

The Achievement of Christ Without Which There Would Be No Others

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the foundational achievement of Christ in removing guilt and averting the wrath of God, highlighting the central importance of this work for all other achievements. It explores six manifestations of Christ's greatness in Hebrews 9 and 10, focusing on the removal of guilt, eternal redemption, Christ's enthronement, sanctification of believers, the anticipation of Christ's second coming, and the eternal inheritance for God's people.

Scripture: Hebrews 9:26, Hebrews 10:12, Hebrews 10:14, Hebrews 9:28, Hebrews 9:15, Ephesians 1:7, Psalms 51:17, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Hebrews 8:10

Topics: "Christ's Sacrifice", "Eternal Redemption"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, we bow our heads together now to declare that we depend upon you. We need your help and we look away from ourselves to Christ who loved us and gave himself for us and secured for us the fulfillment of all your promises to us and therefore we have confidence that you won't leave us to ourselves here.

You will fill us with everything we need. You'll help us to be faithful to your word and you'll give us the capacity to see Christ in his greatness and to speak the truth. So come, strengthen these folks with faith, with hope, with joy, with holiness, with courage to live a life that magnifies Jesus.

I ask this in his name. Amen. In a day when people are co-opting the message of Christ for political ideologies and sometimes twisting it beyond recognition into a kind of rope that holds up the banner of our social causes, I am very jealous that every pastor who believes the Bible, every person in their churches, would foreground the achievement of Christ without which all the other achievements fail.

Something that is so central and so foundational and so essential to the work of Christ that if it doesn't come about, nothing that he aimed to achieve comes about. I want us to magnify every achievement of Christ, but especially the one without which all the others fail. So let's magnify all the achievements of Christ, especially the one that deals with the problem of humanity, which if it isn't dealt with, all the other things that people come to Jesus to get won't be there.

Let's make that central and foreground it. That achievement ought not to be backgrounded, it ought not to be muted, it ought not to be buried under social causes or political ideologies or anything else that Christ achieved. It ought to be prominent, prominent in our preaching and teaching and living.

This is what I've seen in the text that was assigned to me. Hebrews 9 verse 1 all the way 46 verses later to Hebrews 10 18. The most foundational, most central, most essential achievement of Christ was the removal of guilt and the averting of the wrath of God from those who are in Christ Jesus.

Now I've seen six ways that the greatness of Christ is magnified in this text. What I want to do is name them and then linger over them long enough to show how each of these six manifestations of Christ's greatness in fact draw attention to and magnify that central, foundational, essential achievement of the removal of guilt and the averting of wrath. And we'll do it in a way that also magnifies that central achievement by showing the other achievements that it produces like the renovation of human lives, the protection of God's people at the Last Judgment, the inheriting of a great treasure forever and ever in the presence of God.

So here they are. Number one, Christ the great absence, the Old Covenant. Two, Christ the great achievement and eternal inheritance and eternal redemption.

Christ the great accession, enthroned at the right hand of God. Christ the great application, making his people holy. Christ the great arrival, the second coming, and Christ the great abundance and eternal inheritance.

So number one, Christ the great absence, the Old Covenant. Chapter nine, the first ten verses have no Christ in them. He's absent.

And you can see that's intentional in verse 11, but when Christ appeared, so there's the difference. The great absence, the great presence and appearance. The first ten verses describe furnishings, regulations.

Verse one says, now even the first covenant had regulations for worship. Indeed it did. A lot of them.

Furniture, functions of the priests, bloody sacrifices. So the question is, okay, in the absence of Christ, what's the meaning of all that? Three verses. Verse nine, it's a parable for the present time.

That's my translation, a parable for the present time. Chapter 10, verse 1, the law was but a shadow of things to come. Chapter 9, verse 23, copies of the heavenly things.

So parables, shadows, copies. And then lots of blood. Verse 22, under the law almost everything is purified with blood.

Lots of things made with hands. Verse 24, lots of ever repeated priestly ministry. Verse 25, lots of reminders of sin.

