



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Jesus > Our Sin

Hebrews 9:1–15

Tim Badal | January 31, 2021

Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 9. The book of Hebrews can be difficult at times and foreign to us as Gentiles. It was written to a group of first-century Jewish people who had fallen in love with Jesus. Along the way, as they were following Him, the pushback and persecution they experienced was becoming too much to bear. They were beginning to have second thoughts, maybe even “buyer’s remorse.” Most of the people around them, including family and friends, were questioning them, “Who is this Jesus? What makes Him so special that you would give up all you’ve been a part of, all your culture and customs and traditions, to follow Him? How great could He be that you would give up all you once held dear?”

But the writer of Hebrews told them that Jesus was the greatest. In chapter after chapter, he explained that if they walked away from Jesus, it would be the most foolish thing they could do. As he’s been doing this, it has caused us to struggle some with the translation. He’s talking to a group of Jews who knew the customs and rituals, who had lived under these and had even been blessed by them, but now they had to learn a new way of life that was centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We learned last week that the writer is explaining how the old way of doing things—the old religion—was disappearing. It was becoming, as he said, “obsolete.” Commentaries tell us that Jesus would have had an easy time being elevated among the prophets and patriarchs, because they were used to talking “man to man.” Even while Jesus was on earth, the chief priests and Pharisees were taking notice of Him, especially guys like Nicodemus. So the author of Hebrews connected Jesus to figures like Abraham and Moses.

But today he begins to talk about things that were untouchable. In Hebrews 9 he starts to address the issue of the tabernacle which would then morph into the temple. The tabernacle, or tent, was the place where God resided. In the wilderness time the children of Israel would set up the tent so they had a place where they could meet with God. Later, during the time of Solomon, that meeting place became the temple in Jerusalem. Then later it was called Herod’s temple, after it had been destroyed and rebuilt. What made this tabernacle and later on the temple so important was that this was the centerpiece of the Jewish religion. This is where they came near to God. It’s where they confessed their sins and offered sacrifices to God. It’s where all their ministry took place.

That’s hard for us as evangelical Protestant Christians to understand. The building isn’t the main thing for us. Even though we love the building and invest money in it, because it’s a place of significance as the home where this local group of believers gather, we don’t have a building-centric mindset. The closest we can get to it in our day is what we see in our friends and relatives who are Roman Catholic. For them there is a sacredness to the place that is set apart for worship.

It’s ironic that right now we are worshiping and praising Jesus in a place that in many ways is dedicated to the sports of volleyball and basketball. That would never have happened in the Jewish faith. They would never have set up any sort of sporting event in the tabernacle. To do that would surely have brought them to their death. This makes it hard for us to understand just how importance that space was for them. The tabernacle was the centerpiece of everything. No matter how great the Jewish people would have thought Jesus was, they didn’t see Him as being better than the temple. Moses wasn’t better than the tabernacle. It



superseded any person. Yet the author is going to tell them that the tent—that tabernacle, that temple—they were all growing obsolete and vanishing away. The only thing that remains permanent and true is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This might be hard for us to wrap our minds around, but the author is saying there is a new Priest named Jesus, Who has brought forth a new covenant in His blood. He has also brought forth a new sanctuary that is not built with human hands, but is a heavenly sanctuary in the presence of Almighty God where Jesus now resides, sitting at the right hand of His Father. Jesus is the better Priest, the great, final and forever Priest. He has offered a new sacrifice for sin, once and for all, on the cross of Calvary. There He changed our hearts of stone and has replaced them with hearts of flesh. In other words, He's changed us from the inside out. And now the author will explain to us how we are to serve and worship God in this new space, the sanctuary of God.

Let's look at three things this morning. As we walk through them, I want to encourage you to stick with me, because the first two points don't apply to you and me. In some ways we've just opened up the Hebrews' mailbox and we're reading their mail. It's not making sense to us. Who's Aunt Ida? Where's that place? Reading other people's mail can make no sense to us. But when we get to point three, my hope and prayer is that it will make all the sense in the world.

