

The Superiority of Christ's Sacrifice Over Those of the Law

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Christ's sacrifice is superior to the sacrifices under the law because it has superior value and efficacy, purging the conscience from dead works and making it clean to serve the living God.

Scripture: Hebrews 9:13

Topics: "The Sacrifice of Christ", "Cleansing of Conscience"

Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne emphasizes the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the Old Testament sacrifices, illustrating that while the blood of bulls and goats could only ceremonially cleanse, Christ's sacrifice purges the conscience and enables true service to God. He explains that Christ, as both the high priest and the offering, provided a perfect and eternal redemption through His own blood, which was offered without spot. M'Cheyne highlights the significance of the Holy Spirit's role in this offering, underscoring the depth of God's love and the necessity of a cleansed conscience for genuine worship and service to the living God.

Transcript

Hebrews ix. 13,14.--"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God ?"

IN our last Lecture, some of you will remember that we had a remarkable comparison of the high priest under the law, and Christ. We noticed that Christ was a high priest of good things to come. The high priest under the law had no good thing--he had only the shadow ; but Christ is a high priest of good things to come--the pardon that he gives is real. We saw, in the next place, that Christ had a greater tabernacle than the priest under the law. We saw that the high priest under the law had a Tabernacle composed of boards and curtains ; and we saw that the tabernacle of Christ is his holy human soul and body. And then we saw, that, in the Tabernacle of old, there was a ray of Divine Majesty, while in the temple of Christ dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead. His eye was a channel for the divine omniscience--his arm a channel for the divine omnipotence. We saw, thirdly, that Christ was greater than the high priest in his entrance

into the holiest. We saw that the high priest entered in often ; but Christ entered in once for all.

We now come, dear brethren, to consider that the sacrifice of Christ was greater than all the sacrifices under the law. This is the intention of these words--"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God ?" There are obviously two things in these verses that require to be opened up.

What the sacrifices under the law could do--"For if the blood of bulls and goats," &c. What this greater sacrifice could do--"How much more shall the blood of Christ," &c. I. The first thing, then, which we have to consider is, what the sacrifices under the law could do. And first, we must inquire what the sacrifices of the law were. Verse 13--"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh."

First of all, we have got the blood of bulls and goats. This may refer perhaps to that in the 12th verse--"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." This was the high priest's duty on the day of atonement, mentioned in the 16th of Exodus. You remember I told you he had to offer for himself and for the errors of the people. Now, it may refer to this, but I think that it rather refers to all the Jewish sacrifices : For example, it is said in Isaiah i. 11, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me ? saith the Lord.

I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts ; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats." There you notice that the sacrifices of Israel are described as the sacrifices of lambs and bullocks. Compare this with the 50th Psalm, 9th verse--"I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds." Verse 13--"Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats ?" There, you will notice, all the sacrifices of Israel are contained under these two heads--"The blood of bulls and of goats ;" and this I think is the meaning of these words--"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh."--if they sanctified to the purifying of the flesh--"how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God ?"

What was it that the blood of bulls and of goats did ?--There were two things that it did : It represented the shedding of the blood of Christ : Another thing it did was--it made them ceremoniously clean.--Then again, let us notice the other sacrifice here mentioned--"The ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh." We are told about it in the 19th chapter of Numbers, verse 2d--"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke."

You will observe it was to be a heifer without spot. This refers to Christ, who was without sin. It was to be one on which never came yoke. This represents Christ, that on him was no sin : He had no burden of sin of his own. And you will notice that it was to be a red heifer. This shows that he was to be covered with our sin. Then, verse 3d--"And ye shall give her unto Eleazar, the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face."

You will notice, that the heifer was to be led without the gate, to show that Christ was to suffer as an outcast--an outcast from God--an outcast from man. And any one was to slay it. This shows that the

Gentiles were to have a hand in putting him to death. Verse 8--"And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the evening." And then, verse 9--"And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place ; and it shall be kept for the Congregation of the children of Israel, for a water of separation : It is a purification for sin."

The burning of the heifer was to show that Christ was not only to be slain by the hands of men, but that he was to be consumed by the wrath of God. Then it was to be for a water of separation, to wash the unclean. This is to show that Christ was to be a perpetual fountain washing the unclean. That is what is meant in the passage by the ordinance of the heifer. Now, the question comes, What could this do ? Now, friends, there are two things it could do. It could show Christ. It was intended to be a dim Gospel--"The law having a shadow of good things to come."

It was "a shadow of good things to come." And I have no doubt that many a believing Jew was taught through them, by the Spirit, how to be saved. But you will observe, that the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, also sanctified to the purifying of the flesh. The word "sanctify" is used in two ways in the Bible. It often means to make holy--"Sanctify them through thy truth ; thy word is truth,"--that is, make them holy. But it has another meaning,--that is, to set apart.

Such were all the vessels of the sanctuary ; and that is the meaning of these words in the 17th of John--"For their sakes I sanctify myself,"--that is, "For their sakes I set myself apart." Now, that is the meaning in this verse--"If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh," or set men apart to the purifying of the flesh. It made them clean ceremoniously. You know, when a man died in any of the tents of Israel, that tent was reckoned unclean ; or of any one touched a dead body, he was unclean seven days, and on the third day he was obliged to go out of the camp.

