obedience. Frankly, the effect often leads people to replace concrete obedience with mystical experience.
- Legalism – We try to be holy by means of law keeping. We know that you can't be saved by keeping the law. But we believe that we can be sanctified by keeping the Old Testament Law. This was a constant struggle for early Jewish Christians.

How then can those who draw near become perfect?

The Problem in the Old Covenant

(v.1-4)

Certainly not through the Old Covenant. The Law itself simply could not make worshippers perfect.

In Its Character

(v.1-3)

The basic nature of the Law, the Old Covenant, made it impossible for it to perfect God's people. There were three major aspects of the Old Covenant that posed a problem if saints were to be perfected.

It is a Ritual

(v.1)

The Old Covenant was not the reality. It was only the shadows of the all the good things that were yet to come. The word *realities* here is a word meaning icon or image. The Old Covenant could not even give us the distinct edges of what God was going to do. It was the dark and fuzzy and indistinct images of future and heavenly realities.

It is Repeated

(v.2)

If it could actually make them perfect, then it would not need to be repeated. There is no need to continue offering a sacrifice for sin when the person has been forgiven and cleansed forever. Don't you love the heavenly logic? Having read the book up to now, don't you sense already what is coming?

It is a Reminder

(v.3)

Rather than cleansing them from an awareness of sin or a feeling of guilt, it constantly reminded them of their sin. It brought it before them over and over. The very sacrifices they brought kept pointing them to their sin.

Do you hear these words, loved ones? It is not possible that your obeying the law, your religious rituals, your good works, your baptism, your *what ever it may be*, can perfect you. At the heart of all human effort at being right with God is the problem of repetition. If your good works could bring you forgiveness and cleansing from sin, you would only have to do them once. As soon as I say that, you can see the absurdity of it. If the prescribed obedience and sacrifice of the Old Covenant cannot make people perfect, neither can all your good works. Somewhere in your conscience, you know that is so.

In Its Cause

(v.4)

Why could the Old Covenant **never** bring about the realities? Because the Old Covenant sacrifices were animals and grain. The blood of animal sacrifices cannot take away sins. We are not in a time and place where we bring sacrifices in order to be accepted by God. In many cultures today, what is being said here rings like a fire alarm in the ears of those who bring chickens or goats or bulls to try to appease the wrath of a holy God.

What is the proof of this? How can the Author here assert these truths? Is all of this such a new idea that Old Testament saints were utterly without a clue? Not at all!

The Proof in the Scriptures

(v.5-10)

The Author sets out here to show how we know that there is hope. From the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, he makes his argument.

The Text He Draws From

(v.5-7)

This quote is taken from the Septuagint translation of Psalm 40:6-8. But as we always should do with Old Testament quotes, we should read the verses around the quote to get a sense of context. The marvelous thing here is to see the CONSEQUENCES of the salvation God gives (v.1-3). Here is what God has done for believers. Then he responds by COMMENDING that salvation to others (v.4-5). He calls on people to trust in God and to tell about God's great saving works. David then points to the CHARACTER of the salvation God provides (v.6-8). Through the desire for obedience over sacrifice and New Testament use of this, the Messiah will bring the redemption that is commended by being both the Person and the perfection required. He also announces the CALL to the congregation (v.9-10). The need for these great truths to be announced in the congregation *still holds true for New Testament believers as well*. So the sermon we know as the book of Hebrews is the preacher telling the good news of deliverance in the midst of the congregation.

As the author draws from this stanza, he does two marvelous things.

- He shows that Old Testament saints had a sense of the limitations and imperfections of the Old Covenant. After all, this *is* David speaking in this Psalm. So David in penning these words understands that God desired obedience rather than sacrifice. The truths that the writer of Hebrews will develop from this text were at least available if not actually understood by Old Testament saints.
- He puts these same words in the mouth of Jesus Christ when He came into the world. While our disobedience brings about the need for sacrifice, Jesus' obedience qualified Him to be our sacrifice. What David expected, Jesus experienced.

The difference in texts, "my ears you have pierced or opened" is replaced with "a body you have prepared me" is the difference between David and Jesus. David comes to God as a sinner needing opened ears. Jesus comes to earth as a Savior requiring a prepared body. The author of Hebrews sees the implication that the Messiah must have a body as he follows the Septuagint rendering of the text.

The Truths He Develops

(v.8-10)

Our author develops this text by:

His Observations

(v.8-9a)

He observes carefully that all the categories of Old Testament sacrifice were not the permanent desire of God. The Law required them, yes, but God had a higher priority. That priority comes in the next observation, that David and later, Jesus, came to do God's will.

His Conclusions**(v.9b-10)**

In effect, the Author says, “I see these two statements in this text. They follow one another. They press me to these two conclusions.

- God sets aside the Old Covenant sacrifice to establish New Covenant obedience. The shadows are gone; the reality is here. The Old was not only fading away on its own, but it was doing so because it had been abolished by God. The Law showed Old Covenant believers that God was not pleased with sin and that He had made provision for their sin; but, He would rather have their obedience.
- God’s will is to make us holy by the once for all time sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ. Through the cross we have been set apart from sin and unto God. Jesus’ dying for our sins is once and for all applied to us. Jesus’ doing of God’s will is once and for all applied to us.

Loved ones, hear this with hope. The realities and principles of the New Covenant are ours. Why would you ever go back to the shadows of legalism? We do not need to go back to Moses for sanctification. God has determined to make us holy *by the cross*.