Chapter 10, verse 3, but according to verse 9 of chapter 9, none of them, it says, perfect the conscience of the worshiper. Or verse 1 of chapter 10, they can never make perfect those who draw near because of the great absence of Christ. Now, to all that you should say to me, well, not exactly, Pastor John.

Are you thinking that? Not not exactly absent. I mean, Jesus said, before Abraham was, I am. And Peter says, Christ was guiding all the prophets.

And Paul said, Christ followed Israel in the wilderness. He was the rock. And Paul said, all the passing over of sin in the Old Testament was owing to the blood of Jesus.

Romans 3, 25, and God himself said on Mount Sinai, the Lord, the Lord, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. In fact, the whole Old Testament sacrificial system, the shedding of blood, in particular, was the path along which they really did receive forgiveness of their sins. Leviticus 17, 11, the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls.

For it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. And then ten times in Leviticus, they shall be forgiven. So there's a great absence in the Old Covenant.

Or is there? Well, there is. There is a great absence of Christ in the Old Covenant, and there is a significant presence of Christ in the Old Covenant. Christ was there by His Spirit, moving the prophets.

First Peter 1, 11. Christ was there by His Spirit, ministering to the people. First Corinthians 10, 4. The work of Christ, by anticipation and by God's reckoning, was the guilt-removing, wrath-averting power of the sacrifices.

By anticipation, Christ was there, and forgiveness happened. Wherever a true Old Testament saint looked through the sacrifices to the mercy of God and the anticipated Redeemer, they were forgiven. They were forgiven.

Their guilt was taken away, and God's wrath was averted. They knew what David knew, right? You will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. You will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God. You will not despise. Psalm 51.

They knew that. That's what made them saints. They knew Hebrews 4, Hebrews 10, 4. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.

They knew that. They knew Hebrews 10, 11. The repeated sacrifices can never take away sins.

And yet, there was forgiveness in the Old Covenant. There was forgiveness through those animal sacrifices. Christ, by anticipation, by the reckoning of God, applied the blood of Christ that would be to the hearts, and guilt was removed, and wrath was averted in the Old Covenant.

A great absence, an utter inadequacy of the sacrifices in and of themselves. Points to the centrality of the very thing we're focusing on. Namely, the guilt-removing, wrath-averting work of Christ that hadn't happened yet.

This is the overwhelming focus of my text. Chapter 9, verse 7. The priests take blood offered for the sins of the people. Chapter 9, verse 22.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Chapter 10, verse 4. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Chapter 10, verse 11.

Sacrifices can never take away sins. What's the point? The point is that the great foundational, central crisis of humanity is that we have to have our guilt removed because of our sin, and the wrath of God averted because of his justice. That's the point.

This whole system says, men are guilty, God is holy, something's got to happen in order for there to be any salvation at all. The Old Covenant dealt with the crisis provisionally, and Christ dealt with that problem decisively. So in Hebrews 9 and 10, the great absence of Christ in the Old Covenant is a thunderclap of warning and wonder.

Right? The Old Covenant, in and of itself, powerless. No forgiveness of sins. We must have a Redeemer.

Otherwise, our guilt will not be removed, and the wrath of God will not be averted. Second picture of the greatness of Christ. This time, not his absence, but his achievement.

Christ, the great achievement, eternal redemption. So he comes, the Son of God, second person of the Trinity, eternal Word, the Son comes. He willingly sheds his blood, he achieves what the sacrifices never could, and what he achieved is most fundamentally, most centrally, most essentially, the taking away of guilt and the averting of the wrath of God.

Chapter 9, verse 26, He appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Verse 28, Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. Chapter 10, verse 12, Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice Chapter 9, verse 12.

This is the key text for this second point. He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. That's the achievement, an eternal redemption by a single once-for-all offering of his own blood.

So let there be no ambiguity here, no misunderstanding, no confusion. When the author speaks of putting away sin, sacrifice for sins, bearing sins, he's not talking about the purifying of uncleanness, ceremonial uncleanness. There's a lot of that in the Old Testament.

That's not what this is talking about. He's talking about removing the guilt, a real moral deserving of punishment. That's my definition of guilt.

