THE PERFECT SACRIFICE: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF HEBREWS

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The book of Hebrews is an epistle of remarkable theological richness. The theme of sacrifice permeates throughout. My objective in this paper is not to exegete Hebrews as in an exegetical study, nor is it aligned with the systematician's task of organizing texts for doctrinal formulation. Rather it is to trace the theme of sacrifice in Hebrews through a biblical-theological process to uncover the core concepts. Since this paper focuses on sacrifice in Hebrews, it is natural that my attention will lie strongly with its ninth and tenth chapters. To trace this theme in its own right is hardly a challenge. The theme of sacrifice will be traced from a particular vantage point. My challenge is to identify the most central motif within the broader concept of sacrifice as portrayed by the author of Hebrews. In this paper, I will argue from Scripture that the central motif of sacrifice presented in Hebrews is the perfection of Christ. My argument will consist of explicating seven biblical emphases intended by the author of Hebrews, together offering an overwhelming case for the perfection of Christ. As a prelude to my primary evidence, I will explain why the concept of perfection is deeply rooted within Hebrews as a whole. Then, I will begin my evidence by showing, first, the author's emphasis on the contrast between Christ's priesthood and the Levitical priesthood. Second, I will demonstrate the author's emphasis on the need for a perfect person to offer payment for the sins of God's people. Third, I will demonstrate the author's emphasis on the eternality of Christ's sacrifice. Fourth, I will demonstrate the author's emphasis on the quantitative limitations of cleansing under the old covenant sacrifices. Fifth, I will demonstrate the author's emphasis on the underivative nature of Christ's sacrifice. Sixth, I will demonstrate the author's emphasis on Christ's perfect obedience to His Father. Seventh, I will demonstrate the author's emphasis on believers being perfected through Christ.

Each of these seven emphases will be examined below to show that Christ's perfection stands as the central idea of sacrifice according to Hebrews.

Other Themes

The evidence would benefit from a solid foundation of what is meant by sacrifice rather than assuming its meaning. Christian Eberhart gives insight into the function of sacrifice: "Hence the term sacrifice can be used for a number of different phenomena: it denotes sacrificial rituals as such and the materials ("victims") to be offered; it can also designate acts of worship not directly associated with such sacrificial rituals, and in everyday speech it can designate things that are given, or persons who are deployed, for the sake of a greater good."[1] Considered in two distinct and simple categories, sacrifice can either be understood as sacrificial rituals, or it can be used metaphorically.[2] Richard D. Nelson opts for his explanation: "to offer something as sacrifice is to transfer it out of the realm of human use and disposal into the domain of God."[3] He clearly identifies sacrifice as metaphorical. This is to say what sacrifice *is*; William Lane Craig offers guidance on the *purpose* of sacrifice. He says, "Among their various functions the animal sacrifices filled the twin fundamental purposes of expiation of sin and propitiation of God."[4] Crucial for the concept of sacrifice is that the subject is cleansed and God's wrath is satisfied.

Sacrifice is woven into the fabric of other themes such as the tabernacle, covenant, blood, justice, priesthood, salvation, exaltation, and the fulfillment of divine promises. Together these themes, alongside the sacrifice of Christ, create a beautiful picture of what the author intends to portray. This picture fits within the argument of this paper, not against it. Calling

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[1] Christian A. Eberhart, "Sacrifice? Holy Smokes! Reflections on Cult Terminology for Understanding Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible," in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 21.

[2] Eberhart, "Sacrifice? Holy Smokes!," 21.

[3] Richard D. Nelson, "'He Offered Himself': Sacrifice in Hebrews," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 57, no. 3 (2003), 252.

[4] William Lane Craig, *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 18.

Christ's perfection the central motif of sacrifice in Hebrews is not meant to discredit the significance of other motifs. All of them work in harmony, but I intend to argue that one holds a particular significance. By the perfection of Christ I mean He is perfect with respect to His nature and His works.

