

Hebrews 9:1-10

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. 2 For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. 3 Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, 4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. 5 Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

6 These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. 8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing 9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

Old Testament worship pointed. It was a finger, pointing to a sacrifice to come that would do what all the sacrifices and rites of the temple could only foreshadow. Our worship in the end times points. It points to that sacrifice made and realized, and it gives the benefits of that sacrifice through the means our Lord has instituted for doing so, through the Word and the Sacraments. At the center of it all, Old Testament and New Testament, is Christ, the beating heart of Scripture, whose blood does what temple worship never could, except through pointing faith ahead in time to the day when God would keep His promises regarding the Messiah's death and resurrection: perfect the conscience of the worshiper. What does that mean? It means that the repentant Christian need not entertain doubts about his or her standing with God, about whether his or her slate has actually been wiped clean, about whether or not he or she actually is what God has declared those who believe to be, namely, innocent in His sight.

Old Testament worship dealt primarily with externals that at their best were designed to point inward faith to the coming Christ, the offspring of Abraham in whom all who believe, true children of Abraham, would be blessed. New Testament worship cuts to the heart, addresses the heart, and gives faith to the heart. Besides the Sacraments, there are no prescribed externals, and even the Sacraments, although they involve visible externals, are directed at the heart, at grant blessing directly to the heart. We are free in matters of food and drink and washings. We have no need for the temple, because the Spirit has made us the very temples of God. Christ, who died and rose for us, dwells within us. And that means something radical for our daily life. That means that we live, not for what we will be, but as what we are declared to be. We are saints, and our lives are to be but evidence of that fact, fruits of the tree that Christ has made us through the implantation of His Spirit in us through Baptism and the preaching and teaching of the Word. We are free, and yet we are willing slaves. We are servants of Christ, not in order to earn heaven, but because He has spared our life and we can think of no better way to thank Him than to live for Him who died for us. And we are able to do so with joy, with peaceful consciences, sure that we please Him in so doing, confident that nothing could be better than His will revealed to us and accomplished through us, for it was His will, after all, to ransom and redeem us, which makes clear to us the loving and tender heart of our God toward us. Amen.