Sins produce in us a real moral deserving of punishment from God. We know this because guilt correlates with forgiveness, and forgiveness is all over this text. If you forgive somebody, you are acknowledging they have wronged you and they deserve your disapproval, at least.

It could be a lot worse than disapproval that they deserve. And forgiveness sees real moral wrong and lets it go. It just lets it go, takes it away.

It's gone. It's what forgiveness does, and therefore forgiveness correlates with real guilt. When we sin against God, we deserve God's judgment, and it needs to be averted by our guilt being taken away.

Verse 22 of chapter 9, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. It's not going to happen. Chapter 10 verse 18, where there is forgiveness of sins, there is no longer any offering for sin.

So when that word redemption is used, in verse 12, that's what it means. By means of his own blood, he secured an eternal redemption. What is redemption? Redemption is a payment.

It's a blood payment in this case, to liberate us. So redemption does it liberates from bondage. It liberates us by a payment of blood from bondage to the guilt of sin and the consequent wrath of God that rests on us without that liberation.

Paul has an amazing parallel in Ephesians 1 7 where he says, in Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. I love to see parallels like that across books of the Bible. Blood, redemption, forgiveness.

And the blood of bulls and goats could never do it. Not just any old blood, right? Jesus Christ was the God-man, infinitely valuable, unlike the bulls and the goats. Infinitely valuable and therefore his suffering carried an infinite moral weight.

So that when God passes over, forgives, passes over, sin, he's just. Meaning, he's not sinning by taking sin lightly. He's not sweeping our sin under the rug of the universe and saying, oh, just let bygones be bygones.

You don't need any sacrifice. The Son of God doesn't have to die. I just ignore the indignity shown to me by billions of people, trillions of times.

It's not going to happen that way. He is just. And the justifier.

Of him who has faith in Jesus. The great achievement, following the great absence, Hebrews 9 12, by his own blood, he secured an eternal redemption. Millions and millions of hell-deserving, wrath-deserving sinners, redeemed by a single sacrifice.

Jesus is very great. He is very great. So the work was finished and the guilt of God's people was removed and wrath was averted.

That is the greatest achievement in the history of the universe. Number three. Christ, the great accession, enthroned at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 10 verses 11 and 12. Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But, when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Or as Hebrews 1 3 says, after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Almighty on high. So Christ died, he made a single offering for sins, he rose from the dead, he appeared to his apostles, he ascended to heaven, and today he is sitting. He's sitting on the right hand in the most honored place of the universe, the right hand of God the Father.

Sitting. The most vivid contrast in verse 11 and 12 is they are standing, ever in motion, continually offering their sacrifices, which can't accomplish anything, and he's not standing. He's sitting.

He's not in perpetual motion. He's not managing hopeless, repetitive sacrifices. The sacrifice of himself for sins was perfect, complete, final, there will never be, there will never be another sacrifice for sins, ever, and therefore he sat down.

He does happen to rule the world while he's sitting and care for his church as the head, but he doesn't need to stand up to do that. According to Psalm 8, he made the stars with his fingers, not his arm, with his pinky. He made the galaxies.

He doesn't need to stand up to do anything. There is a serenity surrounding this throne of total peace. He has no stress in ruling an infinitesimally small place like planet Earth.

Not like a basketball coach, leaping off the bench trying to manage his players. He's not like a general pacing back and forth waiting for news from the front. He's just sitting, ruling.

The accession of Christ to the throne of the universe and his sitting there in complete equanimity is a signal. It's a signal to all his enemies and to us that this war has been won. The one thing in the universe that could damn his people is no more.

The guilt of unforgiven sin. Satan can't damn us. Cancer can't damn us.

Bankruptcy can't damn us. Pick your worst sin that you've ever committed. It cannot damn you.

One thing can damn us. The guilt of unforgiven sin. That's all.

It's over in Christ. It's gone. It has been removed and with it the wrath of God.

All the enemies of Christ rage against him today. And against his people and they are raging in vain. They can attack.

They can harass. I mean human and supernatural. They can slander.

They can shame you. They can make you sick. They can kill you, but that's all.

And you hear the words of Jesus, don't fear those who can kill the body. Just fear the one that can throw your soul into hell. Fear not.