Now, the ashes of an heifer was that with which he was to be sprinkled, in order to be made clean. Any one that was clean was to take a bowl of running water, and mix with it the ashes of the heifer, and any one was to sprinkle him with it, and then on the seventh day he was clean. Now, this is what the sacrifices could do--they made the man ceremoniously clean. They did, then, these two things : They represented the shedding of the blood of Christ ; and they made the worshippers ceremoniously clean.

II. I now come to the second thing proposed,--that is, to show what the sacrifice of Christ could do. Verse 14--"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God ?" Now, you will notice, brethren, two things here : First, the superior value of the sacrifice of Christ ; and then its superior efficacy.

1st. It's of far greater value. It is described in a very solemn manner--"He, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God !" Every word of it is solemn. You ought to look up for light that you may see every word of it. First, observe what the sacrifice was--"He offered himself!". The Jewish high priest offered a lamb or a goat : This high priest offered himself. The Jewish high priest presented an offering every day ; but what was that to this high priest ?--"He offered himself!".

He that was God and man in two distinct natures, and one person for ever, offered himself. Think of it, dear brethren ; for it has a height and a depth, a length and a breadth, that passeth knowledge. To an unbelieving man there is nothing seen in it ; but to the believing soul, it is a love that passeth knowledge : It makes all historical events seem as nothing. He was the high priest, and he was the lamb, and he was

the altar too. He was the high priest--"No man forceth my life from me : I lay it down of myself.

I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." Just as Abraham lifted the knife to slay his son, so Christ lifted the knife on himself. It is said in Isaiah, "He poured out his soul unto death." And then, brethren, you must always bear in mind, that his divine and human nature concurred in it. And then he was not only the high priest, but the lamb--"He offered himself." "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" It is true that the Godhead could not suffer ; yet he offered himself.

His holy human body and soul was the lamb. How costly ! Where is there anything in all the world so costly ? And then he was the altar too, as some old divines have it. His divine nature was the altar on which his human soul and body, as the sacrifice, was offered. And then observe, "He offered himself without spot." You know the heifer was to be without spot, the lamb was to be without spot, and the goat was to be without spot ; but, brethren, all the heifers and lambs and goats were but externally spotless ; but Christ was both internally and externally holy,--yea, we may say, brethren, that no creature in heaven or earth was spotless as He, the only holy one.

And then he was not only without spot in his life, but in his suffering--he was the only holy one even when he died. And then notice farther, "to God". In the plan of redemption, God the Father is the governor. It is he that gives the law--sinners break the law. God says, the sinner shall die--"the soul that sinneth it shall die." Christ offers to die--to suffer for sinners, and he dies. That is the meaning of the word, "to God". And then he did all this through the Eternal Spirit--"He, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God."

Some divines think this refers to the divine nature of Christ, and the sense is good. Still I do not think it is the meaning. It is through the Holy Spirit just as you remember the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, and formed him in the Virgin's womb ; so, at the hour of greatest need--in that awful hour when flesh and heart was failing--the Eternal Spirit filled him with all divine grace and strength to offer himself--"He, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God."

Ah, my brethren ! when we go to Calvary, we are often taken up with the men that are there--the crowd that surrounded him. We look too much at Pilate condemning him, and the soldiers crucifying him, and too little at what God here points us to. God has put a blank over all the creatures, and lets us see the high priest. A carnal man can understand his sufferings from men ; but it is the spiritual eye that sees his priestly offering.

And let us pause and see how intent the Godhead was on the work of redemption. The Son might have said, "How should I seek to die for sinners?" The Father might have said, "How should I be at Calvary to receive that offering?" And the Spirit might have said, "How should I support Jesus to make that offering?" The Father's heart was intent on the work. The Son said, "Lo ! I come to do thy will, O God!" And the spirit said, "Lo ! I come." And the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Let us learn another lesson--the folly of those who see no beauty--nothing to wonder at--in the cross of Jesus--"Angels desire to look into it." You see no love in it ; yet herein is love--"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." And here is the love of the Spirit. O, blind bats ! that see no love in the cross of Christ !

2d. I have still another point to go over ; but I am afraid I can hardly touch upon it,--viz. the superior efficacy of the sacrifice.--"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit,

offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God ?" As long as you are Christless, your works are dead works. Worms are the attendants of death. Your conscience is dead. The blood of Christ purifies the conscience ; "for if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh," they sanctify to the purifying of the flesh ; but the blood of Christ makes the conscience clean. Do you know what it is to have the conscience washed ? All the Jewish sacrifices could not take sin away. As one said when standing by the sea, "My heart might pollute the sea ; but that sea could not make my heart clean." And then the result--"To serve the living God." You cannot serve God as long as you are unpardoned ; but, Ah ! the moment that the conscience is purged from dead works, the stream of life enters in.

Learn, dear friends, that certainly, if "the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God."

And then learn, last of all, that you cannot serve God with an unpurged conscience. You must get your conscience washed, sinner, or you will never serve the living God. May the Lord bless his word ! Amen.

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