Biblical Evidence

My research has led me to several findings that support Christ's perfection as the central idea of sacrifice, as the author of Hebrews intended. Each of these findings comes as a result of careful exegetical study. Hence, my supporting arguments are summaries of those exegetical findings. Elements within my argumentation will include implied conclusions rather than explicit biblical statements. Whenever this occurs, my explanation for why I arrived at such conclusions will be provided. Within the study of Biblical theology, not all conclusions are explicit. The goal is to determine what the author intended to convey in his teachings. In keeping with progressive revelation, it is apparent that not all true conclusions are explicitly highlighted by the author. Thus, not all of what was intended by God as the divine author was understood or explicitly communicated by the human author. It is therefore completely legitimate to make conclusions based on implicit teachings, and it is the objective of this paper to demonstrate their legitimacy from the biblical evidence. I contend that the author of Hebrews did truly understand and intend the centrality of Christ's perfection for his teaching of sacrifice.

The Perfection of Christ

Christ is perfect in terms of His nature and His works. By nature, He is God. He is holy, just as God the Father. He is without flaw or blemish. He is completely sinless. His sacrifice and exaltation proved that He is meant to be worshipped with the same reverence and legitimacy as God the Father. The ancient world was well accustomed to bridging the concepts of

sacrifice and worship.[5] His life was a demonstration of His nature. He lived completely free of sin. He carried out the will of His Father through His active obedience. He had no fault or guilt. His life, teachings, and character are complete. His mission is both complete and incomplete. His mission to offer forgiveness to guilty sinners, to pay for their sin through His own blood, and to offer a pathway to be reconciled to God, has been completed. He has fulfilled the covenant promises to a large extent. His mission to fully defeat Satan, sin, and death is awaiting His return. This is what is meant by the perfection of Christ.

Arguing that Christ's perfection is embedded in the notion of sacrifice is futile if I cannot prove that Hebrews presents it as its own idea. Does the author of Hebrews present Christ's perfection as a relevant teaching? The first evidence of this is the feminine noun *teleiotēs*. In Hebrews 6:1, most translators translate *teleiotēs* as "maturity": "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity (*teleiotēs*), not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." In Colossians 3:14, the true meaning of the word becomes clearer: "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect (*teleiotēs*) harmony." Perfection is the explicit translation for Paul's usage. Paul's context shows that the word indicates something theologically richer than maturation as Westerners commonly use the term. An adolescent maturing towards adulthood is not what is meant here. The idea here is *completion*. Paul describes love as binding material for all of the godly virtues. He raises the significance of love to encompass the other virtues. A similar idea is found in Jesus's teaching of love as the greatest commandment (Matt 12:28-31). He does not mean to diminish or dismiss the other commandments. He means to highlight the centrality of love as the binding material for all the other commandments. This is akin to my argument that Christ's perfection is the central motif within the concept of sacrifice. Love fulfills the law and

[5] R. T. Beckwith, "Sacrifice," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 754.

binds the characteristics of Christlikeness into a unity. The author of Hebrews employs *teleiotēs* to signify the state of perfection or completeness of the Christlike qualities that result from faith.

From the same root word, the author makes use of the verb form *teleioō*. Here perfection is active. God is making something perfect, or something has been perfected. The verb is used nine times in Hebrews and can be found in Luke, John, Paul, and James (Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1; 10:14; 11:40; 12:23). Of those nine instances, there are five contexts appealed to. First, it refers to law. Hebrews 7:19 states that "(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God." The old covenant under the law is being contrasted with the "better" covenant through Christ. Thus, how the term is being applied corresponds directly to Christ. For now that the old covenant has been done away with, faith in Christ in the new covenant is how to become perfected. The implication is that Christ perfects those who abide in Him.

Second, it refers to sacrifice. Although some state it differently, the CSB translation captures this idea in its translation of Hebrews 9:9: "This is a symbol for the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the worshiper's conscience." Again in Hebrews 10:1: "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship." The old sacrifices are now ineffective and contrast with the efficacy of the new sacrifice of Jesus Christ once and for all. Third, it refers to Christ's perfect sacrifice. Following the old sacrifices, Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." Christ has made perfect those who abide in Him by way of His perfect and complete sacrifice. The other uses the same verb to highlight the old sacrifices in a contrasting connotation—they have not perfected anyone—and the new sacrifice of Christ in a supreme connotation—Christ's sacrifice is the cause of perfection for God's new people.

