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A perfect Saviour
 Confession: Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 5
 Hebrews 10:1-10

Dear congregation,

One of the most uncomfortable situations that we can find ourselves in is when we open ourselves up for scrutiny. Whether it's someone evaluating your budget, the doctor examining your body, or the teacher grading your homework, being scrutinized is necessary but never fun.

In the last three Lord's days we have been subject to intense examination and scrutiny by God himself. We have learned that we are all sinners, we have seen where this sin comes from, and also the righteousness of God against our sins.

And now, on Lord's day 5 we take that second step in our journey to gospel comfort, that is how we might be delivered from our sins and God's judgement.

To be delivered from our sins and misery is of the utmost importance. The scriptures say that all men and women are in bondage to sins (Gal. 5:1). Incapable of salvation in and though ourselves (Eph. 2:1). And unless we are delivered from our sins and misery we are destined for hell and destruction (Ezk. 18:20).

Not only this but the scriptures describe God's wrath in a horrifying way. Ezekiel tells us that God will execute vengeance on sinners (Ezk. 25:17). Nahum prophesies, "*The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, And the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, And the rocks are thrown down by Him*" (Nah. 1:5-6). Even Jesus, our Prince of Peace, says in Revelation that in his return he will be clothed in the blood of his enemies (Rev. 19:13). These descriptions should cause us to cry out with the instructor, "how can I escape this judgement?!!"

Lesson: We may escape God's judgement when our hostile relationship with God is resolved and we are received and united with him through a perfect mediator.

Our headings are:

1. God's Justice must be Paid in Full (Q. 12).
2. A creature cannot pay this debt (Q.13-14).
3. We need a perfect Saviour (Q.15).

Point 1: God's Justice must be Paid in Full (Q.12).

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” (v.1).

I want to focus on that last clause in verse 1 *“Can never... make those who approach perfect”*. Meaning that these sacrifices cannot complete ruined sinners, they cannot satisfy God's claims of justice.

Now the author of the book of Hebrews is an expert on the Old Testament Law of God and by referring to the people under the Law as being *made perfect* what is demonstrated is the legal demands of the Law. What God's Law demands from us is, **perfection**. Exodus 19:6, Leviticus 11:45; 19:2; 20:7; 20:26; 21:8, 1 Pet. 1:16 say, *“You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”* The demand of God's Law is nothing less than perfection.

So when our catechism asks the question, “how then can we escape this punishment and return to God's favour” (Q.12)? We must recognize that we have fallen short of perfection and his justice must be satisfied. And God provides in his Word two means of satisfaction.

1.1 - God's Justice can be satisfied in us - *Legal Demands*

Since we are the ones who are guilty of sins we are the ones who bear the punishment of God's Law. *“Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them”* (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10). This is the first means of satisfying God's judgement, bearing this curse in ourselves. So how bad is this curse? Louis Berkhof says this curse is four fold.

1. Spiritual death.¹

In the garden of Eden the Lord told Adam and Eve the day they ate of the fruit they would die (Gen. 2:17). Now of course they didn't die physically, at least right away, but part of God's curse was their spiritual death. Augustine said, “sin is also the punishment for sin”.² Meaning that the sinful state we are born with, our daily struggle with sin, being separated from God, are all a part of the penalty for sins.

2. Sufferings of life

¹Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pg. 259

²iibd pg. 259

The sufferings of life, which come to us due to sins entrance into the world, are also included in the penalty of sins. We have weaknesses, disease, pain and discomfort which all discomfort our life.

3. Physical death

When God curses Adam and Eve he said, “*For dust you are, And to dust you shall return*” (Gen. 3:19). Which speaks of physical death. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 that *the wages of sin is death*. So the consequence of sin is not only spiritual death but also physical death.

4. Eternal death

Finally, the Bible speaks also of eternal death which is the culmination and completion of spiritual death. This is an awful reality, where the full weight of God’s wrath descends on the condemned and there is a final and eternal separation from God who is the ultimate source of life, joy, and goodness. The scriptures when speaking of this dreadful truth says the *smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever* (Rev. 14:11).

These are the legal claims of God’s justice and they can be met and satisfied in us beginning both now and for all eternity. Yet there is also another way, where this justice can be met in someone else, this other way of satisfaction is called the gospel.