The lay of the land

First, let's get an understanding of what's going on here by looking at the lay of the land. We'll start with verses 9:-5:

¹ Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Right away we're given two things. First, we've been given the floor plan of this tent and second, he describes the furnishings.

The floor plan

The floor plan was a pretty large area, set up so the people of God could worship there as they traveled through the wilderness. First, there was the tent, which the Levites carried with them on their wilderness wanderings. Whenever they stopped, the priests set up the tent.

I don't mean this in an irreverent way, but it was something like what happens when a circus comes to town. The first thing they do is set up the big top. The poles go up, then the canvas is laid. Without that, they couldn't put on their show.

So this was the first thing the Levites would do when the Israelites began to camp. It took a lot of time and attention. This tent then held all the different implements for their worship, things that were needed for all the sacrifices and rituals prescribed by God. Even though they were traveling, God was resolute that His people kept all the regulations He required them to follow.

To show you how important this tent was, the Bible dedicates 50 chapters to its description. Do you think God wanted it to be a place of great importance? To put that in perspective, the creation of the world and all that is seen and unseen were only given two chapters in the Bible. This is a big deal. In fact, when Moses was receiving the law on Mt. Sinai, the majority of his time with God was dedicated to all the rules and regulations of what the tabernacle was to look like and what the rituals would involve. This is a big deal.

The furnishings

When you walked into the tent, the first area was the outermost court, surrounded by a big curtain. It was dedicated to the worship of God. There were places for offerings to be given, for sacrifices to be made and for blessings to be received. There was a bronze altar for the sacrifices and a bronze laver or basin for ritual washings.

The next area within the tent was called the Holy Place, which was the main tabernacle, into which all the priests were able to enter. It was separated by a thick veil or curtain. Here you'd find the golden lampstand and the table of shewbread—which was the bread of presence or the sacred bread. These had a part in the priest's regular duties.

Then finally within the Holy Place was special section called the Holy of Holies. It was a small, inner space behind a second veil and it contained some very important items. In there was the Ark of the Covenant, which held the original Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron and a golden jar of manna from the wilderness. These were items that God had touched and which He set apart for objects of blessing for His people to remind them of His presence and care. The only person who could enter this space was the high priest. He would go in once a year to make a sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

For all of us who are 21st century Gentiles, these things are being thrown at us like we're in a game of Israelite dodgeball. There's the tent, the lampstands, the table, the consecrated bread, the curtains, the altars, the incense, gold coverings, manna, a budding staff and so on. We're wondering, "What in the world are all these things?" It's easy for us to get bogged down. Some of you might be ready to dig into these things, but the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Don't be too enamored of these things." Now Exodus 25-40 give us the opportunity to study everything in more depth, but the writer says in Hebrews 9:5, "*Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*" He doesn't want to emphasize them now.

Why not? Because all of this is vanishing and has become obsolete. Why focus our time and attention on something that is fading away? This book isn't about a bunch of furnishings. Jesus is better than all that. So why in the world would this author spend a couple verses talking about this? He was bringing his readers to a proper place. Remember, these people knew exactly what he was talking about. He wanted to move them from where they were to where they should be as believers in Jesus. Let me give you an example in our own experience.

I'm speaking now to our brothers and sisters here who are Cubs fans. Suppose I was to say, "Remember the good old days of baseball in Chicago? You would walk into a famous stadium filled with green chairs. There was ivy on the wall and the smell of hotdogs and Crackerjacks in the air. You could hear the crack of the bats, the voice of the announcers and the chatter going on in the crowd." You baseball fans would immediately be with me, right? And by the way, the Cubs lose 3-2 to the Cardinals.

But what the writer is doing is what I just did for you. I took you to a familiar place. You close your eyes and hear these word pictures, thinking, "Yeah, I remember that." They could smell the incense. They could see the sacrifices and the paraphernalia that reminded them of God's presence. So the writer is saying, "Now that I have you there, that's not the point. Instead, I'm going to point you to how Jesus is better than that." He's not telling them to forget the past things. Rather, it's like he's bringing in a competitor and saying, "Look at what this competitor has. There are sights and smells and golden things, but in a moment I'm going to tell you how Jesus is the real Champion."