Fourth, it refers to Christ Himself being perfected by God. Hebrews 2:10 says, "In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom

everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered." Later Hebrews 5:9 adds, "and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." Some have mistakenly considered these statements as Christ's progressive perfection. That somehow Christ went from unholy to holy, or imperfect to perfect. At that point, Christ becomes a mere human being who has been sanctified by the Spirit. That is clearly not what the author of Hebrews teaches, for it would contradict his other teachings. For instance, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:3). The remainder of the verse reveals light to Christ being "made perfect." It says, "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 1:3). This is consistent with the context of Hebrews 2:10 and 5:9, where the author precedes with the condescension of Christ. The point is not that Christ, in His divine nature, became something that He was not. Rather, the author indicates that His active obedience in surrendering His life to the cross became the cornerstone for salvation through faith. His condescension became the perfect sacrifice and only sacrifice upon which humans might be saved. The author duplicates this theme in Hebrews 7:28, where "For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever" is preceded by, "He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself" (Heb 7:27). The nature of His sacrifice is what made Him perfect, not that He was lacking anything prior, but the author means to emphasize the fulfillment of God's promises through Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Fifth, it refers to the people of God. This verb is then applied to the righteous, those who abide in Christ, stating that they will become perfected in Him who is perfect (Heb 11:40; 12:23). Tracing all nine passages where the verb form of perfection (*teleioō)* is used, the author roughly moves sequentially in this order in the concepts of perfection: Christ being made perfect through His sacrifice, the law's inability to perfect, the perfect sacrifice of Christ, then those who are in Christ being perfected by His sacrifice. Without question, the author of Hebrews traces a wealth of content related to the notion of perfection.

Perfection in Hebrews 9-10

The perfection of Christ within the theme of sacrifice is being evaluated throughout the entire book of Hebrews. As previously stated, since sacrifice is heavily alluded to in Hebrews 9 and 10, it is natural to presume much of the evidence will reside within those two chapters. What I will do is walk through those chapters and highlight specific words or expressions that explicitly teach or allude to the perfection of Christ as a central idea to the overarching theme of sacrifice. This provides a brief overview of the evidence to be more deeply explained below. Keep in mind that the author teaches the perfection of Christ by affirming it directly *and* by contrasting Christ with the earthly priests. Hebrews is known for its method of teaching Christ's perfection by highlighting Christ's uniqueness *in contrast* to the earthly priests. It foreshadows and points towards the sufficient work of Christ. The first mention of Jesus as high priest is found in 2:17: "Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people." Many references thereafter develop priesthood as an *antitype* prior to Hebrews 9-10 (Heb 4:15; 5:1-4, 5; 7:11, 20-22, 23, 27-28; 8:1-2).[6] The point is that the author emphasizes through both *types* and *antitypes*, and so both will be presented in the evidence.

Christ is alluded to in the ministerial functions of the priests and holy places. Only the high priest is permitted to enter the most holy place, where he offers a sacrifice on his behalf and that of the people (9:1-7). The Holy Spirit would reveal a new way for all people to access the presence of God (9:8). God has planned a second or new tabernacle (9:8). Functions under the old covenant are symbolic of the work of Christ (9:9). The gifts and sacrifices of old are insufficient and cannot perfect believers (9:9). Old covenant regulations are for ceremonial cleansing, not the eternal remission of sins (9:10). God has planned a new way of cleansing under the new covenant (9:10). Christ is the true high priest (9:11). Christ, in His nature, is seen as the perfect tabernacle or presence of God (9:11). Christ's sacrifice was only required once for

[6] Christian A. Eberhart and Donald Schweitzer, "The Unique Sacrifice of Christ According to Hebrews 9: A Study in Theological Creativity," 4-5.

all mankind, as opposed to repeated sacrifices (9:12). As the high priest, He offered His own blood as the sufficient sacrifice (9:12). Through this sacrifice, He accomplished eternal redemption for mankind (9:12). Christ and the Holy Spirit work in harmony (9:14). The efficacy of the cleansing of Christ's sacrifice far surpasses that of animal sacrifices (9:13-14). Christ's sacrifice of Himself was voluntary, and, unlike the earthly priests, Christ was sinless and so did not need to account for His own cleansing (9:14). Christ paid for the sins under the old covenant (9:15). The blood of Christ is required for the inauguration of the new covenant and the forgiveness of sins (9:22). His sacrifice is a better sacrifice (9:23). Christ serves as the presence of God for all mankind (9:24). Christ's single offering of Himself was sufficient for eternal forgiveness of sins (9:25-28).