You can only be killed. Guilt has been removed. Wrath has been averted by one sacrifice.

And your eternal life is secured forever. This war has been won. The damning work of the devil against the bride of Christ was destroyed at Calvary.

Did you hear that? The damning work of the devil to destroy the bride of Christ has been destroyed by Christ at Calvary. Let me read that to you from Hebrews 2 14. Through death he destroyed the one who has the power of death.

That is the devil. Your history, Satan. You cannot destroy the bride of Christ.

The gates of hell don't prevail against the risen, seated Christ. He disarmed him of the one damning weapon that he could use to destroy us the guilt of unforgiven sin. It's over.

So the accession of Christ to the throne of the universe and his sitting down calmly upon the most honored seat of all signals to saints, signals to Satan, signals to unclean spirits and all of humankind my guilt-removing, wrath-averting sacrifice is triumphant. The pivotal battle is over. This war is won.

Now from his seat, by his spirit, without the slightest stress or anxiety, this risen reigning Christ sanctifies his people. That's number four. Christ the great application, making his people holy.

Christ is not doing nothing as he sits on the throne. He is applying to us day by day. Right now in this room, he is applying the benefits of his blood.

He is progressively sanctifying, making holy those whom he has already perfected by his blood. And it is precisely because of the benefits flowing from our blood-bought perfection that he is able to make progress with us in becoming holy. If that sounds paradoxical to you, listen.

Chapter 10, verse 14 is the most important verse on sanctification in Hebrews, maybe in the Bible. By a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. That's a world.

There's a world in that verse. If this were Paul writing, he would say, by a single offering, he has justified for all time those who are being sanctified. They mean the same thing.

This is the greatness. Jesus is greater. This is the greatness and the wonder of the sanctifying Christ seated upon his throne.

And as he prepares his people in this life, prepares his people for heaven, the only people that he perfects are the perfected. The only people that he sanctifies progressively are the people who are sanctified decisively already. The only people that he purifies step-by-step are the perfectly pure people.

The only people that he makes righteous in daily activity are the people who are counted righteous in Christ already, and it is precisely our finished perfection, our definitive sanctification, our sinless purity in Christ, our imputed righteousness that unleashes, unleashes the power of God to progressively perfect us, sanctify us, purify us, make us righteous. How does that work? That's the mystery of the Christian life. It's everything.

How does it work? According to verse 14, chapter 10, it says, by a single offering we are perfected, perfected. That means at least that the blood of Jesus completely removes our guilt, the guilt of our sins, the guilt of our imperfections. We are counted perfect in Christ.

Therefore, all of God's wrath toward us is over. It's gone. It went on to Jesus.

Let me ask you this. When all guilt and all wrath are gone, what's left between you and God? You live there? The answer is total omnipotent mercy. The fulfillment of all his promises are released for you, for you.

Nothing against you ever again from heaven. Remember I said way back at the beginning that as we focus on each of these manifestations of Christ's work as guilt removing and wrath averting, I would get to the point where I tried to show that this achievement unleashes all the other achievements. That's where we are.

And the achievement that it unleashes here is the renovation of your life, the making of you wholly. Let's watch one example of how it works. I'm going to jump out of my text.

Sorry. Hebrews 13 5 and 6. I'm just going over to get an illustration of the point. Hebrews 13 5 and 6. Watch how guilt removing and wrath averting work of Christ liberates you from the love of money.

And if you think, well, that's kind of a random illustration. It's not. You know why? Because Paul said, the heart that loves money is the source of every evil.

This isn't random. Listen. Hebrews 13 5. Keep your life free from the love of money.

So this book is very much about lots of heavy-duty theological things. And when it lands, it's in your pocket book. Keep your life free from the love of money.

Be content with what you have for. He has said, I'll never leave you. I will never forsake you.

So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear what can man do to me. So I ask, how in the world can you and I, who sin every day of our lives, before and against a God of infinite holiness and justice, how in the world can we possibly say, he'll never leave me? He'll never forsake me.

