

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the internet has a lot of useful information. One category of such information is called “life hacks,” which people discover alternative ways to do ordinary things. I came across some life hacks for cleaning things. For example, if your jeans are smelly even after laundry you can deodorize them by putting them in the freezer. For cleaning tough stain inside a microwave oven all you have to do is warm up some white vinegar, then wipe it down. To clear away soap scum on a faucet head rubbing it with a lemon will do the job. Final tip: how to get rid of oil stain on your garage floor? Pour cola over it and soak overnight. I know you may be skeptical about some of these strange tricks. But many people have tried them and they really work!

While there are physical contaminants that we need to remove there is a spiritual problem we are born with. The Bible calls it sin. The Bible tells us that our sins stir up God’s wrath. God is holy and in Him there is no sin. Therefore, God requires us to be holy in order for us to approach Him. But how? In the Old Testament the Israelites offered animal sacrifice to attain temporary holiness. But in Hebrews chapter 9 the author compares animal sacrifice with the work of Christ to explain that Jesus Christ is the only way to attain eternal holiness.

## EXPLANATION

From verse 2 to 5 the author gave us an overview of the layout of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is a mobile temple. The tabernacle is surrounded by an outer fence built by connecting and erecting pieces of cloth. It stands 7.5 feet (or 2.3 meters) high. The whole area of the courtyard is 150 by 75 feet (or 46 by 23 meters). It is about three times the length and width of our multi-purpose room. The tabernacle is a tent with a cover. It is divided into two compartments – the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place – that are separated by a curtain. There are many accessories in the tabernacle. But the most important piece of equipment in the Most Holy Place is the Ark of the Covenant. It is a cabinet made of wood. Verse 5 tells us that the cover of the Ark is called the atonement cover (or mercy seat). The atonement cover is the place where God revealed Himself. Then on the top of the atonement cover are statues of two cherubim. Cherubim is a specific name for angels in the Bible. The whole design of the tabernacle is to reflect God’s holiness. Because God is holy and men are sinful God prescribes ways to forgive sins so that men can approach God.

### 1. 動物獻祭的不足之處 The Inadequacy of Animal Sacrifice

In the Old Testament times animal sacrifice was the way God ordained for the forgiveness of sins. However, animal sacrifice is inadequate in achieving eternal holiness. It is inadequate in two aspects.

#### A. 有限的接近 Limited Access

First of all, animal sacrifice only provides limited access to God. **Verses 6 and 7** read: 6 When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The outer and inner rooms refer to the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, respectively. Here it says that only the high priest would be permitted to enter the Most Holy Place once a year. In God's decree of the twelve tribes of Israel the tribe of Levi were chosen to serve in the tabernacle. Of all the Levites God only assigned the descendants of Aaron to be priests. Among all the priests, only the high priests could enter the Most Holy Place and he could only do so on the Day of Atonement. Therefore, one layer after another God puts restriction on who can access Him. It is more stringent than going into the CIA or Department of Defense depicted in movies. God warned Moses in **Leviticus 16:2** – “Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.” The rest of the chapter stipulates the detail steps of what a high priest needs to do to observe the Day of Atonement. First of all, the high priest had to atone for his own sins. Look at **verse 11**: Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. Then scroll down to **verse 14**: He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover. After that, the high priest would repeat the same procedure to slaughter a goat to atone for the sins of the people. The symbolic meaning behind the animal sacrifice and the sprinkling of the blood is that the animals are killed in place of the sinners. We use the term “scapegoat” to fittingly describe the substitution of animals for humans. Through the death of an animal the high priest attained temporary holiness and could get limited access to God. Because God did not grant access to everyone the high priest also served as a representative and mediator for the people.

## B. 有限的潔淨 Limited Cleansing

Animal sacrifice is inadequate not only because it provides limited access to God it also achieves limited cleansing. **Hebrews 9:9** says: This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. The sacrificial system does not clear one's conscience. In other words, it does not provide an assurance that a person has been made holy and accepted by God. The author of Hebrews adds in **10:2** - If it could, 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. There is a guilty feeling every time when the Israelites saw animal sacrifice because they were reminded of their sins. Therefore, the priests had to offer animals over and over again to help regain a holy status of the people before God. When I was in the seminary one professor made an interesting observation. Of all the accessories in the tabernacle one furniture is missing – a chair. The tabernacle is for the priests to work, not rest.

The animal sacrificial system can easily lead to legalism of “do it and you are done.” People may be satisfied with doing the minimal just to fulfill the requirements. That is exactly the problem from the traditional Chinese beliefs to the Pharisees in the New Testament time. Participants focus on the ceremonial procedures. If you do not follow the right steps you will not achieve the

results you hope for to please the deity one worships and to receive blessing in return. It fits our human logic because in our mind there is no free lunch. If you do your parts then the deities are obligated to do theirs. You spend time, money and effort in hoping that your investment will pay dividend. Everything is man-centered and profit-seeking.

## 2. 基督獻己的完全功效 The Sufficiency of Christ's Sacrifice

If animal sacrifice is inadequate then it creates a longing in men's hearts to look for a permanent way to attain holiness. Compare to animal sacrifice, Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross is sufficient to provide eternal holiness.

### A. 無限的接近 Eternal Access

Christ's sacrifice is sufficient because first of all it provides us an eternal access to God. **Verses 11 and 12** tell us: 11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. Compare to the Leviticus high priests Jesus Christ was the great high priest. But what Christ offered was not animals. He offered Himself as a better sacrifice. Christ died for our sins on the cross as the eternal sin offering to completely fulfill God's requirement for holiness. In Christ we are redeemed. Paul says in **Colossians 1:21-22** – 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. Before a person accepts Christ he is a sinner in God's eyes. Christ's death on the cross bridged the chasm of sin between God and men. Through Christ God gives us eternal access to Him. Some of you may remember that when Christ died on the cross there was a miraculous scene. **Mark 15:37-38** record: 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The curtain in the temple is the same design as the curtain dividing the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. The splitting of the curtain denotes that Christ has attained eternal access to God for us through His death. Christ, rather than a priest becomes our mediator. In Christ, anyone can come before God.

### B. 無限的潔淨 Eternal Cleansing

Christ's sacrifice is sufficient not only because it provides us an eternal access to God, it also grants an eternal cleansing for our sins. **Hebrews 9:14** reads: ...the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! The cleansing power of Jesus' blood is eternal because it cleanses our conscience. We have an assurance from God that when we put our trust in Christ, all of our sins – past, present and future – have been taken care of at the cross. What a great joy that is! Because the cleansing is eternal, unlike animal sacrifice Christ's sacrifice of Himself does not need to be repeated. The phrases “once for all” and “eternal” appear a few times in this chapter to illustrate the point. Both phrases are used in **9:12** that we have read before: He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. It is a done

deal on the cross! God no longer sees those who are in Christ as sinners. He sees them as His own children. There is love and acceptance, rather than fear. **1 John 4:16-17** say - ...God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment. The Bible tells us that the judgment day will come at Christ's return. Christians have no fear facing that day because we know that we have been accepted by God. Instead, we anticipate that day to come sooner because when Christ returns He will usher us into eternity with God forever. While the animal sacrifice reminds the Israelites of their sins the cross reminds Christians of God's grace. The cross also humbles us if we truly realize how undeserved of God's grace we are. We attain God's standard for holiness not because of any ritual or work we do. It is all because of God's mercy and love.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ is the only way for us to attain holiness. All who are in Christ belong to God. Christ's sacrifice is not only a solution to our sins, it is also a prevention for future sinning. Since we are already made holy we live a holy life by relying on God's grace.