

## Jesus Is Our Self-Sacrificing High Priest

### Hebrews 10:1-14 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. <sup>3</sup> But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. <sup>4</sup> It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. <sup>5</sup> Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. <sup>7</sup> Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.’” <sup>8</sup> First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. <sup>9</sup> Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. <sup>11</sup> Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. <sup>14</sup> For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Humans have sacrificed for thousands of years. The first recorded animal sacrifice done by humans is in Genesis chapter 4 where Abel, a son of Adam and Eve, offered to God the fat portions from the firstborn of his flock. Noah sacrificed a burnt offering after he, his family, and all the animals disembarked from the ark following the flood. Abraham offered sacrifices on multiple occasions in worship of God. But it wasn't until the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt around 1440 B.C. when God gave specific ways for his people to sacrifice to him, teaching them that they can't sacrifice to God or come to him and be accepted by him on their terms instead of his.

Counting up the public sacrifices that God required of his people, the number comes to about 1200 sacrifices per year. Every day 2 lambs were offered as burnt offerings – one in the morning and one in the evening. Every Sabbath day, that number was doubled to 4 lambs. The first day of every month was marked by the sacrifice of 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 male lambs, and 1 male goat. On festival days like the Passover, 11 more animals were slaughtered and sacrificed. All this sacrificing meant that it was no exaggeration to say that rivers of blood flowed from the altar of burnt offering and that mountains of animal carcasses filled the courtyard where the LORD's altar stood.

Because so many offerings were not just expected but demanded and commanded by God, some worshipers began to develop the attitude that the act of offering of sacrifices is what made them right with God, that going through the motions of a sacrifice bought God's acceptance and love. However, the act of sacrificing in and of itself did not take away sins. How do we know? The author of the letter to the Hebrew Christians points out: “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.” (verses 1-2) Basically, God is saying that if the Old Testament sacrifices would have been sufficient to take away the worshipers' sins, there would have been a stopping point to all sacrifices. Also, the worshipers still felt guilty for their sins. The sacrifices had not fixed the problem. So the conclusion has to be that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (verse 4)

Even though we don't sacrifice animals to God anymore, do we still live by a law of sacrificing to earn love or acceptance? The husband or boyfriend who messes up, says something he shouldn't have, forgot an important date, wasn't home when he should have been, buys flowers or a card or candies to win back his wife or girlfriend. When he does that, is he sending the message, “I'll sacrifice my money so that you accept me and love me”? Or he sucks it up and says those very important words, words that are damaging to his ego, especially when he thinks he's right and says, “I'm sorry. You were right. I messed up.” When he does that, is he sending the message, “I'll sacrifice my pride so that you love and accept me”? Or he says, “Let me make it up to you. I'll do those chores that you hate doing. I'll do what you want to do on a night out. We'll go to your favorite restaurant. We'll watch the movie you want to see. I'll let you drive, if you want.” When he offers these things, is he really saying, “I'll sacrifice my time and my preferences for you to accept me and love me”?

Do we treat sacrifices of love as if they are transactional, that if I give something up, then you will do this for me or feel this way to me in return? Do we treat acceptance and love as if we can buy it through sacrifice? Is that ever me? Do I try to buy acceptance and love with the currency of sacrifice?

They are plenty of examples in our world, in our lives, that teach us that love is a commodity that can be bought, not always with money, but with actions, with words, with sacrifice. That seemingly works for some people, but that's not love as God showed us love. God's love cannot be not bought or sold. It's not transactional. Because of this, the act of sacrificing cannot make someone love us, and it cannot make God accept us. As the writer to the Hebrew Christians says, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. (verse 8) God makes it clear that the act of sacrificing is not what took people's sins away.

So, then, what's the value in all these sacrifices to God, if he doesn't actually want them, if they don't fix or improve our relationship with him? God says that "those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins." (verse 3) The sacrifices were meant to teach us that blood must be shed to cover over our sins. Someone must bleed for my sins. Someone must die for my sins, but an animal's blood is not sufficient. "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves." (verse 1) These sacrifices were meant to be previews, pictures pointing us ahead to what will actually take away our sins, to what will actually take away our guilt over our sins. They were meant to point us to our Great High Priest, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus, our Great High Priest, shows us what true love is by being our self-sacrificing High Priest. When Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me...Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, my God." (verses 5, 7) Christ, true God, took on our humanity – a body prepared for me – in order to live under God's law and keep it perfectly because we never could. Even if we wanted to, we could never offer our lives up as a perfect sacrifice to God. Instead, Christ, our Great High Priest, came and did God's will for us because we sinned against his will. With Christ, the shadow became reality, the preview became the main event, because Jesus completed God's will and then sacrificed himself.

"And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (verse 10) Our Great High Priest sacrificed himself not to buy our love, not to show us how to sacrifice our bodies to be accepted and loved by God. No, he sacrificed himself to make us holy without demanding anything in return, no repayment. He sacrificed himself once for all to make us holy, cleansing us of our sin now and forever, a sacrifice of love done for all people.

How do we know that no more sacrifice is needed to be accepted and loved by God? Because the sacrifices stopped. The Old Testament priests sacrificed every morning and every evening, always on their feet, standing, working. "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." (verse 12) Never has sitting down meant so much. Christ sitting at the right hand of God means that sacrifice is done, once for all. No more sacrifice is required. "By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." (verse 14)

As those who have been made perfect forever, we know that no more sacrifice is required to be loved. Being loved with Christ's total and sufficient self-sacrifice, we now turn and love with our own sacrifices. Husbands and wives, you love by putting the other person first, a marital love that acts and sacrifices without expecting anything in return. You love, even when you want to withhold it until you get what you want. Children, you love your parents by honoring them, listening to them, obeying them, even when they don't deserve it. Parents, love your children by always considering what is best for them with the actions you take and the words you use. All of us sacrifice time, preferences, money because we want to show others the self-sacrificing love of Jesus, our Great High Priest, and not to earn anything by our sacrifices.

What the sacrifices of the Old Testament previewed, those shadows of what was to come, have now been made complete in Christ. In the self-sacrifice of our Great High Priest, we are made perfect forever! Own that perfection. Boast in it. Boast in our Great High Priest's self-sacrifice that has already made us perfect before God, worthy before him, without any other sacrifice required. This is what it means for us that Jesus is our self-sacrificing Great High Priest. Amen.