The practices of the past

Once we've gotten the lay of the land, we now need to look at the practices of the past. In verses 6-10, the author is pivoting from the furnishings and the floor plan—from the tabernacle itself—to the events that were taking place in that holy and sacred place.

⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

Now as he pivots to what's happening in this place, the author is going to tell us that Jesus is even better than all these events that were taking place as the centerpiece of their worship.

Focus on the external

First, notice these verses only focus on things that are external. All the things he mentions are very earthy, including the floorplan and furnishings of the tabernacle. But he also lists the things that would be impacted by these rituals, including food, drink and washings. These are all earthy and external things. They can be touched or smelled or tasted. They're tangible things.

The biggest difference between the old covenant and the new covenant is that the old focused on things, whereas the new was transfixed by a Person. Does that make sense? This is how you know if you count on old religion instead of a right relationship with Jesus Christ, because you're focused on things.

This can happen to us as well. It's easy to go to our Catholic family and friends and point out how they have a lot of things they pay attention to. Wherever we look we see their paraphernalia. Or if we walk into an Orthodox church, we'll see pictures and icons and candles and things like that all over the place. If you're ADD and looking for a good time, go to a Catholic or Orthodox church; there's always something going on. A lot of movement is happening, with lots of touching and feeling and smelling.

Here's the problem. Amidst all that, it's very easy for people to become enamored by the stuff, yet miss the Savior. We can have this problem in the evangelical Protestant church as well. I'm going to start stepping on some toes now. Some of you think, "I don't like these new-fangled songs. I remember old time religion and it didn't have a hip bald guy on the stage here wailing on his guitar. We won't even talk about that guy in the cage; there's a reason why he's in a cage. Real worship is found in those songs in that book. That's the only way I can worship." We can do this with Bible translations too. "The only Bible we should study from is the King James Bible."

So we add things that can keep us from the substance. By the way, it can go the other way too. We sing a hymn and the young people say, "I can't sing those old junky hymns. They don't make any sense to me. They have Shakespearean English in them." We can do the same thing in both directions.

But in doing this we miss the main thing. Do these things point us to Jesus? If they do, then we should embrace them, because they're telling us something more about the One Whom we love. Be very careful about allowing externals to carry the day. Now, I'm going to get a phone call from someone, saying, "So, externals mean nothing." No. They mean something. The tabernacle had its place. It pointed people to God. But the perversion was that the tabernacle became the end-all. We need to be careful that we don't create gods out of elements that are good and right for us to be part of.

Notice the barriers

It's all about externals, but notice the barriers. There was section upon section. There were a lot of "Do not enter" signs in the tabernacle. If you were a Jew, you could walk into the first big tent. The vast majority of us who are Gentiles wouldn't even get into that section. "Do not enter, Gentiles."

Then if you were part of the Levitical priesthood, you could go into the second tent. All the Jews were glad to get into the first tent, but they might want to go into the second section. "Do not enter!"

Then the third place, the Holy of Holies, and there's another "Do not enter" sign, even for the priests. Only one priest, once a year, could go in there.

These barriers were there for a purpose: to keep man from getting too close to God. That's so important. The Old Testament law was built as a fence around God to keep sinful people away from Him. That doesn't make any sense to us as new covenant believers, but that's where they lived. They didn't get too close to God or experience intimacy with Him. He was transcendent and holy, an all-consuming fire.

Notice the repetition

Not only were there barriers, but there was also repetition. Think about all the work these priests did. Every time they moved and stopped, they would set up the tabernacle and get everything in its proper place. They would start doing sacrifices. The high priest would go into the Holy of Holies and offer a blood sacrifice for his sins and then for the unintentional sins of the people. This went on and on and on and on again. They did these things over and over....are you getting this? And over and over again. [I wrote down to say it ten times, thinking you would stop me—but you didn't.]

