

"MADE PERFECT IN CHRIST"

**I. Introduction**

- A. People sometimes set very high standards for themselves and for the people around them.
  - 1. There was a good example of this this past week in the National Football League.
  - 2. The Denver Broncos fired their head coach in spite of the fact that over the past three seasons the Broncos have won more games than any other team in the league.
  - 3. While the Broncos had a great deal of success over this three year period, they fell short of the standard that was set by the team's executives.
  - 4. They failed to win the Super Bowl.
  - 5. As a result, that coach had to find a new job.
  
- B. The verses that we have just read talk about the standard that God sets when it comes to man's conformity to his law.
  - 1. God's standard is absolute perfection.
  - 2. At it says in the epistle of James, "whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it." (Jas. 2:10)
  - 3. People sometimes think that this is unreasonable of God.
  - 4. They think that God should be happy with whatever we are content to give him.
  - 5. The fact that they think this way only reveals that they have very low thoughts of God.

6. In the words of Stephen Charnock, "Men have naturally such slight thoughts of the majesty and law of God that they think any service is good enough for him, and conformable to his law." [*Works*, I, 204]
7. If people had a true knowledge of God, they would understand why nothing short of perfection is acceptable to him.
8. Like the former coach of the Denver Broncos, we fall short of the high standard that is set before us.
9. Yet this passage shows us that in the gospel God mercifully provides what we cannot attain by our own efforts.
10. In the gospel, we are made perfect in Christ.

## II. Positionally Sanctified by the Active Obedience of Christ (1-10)

- A. Our passage begins by once again pointing out how the law was unable to perfect the consciences of worshippers.
  1. The writer says that the reason for this is that "the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities."
  2. As a shadow, the law's sacrificial system indicated the nearness of God's promise, but it was not the reality itself.
  3. Old Testament saints were not saved by the sacrifices but by the reality to which they pointed: the once for all sacrifice of Christ.
  4. As John Calvin explains, "under the Law was shadowed forth only in rude and imperfect lines what is under the Gospel set forth in living colours and graphically distinct... Hence to both [OT believers and NT believers] the same Christ is exhibited, and the same righteousness, sanctification, and salvation; and the difference only is in the manner of painting or setting them forth."
  5. The writer of Hebrews is continuing to emphasize that now that the reality to which the sacrifices pointed has come, going back to the

shadows is utterly unthinkable.

- B. Our passage continues by saying that if the sacrifices had truly secured cleansing, then the worshippers would no longer have had any consciousness of sin.
  - 1. This does not mean that the worshippers would no longer have an awareness of sin.
  - 2. Even as Christians we remain aware of our sin in spite of the fact that that sin has been forgiven through faith in Christ.
  - 3. What the writer is talking about is having a guilty conscience, a conscience that accuses you of wrongdoing and puts you under God's judgment.
  - 4. There was a sense in which the Old Testament sacrificial system did that to the consciences of worshippers.
  - 5. The sacrifices that were offered up on the Day of Atonement each year served as a reminder of sins.
  - 6. They declared that the true sacrifice for sin had not yet been offered.
  - 7. The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins because those sins have not been committed by bulls and goats but by human beings.
  - 8. The only sacrifice that has the power to take away sin is the sacrifice of a perfect human substitute.
- C. At this point in our text, the writer quotes a portion of Psalm 40.
  - 1. This psalm was originally written by David, but in verse 5 the writer says that Jesus spoke these words when he came into the world.

2. The reason why the writer could say this is because David was a type of Christ.
  3. Christ is therefore is the true fulfillment of what is said in this psalm.
  4. Listen again to the verses that are cited from that psalm: "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" (10:5-7)
  5. The idea that God takes no pleasure in sacrifices is often found in the prophets, but in those contexts the point being made is that the hypocritical use of the sacrificial system is not pleasing to God.
  6. This psalm makes a much more sweeping declaration about sacrifices and offerings.
  7. It is talking about the fact that sacrifice is not what God truly desires.
  8. Sacrifice is only made necessary because of our sin.
  9. It would be better if there was no need for sacrifice.
  10. It would be better if people just obeyed God.
  11. God's desire is not for sacrifices but for human lives that are perfectly consecrated to doing his will.
  12. These verses are describing a life that is unreservedly and joyfully dedicated to doing God's will.
  13. Obedience is better than sacrifice.
- D. Not even David lived a life that was perfectly devoted to God's will.