The law foreshadowed the better things to come in Christ (10:1). Animal sacrifices cannot perfect believers, whereas Christ can (10:1). Christ's sacrifice alone purifies once and for all (10:2). Animal sacrifices are a reminder of committed sin, whereas Christ's sacrifice stands forever as the reminder of forgiveness in Him (10:3). Since it is impossible for animal sacrifices to forgive sins, it follows that Christ's sacrifice is the only way to forgive sins (10:4-8). By contrast to previous offerings, Christ's offering is perfect due to His obedience to God's will (10:9-10). Again, priestly offerings are obsolete to forgive sins (10:11). Christ's sacrifice offers eternal forgiveness (10:12). Because of His offering, Christ is exalted (10:12). His people are made perfect through His sacrifice (10:14). Forgiveness in Christ's perfect sacrifice requires no additional offering (10:16-18). Christ is the perfect priest and sacrifice (10:19-22). His sacrifice gives assurance and purification (10:22). Rejecting Christ's offering brings eternal death (10:29-31). This brief summary of the evidence in Hebrews 9-10 shows that over and over the author does intimate, either explicitly or implicitly, the centrality of Christ's perfection in the notion of sacrifice. However, the evidence is left somewhat ambiguous. The following seven sections elaborate on these verses and serve as the key biblical evidence for my argument.

Contrast of Priesthoods

The author of Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ by contrasting Christ's priesthood with that of earthly priests. Jesus is not just another high priest. He is the fulfillment of the priestly function according to the old covenant. Hebrews makes clear that Jesus's priesthood is drastically different from that of human priests. This is evident from Hebrews 9:11: "But Christ has appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation)." The very nature of their priesthood differs. Jesus's priesthood is a type of the earthly priesthood under the old covenant. Priests stand as the primary spiritual mediator between God and the people, offering sacrifices through blood on the people's behalf: "Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant" (Hebrews 9:15). The function of Christ's priesthood is to administer the new covenant—a greater and even perfect mediatory function for the people of God. Based on these unique functions of Christ, His high priesthood clearly supersedes the Levitical priesthood and is portrayed as a Christological climax in Hebrews.[7]

Twice the author introduces the unique priesthood of Christ with *toioutos*, meaning "such thing" or "this kind" (Heb 7:26; 8:1). The term itself makes no theological significance, but it does denote a distinguishing characteristic of one thing or person from another. Hence, *toioutos* was used intentionally to demonstrate the defining characteristics of Christ by contrasting them with those of the earthly priests. It turns out that both uses by the author to distinguish their priesthoods emphasize the perfection of Christ.

Hebrews 7:26 says, "Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens." To be holy is to be perfect, as God is perfect. Blamelessness is not only innocence but moral perfection in Christ's context.

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[7] Eberhart and Schweitzer, "The Unique Sacrifice of Christ According to Hebrews 9," 5.

Christ is set apart, meaning He is not of the same sinful nature. Lastly, He is exalted, only as a perfect being ought to be. Hebrews 8:1 says, "Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven." The author has already created a conceptual unity between Christ seated at the right hand of God and His divine status. According to Hebrews 1:3, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Here the author uses the exact same verbiage of "the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." By this expression, he means to tie Christ's exaltation to God as confirmation of His divinity. As a divine being, His perfection is inherently implied. Evidently, both uses of *toioutos* in Hebrews teach the unique priesthood of Christ and emphasize the perfection of Christ.

Additionally, His unique priesthood is emphasized in the assurance believers have in His salvation: "since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb 10:21-22). The exact concept is found earlier in Hebrews 4:14-16.

In what may be construed in a paradoxical sense, the uniqueness of Christ's offering is not only the nature of Christ as the offeror but Christ as the offering. The difference in Christ's priestly function is that this priest extraordinarily took on the twin roles of both the priest and the victim.[8] The high priesthood of Christ is "a precursor to the distinct christological and soteriological concept of Jesus as perfect and unique sacrifice."[9] The priestly ministry of Jesus points to the uniqueness and perfection of His sacrifice. On a similar note, some scholars have pinpointed the uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice from the style of authorship in Hebrews: "Rather

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[8] Nelson, "He Offered Himself," 257.