All that would only get them back to first base. Their sins were covered. But notice carefully—it wasn't just any sins. They were the "unintentional" sins. That referred to their sinful blind spots. You didn't even know you'd done them. But those were the ones the priest could cover.

Once that was done, he would walk out of the Holy of Holies into the Most Holy Place and then to the outer court where there would be a sense of relief. But then once the people left that space, they would get back on the sinful merry-go-round where they lived. They never really got anywhere. That's why the author says, "God has something better in store." The worshipers in the

tabernacle wanted something more. They knew something was missing. The law pointed people to Jesus specifically because it left something undone that only Jesus could address. The law addressed the outside, but it didn't address the inside.

There is a current commercial by Bounty paper towels with a little girl playing the part of a pirate. When she comes running into the kitchen with a sword, she stabs an unsuspecting father somewhere in his backside. He's holding a drink and it goes flying. The response is shown in slow motion. "Nooooo!" How many of you have seen this?

Then there's another one where the kid is eating some Chinese food with chopsticks when something he's holding slips out of his hand, hits the bowl and the bowl spills. There's a bulldog ready for the food and again they're going, "Nooooo!" The dog is thinking, "Yessss!"

I truly believe the advertisers are trying to communicate a sense of needing contentment and joy. Spills are going to happen, but it's not just the external—it's the internal angst. That's the "Nooooo!" It's the feeling of "I just made a mess of Mom's carpet. I just made a mess of Mom's kitchen." It's the remorse, all the internal turmoil that comes when we make a mistake.

Listen, the Old Testament law was God's paper towel for a season. It was the quicker picker-upper. You do these right things and the law would clean up the mess. People would leave with the mess taken care of, but what they didn't have taken care of was the "Oh, noooo!" It was the guilt, the remorse, the sorrow, the shame that came with that sin. They were clean on the outside, but there was something left inside.

The cleansing of Christ

That brings us to where we are today, which is that Jesus is the only One Who can cleanse the conscience. We need to look at the cleansing of Christ. The author has explained the old way and has shown them how great that old way was, reminding them of the good old days. But the old way kept them far from God and only dealt with external things. Look what he says beginning in verse 11: *"But when Christ appeared..."*—that's an important 'but' there. In contrast to what we just saw, Jesus appeared *"as a high priest of the good things."* Wait a minute. The things before it may have been good, but this implies that there are better things yet to come.

"Then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)"—speaking of heaven— *"he entered once for all."* Remember the over and over you got tired of me saying over and over again? *"He once for all entered into the holy place, not by means of the blood of goats and calves."* What happened in that main tent area? It was a butcher fest. There were guys with cleavers cutting parts of lambs and goats and rams and bulls. There was a lot of blood. This wasn't a pretty place. He says, "Jesus didn't go in with all of that. Jesus went in *"by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."*

This redemption wasn't temporary; it was "eternal," meaning both forever and complete. It was all-inclusive.

"For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh"—that's the external— *"how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."* The end of verse 14 says our consciences are purified through Christ. Compare that to verse nine where we read, *"According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper."* How is Jesus greater than the sanctuary of the tabernacle? Jesus is able to clean us from the inside out, whereas the tabernacle or temple rituals could only clean the outside. They couldn't touch the conscience.

What is this conscience? Some think it's a little angel on one shoulder and a little devil on the other shoulder. You're constantly going back and forth, listening to one of them say, "Do this. It's a good virtue." Then on the other side you hear, "No, do this. You'll have more fun." Some people think that's what the conscience is, but the conscience has been defined as the part of the human psyche that induces mental or emotional anguish when we violate our values. What are our values? The Bible says God has written His law on our hearts, so when we violate those laws, when we do things we ought not to do, we have a feeling of anguish and inner turmoil. When we do things that are in conformity with God's will and Word, we have feelings of pleasure and wellbeing. There's a satisfaction that comes with it. The problem is the old law couldn't deal with that. The conscience reminds us that we're not just material beings; we are also immaterial. The temple all pointed to the material and external. So how is it that Jesus purifies and cleanses our conscience?

Jesus purifies us from our contamination.