1. Only Jesus lived up to that perfect standard.
  2. Of all the human beings who have ever walked on the face of the earth, only Jesus was truly able to say, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." [Jn. 4:34]
  3. Jesus delighted in doing his Father's will, and he was perfectly successful in doing so.
  4. This is something that we refer to as the active obedience of Christ.
  5. This helps us to understand the other things that are said in this quotation from Psalm 40.
  6. It says, "I have come to do your will, O God" because this is the reason why Jesus came into the world.
  7. It says, "a body have you prepared for me" because the purpose of Jesus' incarnation was so that he would use that body to obey God.
  8. It says, "it is written of me in the scroll of the book" because Jesus understood that he was sent in order to fulfill the law of God.
  9. In short, the writer is using this quotation from Psalm 40 to show that the entire Old Testament system of sacrifice was done away with in order that the reality to which it pointed might be established.
- E. This brings us to verse 10, where it says that by God's will "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."
1. The term 'sanctified' means 'made holy' or 'made perfect.'
  2. The point being made here is that Jesus has accomplished what the Old Testament sacrifices could not accomplish.
  3. By perfectly keeping God's law in our place, Jesus secured a perfect standing for us with God.

4. As important as his substitutionary death was, Jesus also had to secure our acceptance with God by living a life of perfect submission and obedience.
5. His substitutionary death ensures that God can look upon us without seeing any sin.
6. But his perfect life ensures that God can look upon us and see a life that is perfectly consecrated to his will.
7. The writer underscores the finality of Christ's work on our behalf by employing the perfect tense here, saying that "we have been sanctified."
8. This is speaking of sanctification in a definitive and positional sense.
9. It is asserting that through Christ's once for all sacrifice, all who place their trust in him have a holy standing with God.

### III. Progressively Sanctified on the Basis of Christ's Satisfaction (11-18)

- A. This brings us to verse 11, where the writer draws a contrast between the posture of the Levitical priests in the manmade sanctuary and the posture of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.
  1. An earthly priest stands daily as he carries out his duties, but Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.
  2. Israel's priests never sat down in God's presence because their work was never finished.
  3. The fact that Jesus has taken his seat at the place of honor and power next to God's throne shows that he has completed his priestly work.
  4. There is nothing more that needs to be done in order to secure our redemption.

5. By his perfectly obedient life and by his substitutionary death, we have been perfected for all time.
  6. In Christ we already have the status of “perfect” before God.
  7. In light of this, John Bunyan was correct to envision God saying this to the soul that places its trust in Jesus: “Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul, but behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and will deal with thee according as I am pleased with him.” [cited in Bruce, 246]
- B. One thing that stands out in this passage is that the writer speaks of our positional sanctification in the past tense and simultaneously speaks of our progressive sanctification in the present tense.
1. We have already been “perfected for all time”, yet at the same time we “are being sanctified.”
  2. This second phrase is referring to what we typically mean when we speak of the doctrine of sanctification.
  3. In the words of our Shorter Catechism, sanctification is “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” [WSC 35]
  4. The key phrase in that statement is “more and more”.
  5. It tells us that sanctification is a process that continues throughout the duration of a Christian’s life in this world.
- C. This passage in Hebrews helps correct a misunderstanding that Christians can sometimes have about the process of sanctification.
1. Some Christians think that, while our justification is entirely based upon what Christ accomplished on our behalf, our sanctification is our part in the process of salvation.

2. But notice what it says here in verse 14: “by a single offering [Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”
  3. This makes it clear that our sanctification is not based upon what we do but upon the single offering that Jesus has made on our behalf.
  4. He secured our sanctification, our actually being made holy, every bit as much as he secured our justification, our being declared righteous.
  5. Progressive sanctification is a matter of the Holy Spirit applying the sanctification that Christ has already secured for us.
- D. It is also worth noting the context in which the writer mentions the Holy Spirit in verse 15.
1. He introduces the text that he is quoting from the prophet Jeremiah by saying, “the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us..., saying...”
  2. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of Scripture.
  3. We find the same assertion at numerous points in this letter.
  4. These passages are a key part of the biblical testimony that leads us to conclude that the Scriptures have been given to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- E. As far as the content of this quotation from Jeremiah, it is referring to the new covenant that was the focus back in chapter 8.
1. Here, the writer narrows his focus to two points in that prophecy.
  2. The first is the Lord’s assertion that he will put his law on the hearts and minds of his people under the new covenant.
  3. This is exactly what God does in the process of sanctification.



4. Because we have been set free from the curse of the law, the law no longer holds any terror for us.
  5. It no longer says, 'Do this in order to obtain eternal life'.
  6. The law now comes to us as a friend and says, 'Because you have received eternal life as a free gift, do this.'
- F. The second point that the writer focuses upon in this prophecy is the Lord's assertion that he will remember our sins and lawless deeds no more.
1. Because Christ has atoned for our sins by his once for all sacrifice, they are no longer held against us by God.
  2. Our guilt has been entirely removed.
  3. This is something that should continually astound us.
  4. By God's grace alone, we can stand before him as those who have attained to his standard.
  5. In Christ our Savior, we have been perfected for all time.