[9] Eberhart and Schweitzer, "The Unique Sacrifice of Christ According to Hebrews 9," 5. Eberhart and Schweitzer argue that this is an exercise in theological creativity.

than focusing on historical accuracy, Hebrews seems to be making use of a familiar framework to emphasise the uniqueness of Christ's work."[10] The evidence shows that Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ within the concept of sacrifice due to its contrast between the human priestly function under the old covenant and the perfect priestly function in Christ.

Necessity of a Perfect Person

The author of Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ by showing that only a perfect person could have paid for the sins of the people. He unmistakably teaches that what Christ accomplished on the cross as a sacrifice for sin could not have been replicated by anyone else or through any other means than his blood. The reason for this is in virtue of Christ's sinless perfection. No other high priest has the right to become a sin offering because he must account for his own sins and would therefore be unable to offer himself. This is proved in Hebrews 9:7, where not only offering sacrifices on behalf of the people but also for themselves, illustrating their need for cleansing. It would be unjustified for any other human being to be sacrificed for God's people. What was essential in sacrificial offering, however, is that the animal be ritually clean, so that it would effectively stand against the human sin.[11] Christ had no sin (2 Cor 5:21), but all mankind has fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 2:23). No one could have accomplished what Christ did on the cross due to human sinfulness and Christ's sinlessness. Only he who is without sin could become a sin offering (Heb 9:13-14).

If that is not enough evidence, Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that Christ's perfection is required since "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:4). The author does not imply that the old sacrifices were not valid at all, but instead directs the reader's attention to a "better" (Heb 9:23), more perfect, and definitive sacrifice.[12] Sewakpo

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[10] Honore Sewakpo, "An Interpretation of Christ as the Sacrifice in Hebrews 9:26 to a Holistic Relationship with God," 29.

[11] Beckwith, "Sacrifice," 755.

[12] Nelson, "He Offered Himself," 251.

aptly writes, “Hebrews reveals that blood sacrifice has come to an end. Apparently, so has the hierarchical structure created and sustained by sacrifice come to an end. Hebrews does not, however, end the logic of sacrifice. For Hebrews, forgiveness of sins was obtained through Jesus’ high priestly offering. The effects of Jesus’ sacrifice continue to be available for humans.”[13] Christ is therefore the perfect high priest. To accomplish the sacrifice under the new covenant, the author emphasizes the need for a perfect person to perform such a sacrifice.

The Eternality of Christ’s Sacrifice

The author of Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ through the eternality of his sacrifice. An obvious contrast between the sacrifices of the old covenant and Christ's ultimate sacrifice is that the former sacrifices were *temporary*. Under the old covenant, when a person was cleansed by animal sacrifice, they were required to offer additional sacrifices for continued sins committed. Payment of additional sacrifices was needed as a way to reconcile future sins. Christ's sacrifice is once and for all eternity. Thomas Schreiner says, “ His one sacrifice is effective forever and needs no supplementation by further sacrifices.”[14] The author of Hebrews teaches this in his statement that “sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary” (10:18). By no means does he mean to suggest that sin no longer exists as a reality of the human condition post-crucifixion. The only rational conclusion is that he understood the sacrifice of Christ to apply not just to all sin that had occurred up to the present time, but for all sin that exists and awaits in the future until Christ's second coming for those who remain in Him (Heb 9:10).

Hebrews teaches this in its understanding that Christ’s singular sacrifice is sufficient for all time (9:25-28). This is confirmed by Paul elsewhere: “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed

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[13]Sewakpo, “An Interpretation of Christ,” 29.

[14] Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 822.

beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom 3:25-26). His sacrifice is eternal, covering past, present, and future sins. Eternality is also seen in several other teachings. Christ as the perfect tabernacle, as "he entered the most holy place once for all time" (Heb 9:12). Using the same Greek word *ephapax*, he writes that "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time (Heb 10:10). The same term is used in the same context as Hebrews 7:27 and Romans 6:10. Nothing can change the cleansing of the cross for those who remain in Christ. Moreover, it is said that the blood of Christ was offered "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb 9:14). The intersection between the sacrificial ministry of Jesus and the sanctifying ministry of the "eternal Spirit" signifies the eternality of Christ's work on the cross. Moreover, the new covenant promises are described as an "eternal inheritance" for God's people in Christ (Heb 9:15).