The old way addressed sin from an external place. Let's be honest here. Think about a sin you've really struggled with. The issue isn't so much the physical. Think about sins of the tongue for a moment. Does your tongue hurt when you bad-mouth someone? Do you feel a pain in your tongue? No. It's not an external issue. It's the heart. When you see someone you've spoken harshly to, it causes both you and that individual to feel pain. It's not pain in their ears. They don't say, "You've hurt my ears." They say, "You've hurt my feelings." You've done something internally that's not easily taken away. That's why we say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones..." but it's those names that really do hurt us.

Let's go a little deeper, and I do this with fear and trepidation. Lust isn't for certain regions of our body. That plays a part, but if you've ever been part of sexual sin, you know it isn't the part of the body that was the instrument for immorality, it's what you carry mentally and emotionally afterwards. It's far more difficult to get through what you carry on the inside.

Jesus is able to clean us from the outside in and the inside out. Fully and freely we are given new life in Him, which means there's no more contamination.

Jesus delivers us from a guilty conscience.

Then Jesus goes on to deliver us from a guilty conscience. What I mean by that is He addresses the guilt, shame, remorse, sorrow and anguish through which the evil one holds us captive. The devil never accuses you of your tongue; he goes to the heart. When you use your mouth in a wrong way, he doesn't point at the tongue. The tongue is just the instrument being used. That's why Jesus said, *"What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart"* (Matthew 15:18). What we really struggle with is not our mouths, but our hearts.

The author of Hebrews acknowledges that the blood of animals does have value, but how much more value does the blood of the One and only Son of God have to save! He saves us with an eternal redemption. Listen very carefully. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, if you have bowed the knee to Him, you don't have to worry about your sin anymore, because you have been made as white as snow. You have been saved to the uttermost, as we read in Hebrews 8. All of it has been taken care of.

We know this, but do we know what dogs us as individuals? It's the guilty conscience. That's what the devil beats me up with. The devil says, "How can you be a Christian? How can you be a pastor? You've got all this sin in your life. Man, if they only knew how sinful you are, Pastor Tim." My conscience gets beat up. I begin to wonder if I can continue to serve and worship God. When I come into this place, I can't sing these songs. I can't experience God's forgiveness. But Jesus comes and whispers in my ear, "Yes, the devil is absolutely right. You are sinful to the core, but I am holy to the core and My holiness covers your sin."

So, child of God, don't live in guilt. Don't live in shame. Don't live in regret. We do need to address our issues to the best of our ability. When we've wronged someone, we need to go and seek to make it right so we can live at peace with them. Then it's all in the past. One of my favorite pastors, Tony Evans, says, "We need to put our past in the rearview mirror. It's there, but we have the whole windshield ahead of us. The rearview mirror is just for us to be reminded of what's behind us." We don't need to live in the past, but some of you are living in the past and you are ineffective regarding what God wants you to do.

When we are delivered from a filthy and sinful conscience to a holy one, notice what the author writes in Hebrews 9:14: *"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."* That word "serve" there is the Greek word *latreuo*, which means to worship and serve. It's used interchangeably. Since Christ is greater than our sin, you and I can worship and serve God without fear of reprisal or regrets. I will tell you that if you can get this into your head and apply it to your heart, your service to God and your worship of God will be elevated in ways you've never experienced before.

You will be thinking, "I am so sinful, and You are so holy," but now the barriers are gone. There are no more "Do not enter" signs. Instead, there are signs that say, "Welcome!" and we enter in with a clean heart.

Hebrews 10:19-23 says:

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in

full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

That truth delivers us so we can sing and shout and proclaim that Jesus is the great High Priest over the house of God forever. Because of Him, we get to enter into that most holy place. In that moment, we will experience grace and mercy in our time of need. If those Jewish individuals could have grabbed hold of this, they would have said, "In light of Jesus, why do we need a tabernacle? Why do we need a tent? Why do we need a temple that is a growing obsolete and vanishing away, when we have Jesus, Who is the same yesterday, today and forever?"

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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