1.2 - God’s Justice can be satisfied in another - *The Gospel*

The only other means of escape provided for us in the scriptures is satisfaction by another (Rom. 8:3; Jn. 3:16). God’s justice will be satisfied in the punishing of a surety in our place. He must take all of the above mentioned penalties upon himself. This is where someone bears a sufficient punishment for our disobedience, thereby God’s Law is satisfied, and the justice of God pardons the offenders and receivers them into his favour.³

Now at this point we might ask the question, why does God’s Law even demand perfection? Why must we go through all this? Could not God receive us into his favour as we are? God demands perfection for all those under the Law that he might have communion with his church. God desires that his people be brought into his presence, enjoy and glorify him. He wants his church to be satisfied in him, to adore and glory in him. And this can only be done if the worshiper is perfect. For God is holy he cannot be in the presence of sins.

³Ursinus, Zacharias. *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharies Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*

Therefore a perfect expiation must be made that gives complete pardon, a clean conscience, and purified heart - an expiation that makes us truly worshipers - reconciled with God who enjoys fellowship and communion with him. If this is to be our inheritance, if he is to be our joy and love, the treasure of great price that worth selling all that we might have him, then we must be absent of sin. The debt must be paid in full.

Application:

1. It is wrong to think that we can live in sin and enjoy communion with God. There are many who would like to brush their sins under the rug with the excuse that we all sin and God is okay with my little sins (why would he deal with my sins where there are murders, drug addicts, and prostitutes out there)? Nothing is farther from the truth. The scriptures teach us is what God desires is a pure and spotless bride, free from sins.
2. Before we read our Bibles, come to church, we should confess our sins. Knowing that we have an advocate before the Father who will forgive us of sins! We should often confess our sins before entering the presence of a holy God such as ours.

Point 2: A Creature cannot pay this debt (Q.13-14).

So we have heard that there is a way to escape this soon coming judgement by way of a surety, that is, someone taking our punishment for us. Now, you don't have to be a Bible scholar to immediately think back to the Old Testament sacrificial system where we are told that many animals were to be killed and the sinner set free. We might ask, "are those sacrifices the surety that we need?"

The author's main focus in Hebrews 10:1-4 is to show his readers that no mere creature can pay our debt for us. In fact the Old Testament sacrificial system was insufficient to take away sins because that was not the reason they were given. The author gives us 3 reasons:

2.1 - The Law was a shadow

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come"

Now when the Apostle here refers to the Law does he refer to the whole of the Law? The answer is no, he is referring to the sacrificial Law, especially the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Especially we focus on the fact that he refers to it as a shadow.

You of course all know what a shadow is, if you are outside on a bright shining day, you can see long shadows cast by trees, cars, etc.,. Interestingly, if your vision were to be obscured but you could see someone's shadow you could vaguely make out their movements, emotions, and even their animation or what they are doing. But it's far from a clear picture.

You see, when the Apostle calls the Law a shadow he tells us what we all know about shadows, they are dark, vague, and are insufficient to show us the good thing to come that casts it.

So when an Israeli man, on behalf of his family, laid his hands on the head of a sacrificial animal, confessing his and his families sins, and the animals throat was slit, its blood poured out and its body burned upon the altar it acted as a vague shadow that was pointing them to a greater reality to come.

You see, what's being taught in verses 1-4 is that the sacrificial Law was divinely given, but not as a means of expiation and propitiation but as a means of point to the mediator who could do these things for all who embrace him in faith (Gen. 3:15).

What this means then is that an OT believer was not saved by Law keeping, or by the sacrifices, but saved by God's grace, through faith, in the mediator to come (Heb. 11:8,9,13). *"Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

2.2 - The Law was not given to take away sins

And the author proves his point by reminding them that the sacrifice of atonement had to be offered annually (Lev.16). *"can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins."* (v.1b-2). What is he saying? He is saying that the mere fact that they have to be continually offered shows that the sacrifices provided no real lasting solution to the problem of sins.

So people ask, what then is the point of giving all of these offerings? *"But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year"* (v.3). John Brown says, "The point of the sacrificial system was that the offers were still yet sinners whose sins still needed to be expiated".⁴ It was never God's purpose in the Law to pardon sinners, the purpose of the Law is to show people their sins and to point them to the one sacrifice for all, Jesus Christ.

2.3 - It is not possible for the Law to save

The author simply states, it would be impossible for animals to pardon sinners. *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins"* (v.4). Why is this not possible? Could God not make it possible?

The reason it is not possible is because the shedding of the blood of animals is not an adequate manifestation of the displeasure of God against sin. A bull or a goat did not violate God's Law, a ram didn't contempt the Lord of glory, we did. Our instructor picks up on this in question 14, "God will not punish a creature for what a human is guilty of".