Another way to state the eternality of Christ's sacrifice is its permanence. Nicholas Moore writes, [Hebrews 7:23-28] "constitutes the climax of comparison between the Levitical priesthood and Christ's priesthood. In 7.23-25 we find emphasized Jesus' permanence and continuity as a priest, in contrast to the mortality of the Levitical priests."[15] Christ permanently removed the guilt of sin for anyone who believes in His name. His priesthood magnifies His permanence. Sin against a perfect God requires a perfect sacrifice, and the blood of Christ satisfies God's wrath permanently. Within the concept of sacrifice as the author of Hebrews portrays it, the eternality (or permanence) of Christ's sacrifice—effective in cleansing all past, present, and future sins—underscores Christ's perfection.

Quantitative Limits

The author of Hebrews emphasizes Christ's perfection through the finite number of sins that old covenant sacrifices could cover. This functions as a similar and yet distinct teaching

[15] Nicholas J. Moore, "Sacrifice, Session and Intercession: The End of Christ's Offering in Hebrews," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42, no. 4 (2020), 529.

from the previous evidence on eternality. Whether in the past, present, or future, a sacrificial offering of slaughtering an animal would only apply to a certain number of sins. It is not always made clear within different authorships what the Old Testament sacrifices actually accomplish. Paul Hoskins argues that from a plain reading of the text we can deduce that there is opportunity for forgiveness in both Jesus's sacrifice and the sacrificial sin offerings prescribed in Leviticus.[16] Repeated sacrifices were necessary both because the sins of mankind were so great and because the sacrifices were not of infinite worth. This is why God's people were required to continue practicing the Day of Atonement and Passover festivals. The author explicitly notes that repeated sacrifices could not perfect those who made the offering (10:1). Repeated sacrifices served as a reminder of repeated sins, not as the remission of sin (Hebrews 10:3-4). The author leaves no doubt about the limitations of old covenant sacrifices in contrast to the efficacy of the cross when he explains, "Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb 10:11-12).

Levitical priests continue to make sacrifices year after year, whereas Christ offered Himself "once and for all." The use of the term "all" shows us that the limitations of the Levitical sacrifices do not apply to Christ's offering. Scholars have referred to this as the "singularity." This is where the idea of completion and perfection factor in. As Moore writes, "Singularity is to Christ's sacrifice what perfection is to his priesthood: both terms are evocative of a process … yet most importantly both stress the aspect of completion."[17] Christ's singular event was sufficient for the complete forgiveness of sins. Based on the evidence presented, the author highlights Christ's perfection by showing that Christ's sacrifice was quantitatively limitless, whereas the old sacrifices were limited.

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[16] Paul M. Hoskins, "A Neglected Allusion to Leviticus 4–5 in Jesus's Words Concerning His Blood in Matthew 26:28," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 30, no. 2 (2020): 237.

[17] Nicholas J. Moore, *Repetition in Hebrews: Plurality and Singularity in the Letter to the Hebrews, Its Ancient Context, and the Early Church*, WUNT 2.388 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 177.

Underivative Sacrifice

The author of Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ by clarifying that his sacrifice was not empowered by or derivative of some other person or animal or item. Christ did not require something or someone else to serve as a payment for the sins of the world. Another mediator was not needed. Christ accomplished salvation through the shedding of His own blood, and none other (Heb 9:12,14). This is shown in the contrast that earthly priests had to offer sacrifices "with the blood of another" (Heb 9:25). Instead, Christ offered the sacrifice of Himself alone (Heb 9:26). Implied here is the role of the authority of Christ. His implied authority is predicated on the fact that there is no external empowerment in order to accomplish forgiveness. Also implied in the opening chapter: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (1:3). By the complete authority of Christ, His sacrificial offering covers the sins of the world. While the author does not explicitly state Christ's perfect authority, it is very much implied. His own authority did not require any external thing to make his sacrifice perfect. Christ's perfection is shown in the teaching that His sacrifice is sufficient without need for another person or thing.

