

# Sermon 44, Better Officiant, Better Tabernacle, Better Worship, Hebrews 9:6-12

**Proposition:** In a point-by-point comparison of officiant, tabernacle, and worship, the new covenant is far better on all three counts.

- I. Old Covenant Regulations for Worship, vv. 6-7
  - A. Officiants: The Priests, v. 6b
  - B. Tabernacles
    - 1. Outer Tabernacle for Daily Divine Worship, v. 6
    - 2. Holy of Holies for Annual Divine Worship, v. 7
      - a) Blood Offering for the Priest
      - b) Blood Offering for the People's Sins of Ignorance
    - 3. (People Excluded, v. 8)
  - C. Worship
    - 1. Blood Sacrifice (from Animals), v. 7b
    - 2. Ongoing and Repeated, vv. 6-7
    - 3. Sanctifies the Flesh but Perfects not the Conscience, v. 9
- II. New Covenant Worship, vv. 11-12
  - A. Officiant: Christ, High Priest of Good Things That Have Come, v. 11a
  - B. Tabernacles
    - 1. Outer Tabernacle: The Human Flesh of the Son of God, v. 11b-c
      - a) Not Made With Hands
      - b) Part of the New Creation, Not This Creation
    - 2. Holy Place: Heaven, v. 12c
    - 3. (People Brought In, v. 12)
  - C. Worship
    - 1. Blood Sacrifice — His Own, Not Animals', v. 12a-b
    - 2. Once for All, v. 12c
    - 3. Grants Eternal Redemption, v. 12d

## Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the passage before us this morning, the Hebrew writer continues to compare the priesthood of Christ with the Levitical priesthood. In particular, he does a point-by-point comparison across three different aspects of each covenant's worship. These aspects, as enumerated in your outline, are the officiant, the tabernacle or place of worship, and the acts of worship themselves. Across all three domains, the new covenant is clearly better — not just a little better, but far better. It has a better officiant, a better tabernacle, and better rites of worship.

## **I. Old Covenant Regulations for Worship, vv. 6-7**

The writer begins with a very quick summary of the old covenant's regulations for worship. Last time we looked at his brief recounting of the furniture within the old tabernacle, and his conclusion that the tabernacle was a parable telling a story about how to approach God. We saw his contention that the tabernacle actually concealed the way of approach to the Almighty. Surrounding this contention, he summarizes old covenant worship and new covenant worship. That summary is actually a direct comparison of the two modes of worship across three categories: officiant, tabernacle and worship. He compares both under the old covenant vs. the new.

### **A. Officiants: The Priests, v. 6b**

The writer begins by mentioning "the priests" in general. The Levitical economy employed one twelfth of Israel. Eight and a third percent of Israel — one whole tribe — was set apart to do this work. The writer does not comment directly on their number or the organization here. He simply tells us that there were a lot of priests who performed divine worship under the Levitical system.

### **B. Tabernacles**

He also mentions the two parts of the one tabernacle separately. We looked at these two parts, and the different items they contained, last time in our worship together.

#### **1. Outer Tabernacle for Daily Divine Worship, v. 6**

The priests in general are continually entering the outer tabernacle to perform the divine worship. They do it all the time, every day, morning and evening and probably more often even than that. The tabernacle was a busy place. There were lamps to clean and fill, wicks to trim, bread to replace, incense to burn, and of course all the animal sacrifices.

#### **2. Holy of Holies for Annual Divine Worship, v. 7**

The second part of the tabernacle is the holy of holies, the most special place in Israel where the presence of God is most clearly manifested. This apartment is off-limits to every last Israelite except one — the High Priest. And even he certainly does not have unlimited access to the presence of God. He is able to enter only once per year. This is still divine worship, but it is a very special rite, the kind of thing that is limited to just once in 365 days.

##### **a) Blood Offering for the Priest**

The high priest who is allowed into God's special concentrated presence must carry blood along with him. He cannot enter in his own strength and righteousness. Oh no. Only the power of another life, the life represented by the fresh blood of a slaughtered animal that was alive moments ago, is sufficient to cleanse him from his own sins and fit him for the presence of God. His sin brings death, and so a certain amount of borrowed or transferred life, taken from the innocent animal and applied to the priest, is necessary to fit him for an encounter with the Holy God.