⁴Brown, John. *Geneva Commentary Series: Hebrews*. pg. 438

Then what's needed for sinful humans is a surety that can sufficiently bear the punishment of God, and the animal is not guilty of the crime nor can bear the punishment.

Application:

1. Our God has always been the God of grace. When you enter into the presence of God forever there will not be a single person there by their own merits. The only means of salvation for OT believers, Chinese people, Muslim people, Canadian people, is the shed blood of Emmanuel's lamb. Everyone who has ever been saved is only saved by grace, through faith, in Christ.
 - a. Do not trust in the work of your hands.

Point 3: We need a perfect Saviour (Q.15)

We need to remember the audience of the book of Hebrews, wouldn't you know it, its Hebrew people. Also remember that the Jewish people would have grown up with the sacrificial system, which was rightly seen in Israel, as the way to have communion with God by faith.

Yet it's clear from the ministry of Jesus that many Old Testament Jews had not been instructed well in the grace of God and they depended on the outward manifestation of their religion as their righteousness. So we know that many of the Hebrews would have been offended by this teaching.

So the author in order to prove that what he is saying is in accordance with the mind of God proves it with scripture, quoting Psalm 40:6-8. He is not saying anything different than God, God but has always taught this!

"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

*"**Sacrifice and offering** You did not desire,*

But a body You have prepared for Me.

In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin

You had no pleasure.

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—

In the volume of the book it is written of Me—

To do Your will, O God.' "

And the four sacrifices mentioned (*sacrifice, offering, burnt offerings, and sacrifices for sin*) describe not a part of the Levitical system, but the whole. Meaning, all the OT Law about sacrifice were never meant to cleanse the worshiper, but were always meant to point to the one perfect sacrifice of the mediator.

Dig a little deeper and you will see that the author of Hebrews is not alone but the prophets also spoke of these things (Isa.1:11-17; Jer. 7:21-23; Hos. 6:6; Ams. 5:21-27; Mic.

6:6-8; 1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 51:16-17). Now please don't misunderstand the scriptures, they are not saying that sacrifice is not needed, rather they are stressing the need for a perfect sacrifice. Only a perfect sacrifice can satisfy the claims of God's justice.

So God the Holy Spirit gives us a divine commentary on Psalm 40:6-8. If you turn there you will see that the author amends Psalm 40 verse 6 which says, "*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; "My ears You have opened"* not "*But a body You have prepared for Me*". What the Spirit of God is showing us is the meaning of these words.

You see, the ear in the Hebrew scriptures often was a figure of speech to show submission of a servant to their master forever. If a slave did not wish to be set free in the year of Jubilee his master "*shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever*" (Ex. 21:6). This signified that the servant was going to give up his body/freedom to serve his master forever.

The author of Hebrews says that what Jesus did! But instead of his ear being pierced to the door frame of his masters house he came into this world by his master's will, a body prepared for him by God, that he might be pierced through his hands and feet.

Q. What kind of Mediator should we look for then?

A. One that is a true and righteous man.

The pre-existent Son of God became incarnate as it said in the *volume of the book* (v.7), these things pertained to him (Lk. 24:27)! By his own gracious act he voluntarily identifies himself with humanity that he might live a life of perfect obedience to the Father, even to the point of dying on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Born without sin, lives a perfect and spotless life, is condemned to die by Pontius Pilot, he is pierced in his hands in feet, forsaken by God crying out on the cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And he gives up his life that he might be the spotless lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is the ultimate act of obedience rendered to God.

In so doing our Lord Jesus removes the barrier of sin, of death, of hell and reconciles us to God. Where the Old Testament sacrifices were insufficient, even to the point where the Lord *took no pleasure in them* (v.8). But when his own blessed Son came into the world to fulfill all these shadows, and pay in his own person the price of our redemption is said "*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand*" (Isa. 53:10). The Lord delights in Christ sacrifice of love, that he might have you, dear Christian.

"*He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (v.9b-10). And in Jesus'

life, death, and resurrection he completed the Old Testament dispensation, he was what the shadow pointed towards.

He came *to do the will of God* (v.7) to make expiation for iniquity; and by his accomplishment of that will, we who believe in him are not eternally set apart to God on the basis of Jesus' offering of his body.

So what kind of mediator and deliverer are we to look for? The God-man himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we cry out with Thomas, that he is "*my Lord and my God*".

Application:

1. To those who are seeking salvation look no farther than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. No amount of good works, personal righteousness, or church attendance can satisfy the justice of God. All one needs is the perfect saviour, Jesus Christ.