Perfect Obedience

The author of Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ by pointing to His perfect obedience to the Father. He quotes a section of a psalm and applies it to Jesus's ministry: "I have come to do your will, God" (Heb 10:7).[18] And "by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). Perfect obedience of Jesus to His Father is a theme highlighted throughout the Gospels and Paul as well (e.g., Phil 2:8; Rom 5:19; John 8:29; 15:10, 13; Luke 22:42). In Hebrews, His obedience regards His willingness to voluntarily become the perfect sacrifice on the cross for the remission of sins. Elsewhere in Hebrews, "Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. After he was

[18] Quotation from Psalm 40:6-8.

perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:8-9). The point of perfect obedience is not that Christ went to the cross to pay the penalty for sins and accomplish the forgiveness of sins for the world, but that he did so *voluntarily*. This idea is deeply Johannine, primarily manifested in Jesus stating His Father's love: "This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father" (John 10:17-18). Later in John He reiterates this sentiment: "No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). I argue the same teaching is implied by the author of Hebrews. Imperative to the concept of a perfect sacrifice is the voluntary giving of oneself. Thus, Christ's perfect obedience to the Father by following His will to the cross emphasizes His perfection as a central motif of sacrifice.

Believers are Perfected

The author of Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ by showing that, through this sacrifice, those who believe in his name are perfected. As a rhetorical question, how can believers be perfected by someone who is not Himself perfect? Obviously, for God's people to be perfected through Christ's sacrifice, Christ Himself must be perfect. The evidence suggests the author combines the concepts of sacrificial cleansing and sanctification. First, he shows the inability of the previous sacrifices to perfect believers (Heb 9:9; 10:1). He also positively states that we are sanctified through His blood (Heb 9:14; 10:10; 10:14). The author teaches this point again in connection to the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify according to Jeremiah 31:33-34 (Heb 10:16-17). He continues with a rather Pauline style of teaching: "he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain" (Heb 10:20; see 2 Cor 5:17). Through the cross, we have a new kind of life. This is why Hebrews adds teachings on good works (10:24) and punishment for deliberate sin in conjunction with the perfect sacrifice (10:26). Because of Christ's sacrifice, those who believe in His name are not only cleansed but given new life.

Hebrews emphasizes the perfection of Christ by pointing to it as the reason for how believers are perfected toward holiness.

Conclusion

In this paper, I set out to prove that the understanding of sacrifice according to the book of Hebrews has at its central motif the reality of Christ as perfect both in His works and in His nature. First, I explained specifically what is meant by this idea of Christ's perfection. Then I showed why perfection corresponds to an overarching theme throughout Hebrews. Next, I provided a brief overview of the evidence for the perfection of Christ within the two foremost relevant chapters. Then I began presenting my primary evidence based on seven key emphases. First, I argued that the centrality of Christ's perfection appears in the contrast between the elements of His priesthood and those of the earthly priests under the old covenant. Second, I argued that Hebrews underscores the teaching that only Christ, as a perfect person, could have paid the penalty for sins. Third, I argued that the eternality, or permanence, of Christ's atoning sacrifice emphasizes the centrality of Christ's perfection. Fourth, I argued that Hebrews shows the limitlessness of Christ's sacrifice by contrasting it with the quantitative limitations of the animal sacrifices, thus teaching His perfection. Fifth, I argued for the centrality of Christ's perfection through the emphasis on Christ's unique authority to accomplish salvation through the cross. Sixth, I argued that Christ's perfect obedience to His Father emphasized Christ's perfection according to Hebrews. Seventh, I argued that the perfection of Christ is evident in how the believers are perfected through Him. Some of these evidences are not compelling to my overall argument when evaluated in isolation. Christ's perfect obedience to His Father, for instance, is hardly enough to prove that His perfection remains the central motif of sacrifice. However, it does hold value in a cumulative case to prove my thesis. The strength of my case has become clearer: namely, that countering any of my evidences alone does not defeat my argument as a whole. In conclusion, this paper has built an overwhelming case that the perfection of Christ is taught to be the central motif behind the theme of sacrifice in the book of Hebrews.

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On my honor, I have neither given nor taken improper assistance in completing this assignment.

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