##### **b) Blood Offering for the People's Sins of Ignorance**

That blood is also powerful to cleanse the sins of the people — at least, to cleanse some of the sins of the people, the ones committed in ignorance. It is not intended to deal with deliberate sins.

Now, I don't know about you, but if only my sins of ignorance can be forgiven, I'm in big trouble. But the Hebrew writer emphasizes that the animal blood carried by the high priest on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, is not a blood for general forgiveness and absolution. It can only deal with the most minor of sins — the things you do wrong that you didn't even realize were wrong. The more mature you grow, and the more you learn about God's law, by definition the fewer sins of ignorance you can commit. Sins of ignorance are natural to a two-year-old. For a fifty-year-old, there are not very many actual sins of ignorance. Certainly if things are working properly, there should not be.

Well, this is what happened within the old covenant's tabernacle.

### **3. (People Excluded, v. 8)**

I'm going to make one more point about the tabernacle. I've put it in parentheses because it is not in the text. But because it is a point about what was not in the tabernacle, in a certain sense it is a legitimate deduction from the text. The text tells us what was in the tabernacle and what happened there, while not mentioning what didn't happen. But here's what didn't happen: the people did not come into the presence of God. The congregation was excluded. The way into the presence of God for Joe Israelite was closed, not only because he committed sins deliberately at times but also because the tabernacle was tiny and was never designed to hold all the people or even some of the people!

### **C. Worship**

Well, the writer calls out three aspects of the worship of the old covenant.

#### **1. Blood Sacrifice (from Animals), v. 7b**

The first is that it utilized blood sacrifice from animals. We just talked about this. Bulls and goats and pigeons were the raw material of the old covenant. Without another life offered in place of his own, blood not his own shed on his behalf, the priest was helpless. He could not bring salvation and forgiveness to his people or even to himself.

#### **2. Ongoing and Repeated, vv. 6-7**

The second aspect of the old covenant, one which is mentioned though not highlighted here, is that its sacrifices were ongoing and repeated. The priests were doing this continually. Over and over, repeatedly and without a break, they entered the tabernacle with blood and made atonement for their own sins and the people's.

#### **3. Sanctifies the Flesh but Perfects not the Conscience, v. 9**

The writer gives us his verdict on what this worship did: It sanctified the flesh but did nothing for the conscience. It could set apart your body for God's service, but it could not take away your guilt or even your consciousness of guilt.

So that is the summary of what old covenant worship was. It had a lot of priests, who killed a lot of animals and brought their blood into the holy place, but it could not take away guilt and shame.

## **II. New Covenant Worship, vv. 11-12**

Well, as we saw last week, the writer then describes the tabernacle as a parable showing that the way into God's presence was rather blocked than opened. After he does that, though, he systematically compares the three actions of the old covenant's worship to the same three aspects of new covenant worship.

### **A. Officiant: Christ, High Priest of Good Things That Have Come, v. 11a**

The officiant of worship in the new covenant is Christ, the high priest of the good things to come. Now, we have looked in great detail at the author's characterization of Jesus as high priest. We saw that this means that he repairs and maintains our relationship with God. He represents us before the Almighty and prays for us, making intercession. And, of course, all of the good things that have come to us in the new covenant are things that Jesus procured for us. That's what the writer means when he says that Jesus is the high priest of these good things. He is our high priest. He belongs to us. But He is the one who brought the fullness of the Spirit, did away with the food laws, sent the gospel out to all nations, and took away our sin and guilt. These are just a few of the good things that Jesus has brought.

Do you praise and worship Him for these things? Do you love and delight in Him? Do you tell Him that you are grateful for the good things that you enjoy through His work?

Above all, this section is focused on the conscience and guilt. I speak very little about the conscience, in part because I think our 19th and early 20th century forebears in this country massively overemphasized it. The notion of letting conscience be your guide can be a problem if your conscience is misinformed. Particularly in our subjectivist, romantic age, the law of God is a much safer guide than conscience. Put in a more balanced way, the law of God needs to train your conscience so that you can be certain that you are following the right.