How does all this develop for us?

The Principles in Christ**(v.11-14)**

I see so clearly in these verses another repetition of the superiority of Jesus as Savior (v.11-12) and as Sovereign (v.13-14). The great themes of the cross and crown structure these verses. There are also here several very important principles the encouragement of our sanctification.

There is a contrast between the Old and New (v.11-12)

Old Testament priests stood to minister. There were no chairs in the tabernacle. There was no place to sit. But Jesus, having finished His sacrificial work, sat down in heaven at God’s right hand. This is significant for two reasons:

- GOD WAS SATISFIED WITH JESUS. God accepted as full and final the sacrificial work of Christ so that He could be seated in heaven. Over against the constant repetition of the Old Testament sacrifices and against the backdrop of pagan sacrifices, the sacrifice of Jesus is once for all time. There is no continuing sacrifice. There is no offering of Jesus again. His sacrifice is completed, done, over. This is very important to see. If Jesus’ sacrifice is not a final and sufficient one, then we are not cleansed nor forgiven.
- GOD EXALTED JESUS TO THE THRONE. It is the place of honor that Jesus takes. Philippians makes this so clear. God has given a Name above every Name and exalted Him above all.

If God is satisfied with Jesus and has honored Him, ought we not to also?

There is an *already* and a *not yet*. (v.12-13)

Jesus is in heaven. Jesus is our King and Priest. He is both Savior and Sovereign. He has the ultimate right to rule over all the cosmos. In the quote from Psalm 110:1, our author underscores this core principle in the entire Bible. There is an *already* sense in that Jesus is seated. And there is a *not yet* in that Jesus is waiting.

There is a *perfection* and a *process*. (v.14)

Look at verse 14 carefully. “He has made perfect forever those who are being sanctified.” There it is, many would say. Just as there is an *already* and *not yet* for Jesus (v.12-13), there is a *perfection* (made perfect forever) and a *process* (being sanctified).

Now, I want to stop here just for a brief lesson. The Bible teaches that we have been sanctified in a once for all act of God. Through the cross and at conversion, we are once for all set apart from sin and unto God. This is a definitive work that the Bible calls sanctification. It is definitive, one time action at your salvation. You have been sanctified. This is what this verse is talking about. God has perfected those He has set aside for Himself, He has made holy. This is like exactly the same as Hebrews 2:11, “He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one.” It is a designation of the community of faith. Paraphrasing William Lane further: God confers on His people a definitive consecration through Christ, the consecrator par excellence, by His atoning death on the cross. (Lane, *Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p.268)

But these perfected, sanctified, made holy people still sin and still need to change. How is this possible? Because they have a heavenly perfection that is in earthly process. The earthly process the Bible calls transformation, growth and “from glory to glory.” While we have already been made perfect in the heavenlies, we still in the process of change and growth in the earthlies.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has guaranteed the eventual perfect holiness of those who are in the process of becoming holy. Is this true of you? You can know if you have been perfected, if you are in the process. You can know if you have a holy standing in God’s sight if you are progressing in holiness now.

How do I know this is true both objectively and subjectively?

The Provision for Christians (v.15-18)

The Holy Spirit witnesses to it. He testifies to the truth of this:

In the Scriptures

This is where faith comes in. The Holy Spirit speaks to us as we listen to the truths of the Word. He tells us three important things from this Old Testament text:

There is WHAT GOD PROMISES (v.15-16). This is the definitive action by God in the new covenant. He will do these things in His people. He will change them with the Word applied through the Spirit. This is what God promised and what He is even now, conversion by conversion, doing.

There is WHAT GOD PERFORMS (v.17). Here is how God deals with our sins. He not only moves to make us holy by His Word, He also forgives our lawlessness. He will remember our sins no more. Until our holiness is complete, our sins will be forgiven.

There is WHAT GOD HAS PROVIDED (v.18). To make all this possible, God has provided the once-for-all sacrifice. And there is no longer any more need of offering because forgiveness is complete. We have been forgiven.

One further note: the Holy Spirit is speaking and is an external, objective revelation in the Bible. What God promises, performs and provided is truth revealed in the Bible and illuminated in our souls by His Spirit so that we believe.

In our Experience

What is woven through the objective revelation in the Scripture is a subjective disclosure in our experience. I believe that God has made these promises. I believe that God will perform these works. I believe that God has made this provision. I believe because God has written His law in my heart and mind.

These two together, the objective witness of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and my experience of those realities become an assurance giving confidence as I, a sinner, draw near to worship.

Conclusion

- Last week we wrestled with the question: “Does your faith cause you to eagerly desire for Jesus to come back?” We must trust and treasure Jesus in such a way motivates us to eagerly anticipate His return.
- This week, I have a final closing question: “Does your faith make you eager to forsake sin and make progress in holiness?” The kind of faith and belief that saves is one that moves you to greater and greater holiness. Jesus has perfected forever those He is in the process of sanctifying.
- This week, in moments of sin and imperfection, here is the cry, not of proud hearts, of humble and sin-burdened souls, “God, today I have sinned. But I hate my sin. You have written Your law in my heart and I long to do it. And so I hate the sinful thoughts I contemplate and the sinful things I do. In this hatred of my sin and in my meager progress in obedience, I will rejoice and embrace the truth of Hebrews 10:14, that I have been perfected forever by the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ.” (Piper)

So trust in Christ today in such a way that you walk with God in holiness and long for His coming.