

# Imperfection of the Jewish Tabernacle

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

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*The Jewish Tabernacle was imperfect and could not make the worshippers perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, but Christ has obtained eternal redemption and offers Gospel liberty.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 9:9

**Topics:** "Redemption through Christ", "Imperfection of Rituals"

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## Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne emphasizes the imperfection of the Jewish Tabernacle and its services, which were merely figures meant to teach deeper spiritual truths. He explains that these rituals could not perfect the conscience of the worshippers, highlighting the need for a true mediator, which is fulfilled in Christ. M'Cheyne contrasts the temporary and burdensome nature of the Mosaic covenant with the perfect and liberating work of Christ, who offers eternal redemption through His own blood. He urges listeners to seek a clean conscience through faith in Christ rather than relying on outdated rituals. The sermon concludes with a call to embrace the freedom found in the Gospel and to avoid the condemnation that comes from neglecting the sacrifice of Jesus.

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## Transcript

Hebrews ix.9-13.--"Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience : Which stood only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands,--that is to say, not of this building,--neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

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WE have now gone over, dear friends, the description of the Tabernacle, with its two apartments. We have gone over rapidly the service of the priests in the holy place, and the service of the high priest once a year in the holiest of all. Now, these ordinances were the peculiar glory of the Jewish nation.

We now come to two things farther--

The total imperfection of the Tabernacles and all its service.

The amazing perfection of Christ and all the work which he accomplished.

I. The first thing in these words, brethren, is the total imperfection of the Tabernacles and all its service. It was imperfect for many reasons.

1st. Because the Tabernacle and all its service was only a figure for the time then present. Verse 9--"Which was a figure for the time then present." The word "figure" is the same which in other parts is translated "a parable". So, then, it was intended to be a shadow. Observe, dear friends, that this implies that the Tabernacle and all its services, its boards of shittim-wood, its curtains, its golden altar, the priest's daily ministrations, &c., was but a parable. It was but a figure for the time present. It was never intended to be anything but a shadow--"Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices," &c. You know it is common in parents and teachers, when they teach children, to teach them by pictures and models. We are such ignorant creatures that we are taught best by objects presented to the eye ; so that it has been found far better to teach children by objects brought to the eye than in any other way. Now, this is just exactly what God did to Israel : He began to teach them by a parable presented to the eye : Everything that is necessary for a sinner to know, in order to be saved, was presented to the eye--"Which was a figure for the time then present." For example, he wanted to teach them the distance there is between a sinner and God ; and how did he do it ? --Just by putting up a curtain. God taught them thus by a figure that there is no way for an unpardoned sinner into the presence of God. And again, God wanted to teach them his imputation of sin to his Son ; and how did he do it ? --By making the high priest put his hand on the scape-goat, and confess over it the sins of Israel. And again, brethren God wanted to teach Israel that we needed a holy high priest to bear our sins ; but how could God do this ? --There was none that was without sin, and therefore God intended that the Jewish high priest should slay a bullock for himself, and then come and offer a goat for the sins of the people. God taught them that we need a Mediator without sin. All these things, brethren, God taught them by a figure. Now, this shows you the imperfection of the Jewish Tabernacle. You know we go past a picture to the reality. Observe, dear friends, you do not always teach your children by a picture. It may do for a time ; but when they get older, you have to teach them by the reality ; and so has God done to his Church --"Which was a figure for the time then present." And this shows two things. It shows God's condescension. You know if a great philosopher--say Sir Isaac Newton--was to come and teach a child the alphabet, it would be a great condescension ; and such, dear friends, is the condescension of God, but in a far higher sense. Another lesson is, that the persons who would take us back and teach us through pictures , they are for bringing us back to childhood again.

But I have a second and still greater imperfection in the Jewish covenant,--That it could not make the worshippers perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. Verse 9--"Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience." The worth of a man's religion may be estimated by this--what does it do for his conscience ? True religion is this--to give perfection to the conscience.

Let me open this up to you--the matter of the conscience. We are told by Paul that there is a conscience in every man. Romans ii. 14--"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts." You will notice, that though the Gentiles had not the Bible, yet it is said they had a conscience. The conscience in man is that part of his nature which is intended to regulate all his doings, but which here is said to accuse or excuse all that we do.