Jesus has cleansed your conscience so that you need not walk in fear or guilt any more. You are clean through the word He has spoken and the blood he has shed. That is one of the very greatest of the good things that have come.

### **B. Tabernacles**

Well, the writer goes on to draw another comparison, this time not between the priesthood of Christ and the good things it brought vs. the numerous Levitical priests and the good things they failed to bring, but instead between the tabernacles.

#### **1. Outer Tabernacle: The Human Flesh of the Son of God, v. 11b-c**

Now it becomes clear why the writer chose to portray the original tabernacle, which was just one building, as though it were two buildings. It's because in the new covenant, there are in fact two separate tabernacles, the one of which serves as the path into the other. The outer tabernacle through which Christ entered into heaven is in fact His flesh — His human body. Why do I say that? Because the two descriptions that the author gives could only apply to the greatest thing in the world — the human flesh of Christ.

##### **a) Not Made With Hands**

This outer tabernacle through which Jesus entered heaven is "not made with hands." The first tabernacle was, of course, made with hands from top to bottom and beginning to end. But the

body of Jesus, though it had hands, was completely made by God through the natural process of conception and birth. No human hands fashioned the body of the Son of God. He fashioned it all Himself.

### **b) Part of the New Creation, Not This Creation**

The writer also comments that this tabernacle in which Jesus entered heaven was not part of this creation. It is part of the new creation, the world to come, the glorified earth which will be heaven.

Why is the body of Jesus a tabernacle? Because there God dwelt with us. In fact, John specifically uses the verb “tabernacled” to describe Christ’s action in taking flesh and dwelling among us.

And thus, instead of a curtained room with a table, a lamp, and dozen loaves of bread, we have instead the man Christ Jesus.

#### **2. Holy Place: Heaven, v. 12c**

In that flesh, He entered heaven, “the holy place” because it is the eternal home of God Almighty. The writer has talked about that from the very beginning of his composition. He is close to being obsessed with the notion of Jesus entering into heaven. Why? Because the residence of Jesus in heaven is so incredibly important to our salvation! Because Jesus is in heaven, we know that we are saved. Because He is in heaven, we know the Father has accepted His sacrifice. We know that it worked, and that He never needs to die again or do anything again to save us. Jesus is in heaven — and that implies something about our destination too.

#### **3. (People Brought In, v. 12)**

Once again, this is a parenthetical point because it is not stated in the text, but the “eternal redemption” which Jesus purchased through His blood allows us to enter heaven along with Him. We have received the promises; we will get everything that God has to offer, summed up as eternal life in heaven with Him! The tabernacle had no space for God’s people. But Heaven has room for the whole of the great multitude which no man can number.

### **C. Worship**

The worship that Jesus leads also far surpasses the old covenant worship.

#### **1. Blood Sacrifice — His Own, Not Animals’, v. 12a-b**

For one thing, he enters in the power of his own blood and thus in the power of His own life too. He was not there by virtue of a bull’s life or a lamb’s life. He did not need their blood to clean him up so that he could be welcomed in God’s presence. It was His own blood that cleaned us up and made us welcome in heaven.

#### **2. Once for All, v. 12c**

That blood was shed and that entrance made once for all. His worship is not an eternal recurrence or a daily repetition. It happened once, and the strength of it saves us forever.

#### **3. Grants Eternal Redemption, v. 12d**

Indeed, His blood and His entrance into heaven grant eternal redemption. We have been bought back; the wrath of God no longer abides on us. We are freed from God’s wrath, and also from Satan as His avenging agent, and also from our own sin and sinful hearts.

We have eternal redemption through Jesus Christ. That means that your conscience can be clean and you can be free from guilt. Only trust Him, only trust Him, only trust Him now! He is your Lord and Savior, and the salvation He brings you is forever.

So love to worship Him. The new covenant's worship is better, enacted on better promises, with a better mediator and a better tabernacle. Jesus is the tabernacle who entered heaven.

You don't need psychological tricks to cleanse your conscience. You need the blood of Jesus — and you have it. Amen.