

Hebrews 10

The previous chapter closed with a clear statement of the finality and completeness of the sacrifice of the Messiah. Every time the Jewish readers of this letter encountered the word 'Christ', they would have been reminded of the fact that Jesus is God's chosen and Anointed One, the One who had been promised since generations past. The writer started the letter by referring to 'the Son' (1:2), then identified him as 'Jesus' (2:9) and has continued through following chapters making it clear that 'Jesus' is 'the Son', clearly referring in 4:14 to 'Jesus the Son of God'. But gradually, from 3:6 onwards, he has started combining his human identity ('Jesus') and his divine Sonship with the title 'Christ', i.e. 'Messiah', sometimes (e.g. 9:28) actually calling him the Christ and so emphasising his role in the prophecies and expectations of the coming Kingdom of God.¹ Now, in this chapter, he starts to use the phrase 'Jesus Christ' – for the first time in the letter!

10:1-10 The total ineffectiveness of the system of sacrifices and offerings.

Because the Jewish Law, operating through the system of temple worship, was only a 'shadow' of the good things which were coming (and had now arrived in Jesus), it was simply unable to 'make perfect' (i.e. 'make complete') those who were still (at the time of writing) continuing to come to the temple in Jerusalem.

He says very clearly that the whole system of sacrifices prescribed in the Books of Moses is ineffective. Every year, the offering by the high priest on the Day of Atonement was a striking reminder of sins and failures but could not actually remove sins (10:3-4). It just didn't work!

As we have seen with other points, this could have been quite shocking to Jewish believers, especially as some of them tended to try to cling to the Jewish Law at the same time as trusting in Jesus as their Messiah.² I am pretty sure that one of the main purposes of this letter was to help these Jewish believers to see that they could safely leave all the trappings of the Law behind, as it had all been completely fulfilled in Jesus.

Again, the writer quotes from the Psalms. He quotes from King David in **Psalm 40**, where David had evidently seen past the rituals of sacrifices and offerings as he wrote: *"I delight to do your will, O my God; your Law is within my heart."* He takes these prophetic words of David and 'puts them in the mouth' of the Anointed One, the Christ, Jesus, who *"takes away the first in order to establish the second"* (10:9).

And he underlines again the fact that, by this same will of God, we **have been** sanctified, **once for all**, through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus the Messiah.

10:11-18 It really is complete !

Jewish priests, day after day, offering the same sacrifices time and time again, are totally ineffective. Jesus, on the other hand, has offered **one** sacrifice for sins **for all time** and is now seated at God's right hand, just waiting now for all his enemies to become his footstool! (We are back in the prophecy of **Psalm 110** again!)

There's a lovely paradox here in 10:14 ! Because of that 'once-for-all' sacrifice, we have been made complete, but the process of sanctification is still ongoing! As the New International Version has it, *"For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."* Complete in God's sight but still a 'work in progress'. We can identify with that. He is certainly not preaching 'sinless perfection' here!

As he writes in 10:15 that *"the Holy Spirit also testifies to us"*, there may be a double meaning. Certainly the Holy Spirit speaks through the words already quoted from **Jeremiah 31**, but also there seems to be a sense that the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us personally by confirming the words in our hearts (compare **Romans 8:16**).

10:17 quotes from **Jeremiah 31:34**, and there is a real air of finality: *"... I will remember no more"*, and the word translated 'forgiveness' in 10:18 (and throughout the New Testament) means a 'sending away' or 'releasing'. It was used throughout the Septuagint (Old Testament translated

¹ There are several passages that make the point that Jesus is the Christ. See **John 20:31, Acts 17:3, 18:28, Galatians 5:24, Colossians 2:6, 1 John 2:22, 5:1**, and I get the feeling that Paul's frequent use of the phrase 'Christ Jesus' (that way round) may be to emphasise the same point.

² See a classic example of how this leads to trouble in **Acts 21:20** onwards!

into Greek) as the word for the years of ‘jubilee’ which came round every fifty years. In the year of jubilee, all slaves were released and all debts were cancelled, and all countryside fields and houses reverted to their original owners (and so remained part of the family’s inheritance).¹ Perhaps a bit more radical and permanent than we may think of forgiveness! So, of course, with that level of release and cancellation of debts, there is absolutely no more need for sacrifices or offerings for sin (**10:18**). To Greek-speaking Jews, reading this letter, the picture of the total release of the year of jubilee would drive home the total release through Jesus from the condemnation of sin.

10:19-25 A New and Living Way

As the result of all that Jesus the Messiah has accomplished in giving us this release, **therefore**, he writes, there are some real results:–

1) We now have confidence (literally, ‘confident outspokenness’ !) to enter the presence of God himself – to pass through the veil/curtain into the Holy of Holies. Only the Jewish high priest would enter that place in the temple, and then only once a year. Ordinary people like us would not have dared to enter that part of the temple but now we have confidence through the blood of Jesus to enter the **real** holy place – the presence of God himself! It is significant that the veil of the temple was torn from the top to the bottom at the time that Jesus’s body was broken on the cross.² “... *through the veil, that is, his flesh.*” (**10:19,20**)

2) Saying the same thing again: As we have a great priest over the house of God, we can come close to him with true and truthful hearts and in the full assurance (= ‘complete carrying out’) which comes from trusting him. The ‘sprinkling’ and ‘washing’ refer back to OT purification ceremonies; we have effectively passed through them as well!

3) Another result: holding fast – completely holding on – to ‘the confession of our hope’. What does that mean? What is our hope? And what does the ‘confession’ of it involve in a practical way?

4) Next result: Actively finding ways to stir one another up to real love and doing good things.

5) Not abandoning getting together with other believers, but encouraging (coming alongside to help) each other, especially as we see ‘the day drawing near’. (Our hope getting nearer to realisation).

10:26-31 A Warning – Why we need to keep on encouraging each other

10:26 starts with ‘For’, so here is a strong reason why we need to go on encouraging one another. Whatever our theology, there is a warning in these verses, and at least one of the reasons why we need to keep encouraging each other is that anyone who wilfully turns against the Lord is bringing judgment on themselves. A parallel passage, perhaps, to **Hebrews 6:4-8**. The warnings would not be here unless there was a real danger of going badly off the rails.

10:32-39 Endurance Needed!

But, remembering their early days as believers, he reminds them of their earlier ‘stickability’ in many different ways: Enduring a ‘great conflict of sufferings’; Being made a public spectacle through ‘reproaches and tribulations’; Or sharing with others who had that sort of treatment; Demonstrating sympathy with those who had been imprisoned (much easier to ‘lie low’ and pretend you don’t know them!); Having personal property seized (knowing that they had a better – and lasting – wealth).

‘You have come through all that’, he writes, ‘don’t throw it away!’ ‘Your confident outspokenness has a great reward’.

Yes, the promise is coming, but we need to ‘keep on keeping on’. Then we shall receive it! Encouragement from **Habakkuk 2:3-4**, but that also carries a warning – no shrinking back!

But, he insists, we are not those who shrink back, but those have faith to hold on to what is ours!

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¹ Lots of detail in **Leviticus 25** !

² **Matthew 27:51**