He will help me every hour of my life, and I don't need to be afraid of anybody. That's pretty gutsy guilt. How can you say that? How can this, how can this sanctifying Christ seated on his throne free you from the love of money? How can you take promises like that and embrace them so that you walk out into life free from sin? Loving, simplicity, and a wartime lifestyle, and pouring your life out for other people, rather than just amass, amass, amass.

Treasure, treasure, treasure. Richer, richer, richer. How can that happen? Sinner, the answer is, by a single offering, he has removed all our guilt, and averted all God's wrath, and therefore opened the sluice gates of heaven, where there's a reservoir of grace, and mercy, and power, and wisdom, and love, that is now pouring with infinite wisdom, and power, and love, all over you, as he fulfills every promise in the Bible for you.

All the promises of God are yes in Jesus. You see the relationship between the fundamental, central, essential work and achievement of Christ in taking away all guilt, and all wrath, and your being free from the love of money? Because that unleashes the reservoir. I'll care for you.

I'll always be there for you. I'll take care of you. You don't need to live for money.

Live for me. Trust me. Preach to yourself the promises.

They're bought by the blood of Jesus. It's not about your sinlessness. Are you in Christ? This is the great application.

Christ making his people holy from his throne by applying the removal of our guilt, and the averting of God's wrath, and the unleashing of all the promises of God. Number five, Christ the great arrival, the second coming. Christ is going to get up off his throne.

He's going to stand up, perhaps soon, and in his glorious resurrection body, he's going to step out and appear on the clouds. Let me read you the description of what's going to happen. He will descend from heaven with a cry of command, and with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

That's 1st Thessalonians 4, 16, and 2nd Thessalonians 1, 7 and 8. And the focus of the writer to the Hebrews at the second coming is not on what happens to unbelievers, he mentions it, but on what happens to you in Christ. Let's read it. Hebrews 9, 27 to 28.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having offered, having been offered once, once, to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. Are you? That's who he'll save. So the single sacrifice mentioned here, the single sacrifice of Christ, not only unleashes the power of God's promises to save us from the love of money, it unleashes the power and commitment of Jesus to save us when the fire falls at the second coming.

How does it do that? By a single offering of his own blood, he has removed the guilt of sin and the wrath of God forever. Verse 27 of chapter 10 says, Be warned of a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. And the only hope you and I have not to be incinerated at the second coming and cast into the lake of fire is a single offering where guilt has been removed and the wrath of God has been averted.

One last thing, you could call that, I suppose, at the end, the great escape. That's not where the story ends, though is it? Number six, Christ the great abundance, our eternal inheritance. Verse 15 of chapter 9, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

How did he mediate the new covenant? Remember, Jesus said he lifted up the cup at the Last Supper and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, signifying how he purchases the promises of the new covenant, by his blood. Hebrews 9 26, he appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. So what the old covenant could not do, put away sin, Christ did.

He put away guilt and averted the wrath of God. So I ask, what's the inheritance? It's a thousand things. It's ten thousand things.

Paul said, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, that's a lot of blessings. What's the best one? We could talk forever about those blessings. What's the best one? What's the best promise of the new covenant? I'll read it to you.

This is chapter 8 verse 10. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my laws into their minds.

That's good. And I will write them on their hearts. That's good.

And here it is. And I will be their God and they will be my people. So I ask you finally, if there is no guilt and no wrath, what does it mean to have God as your God? That's worth a few years of meditation.

It means that everything God is and everything God does is for you and not against you. Everything he is and everything he does is for you and your good and your joy. And not against you.

And there are so many ways for God to be good to you that it will take him forever to finish. Here's the way Paul says it. The unending ages of eternity will be spent pouring out the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

It will take eternity for immeasurable riches to be exhausted on you if there's no guilt and no wrath. This is the most foundational, the most central, the most essential achievement of Christ. By it, all the other achievements stand or fall.

Don't hide this. Tell it from the housetops. In Christ, all guilt is removed and all wrath is averted.

Let's pray. Father, we love your word because it reveals you and your Son and your Spirit to us and you are the great inheritance and we receive it now. I pray for any, perhaps in this room, for whom the great work of Christ had been unknown and its effect on their lives unexperienced.

I ask now that you would come and open their eyes to see the wonder of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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