Observe what state ungodly men have brought their conscience into : Those of you in the Congregation who are ungodly, you have got a seared conscience. See 1st Timothy iv. 2--"Speaking lies in hypocrisy ; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." Compare Titus i. 15--"Unto the pure, all things are pure ; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure ; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Now, brethren, this shows you very plainly what state the conscience is in--it is either seared or defiled.

Conscience is intended to be the voice of God in the heart ; but observe, those of you who have sinned much against the light of your conscience, you have got a defiled conscience. It is like a mirror that is defiled ; so that it does not reflect the objects put opposite it. It is like a piece of flesh over which a red-hot iron has been drawn. That is the state of those of you who have a defiled conscience. But, O, brethren ! when it pleases God to convince a man by the Spirit, God pricks conscience, and then it cries out, "Men and brethren ! what shall we do ?"

O ! that God would unstop conscience. Now, brethren, when the conscience is thus awakened, before he can have peace, it must be pacified. Now, what will do this ? Will the blood of bulls and goats do it ?--Ah, no ! Nothing but a price put down will do. O, dear fellow sinner ! think of this. It's a poor religion that will not pacify an accusing conscience--that will no make the lion in the breast lie down and sleep. All the gifts of Moses will not do--they make a man clean ceremoniously ; but nothing but a ransom laid down by Christ, and taken by the sinner, will do it.

Do you know, brethren, what I mean ? Ah ! would to God that your conscience was awake ! I fear many of you have got a seared conscience--so that you cannot weep for your guilty and sinful heart--so that conscience does not cry out against sin. Ah, friends ! think of this. I do not know a man so miserable as the man who has a seared conscience--as the man who has sinned against much light.

And again, if there are any here who have an awakened conscience, I pray you think that it is not all the gifts and sacrifices of Moses that will give it peace : It is only the blood of Christ. O ! the happiness of having a clean conscience. O ! to be able to say with holy Paul, "I have a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward men."

But I hasten to the third imperfection of the Mosaic covenant : It is, That it was a yoke imposed on them. Verse 10--"Which stood only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." This Tabernacle and all its service was accompanied with divers ordinances ; which Paul here says were imposed on them till the time of reformation. I shall not now stay to open up to you all the ordinances here mentioned. The "meats" appear to be what they were allowed to eat. You know there were some beast which they were commanded not to eat, such as the swine. They might also appear to refer to what the priests were allowed to eat in the holy place ; and the "drinks" may refer to the command, that the priests were not allowed to drink wine while performing the service of the Tabernacle. The "divers washings" appear to refer to what the priests had to do when they entered into the holy place ; and when they offered sacrifice, they had to wash themselves at the brazen laver. These things the Apostle calls "carnal ordinances," not sinful ; but outward ordinances, not extending to the conscience. Now, of all these ceremonious ordinances, Paul says they were imposed on them till the time of reformation. This is much illustrated from what you read in Acts xv. 10--"Now, therefore, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." Peter here calls the ceremonial law a yoke which neither they nor their fathers could bear. Compare Galatians v. 1--"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not

entangled again with the yoke of bondage." They both agree in calling it a yoke of bondage. I believe God intended it to be a yoke, in order that men might be looking out for Christ--in order that men might look at the high priest that was to come--in order that men might be weary of their bondage. I believe that we do not rightly understand the old covenant unless we understand it thus--unless we see it as making them long for the coming of Christ. "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

I see that I will not have time to go farther. I am sorry for this, as you will not rightly understand it, unless you know what follows. In the following verses, he shows the superiority of Christ over the Mosaic services. They were the shadow--Christ is the substance. But, brethren, though I cannot now go over it, yet you may learn this sweet lesson,--that we are now come into Gospel liberty. "If the Son make us free, we shall be free indeed." But, ah ! what will be the condemnation of those of you who yet remain with a seared conscience, unpardoned and unholy ? What will be your condemnation, brethren, if, after Christ has laid down his blood and gone into the holy place, you should count that blood a common thing ? What place of hell will be bad enough for you who despise him ? Ah, brethren ! think of this. Do not be content with a religion that does not make the conscience clean. But, O ! come to the Lord Jesus, who has obtained "eternal redemption," and do not despise it. That word "eternal redemption" is enough to fill heaven and earth with praise. Ah, brethren ! which of you can be happy that has not obtained eternal redemption. Amen.

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