

ONCE FOR ALL

5 Therefore when he entered the world, Christ said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but you prepared a body for me. 6 You were not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings. 7 Then I said, "Here I am. I have come to do your will, God. In the scroll of the book it is written about me." 8 First he said: "Sacrifices and offerings that were offered according to the law, both burnt offerings and sin offerings, you did not desire, and you were not pleased with them. 9 Then he said: "Here I am. I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will, we have been sanctified once and for all, through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ.

On a typical morning, not a holiday or a festival, just any morning, the High Priest of the Israelites put on his robes and went out into the courtyard where the Altar stood, and he made sure that it was still burning—the priests were charged with this, but he was ultimately responsible for it^a-- and after ordering more wood, he would be brought the morning lamb, one of the two daily sacrifices. The High Priest was all business here, partly out of respect for the lamb and understanding its fear, for Proverbs says, “The righteous man sees to the needs of his animal” (Pr. 12:10), even if that animal happens to be set aside as a sacrifice. The animal’s death come quickly, and the blood is poured out, and the lamb’s body is arranged by the priest on the altar, who was also charged with seeing to it that everything offered there stayed in place on the altar and did not fall off. Everything was done in a fitting and orderly way.^b

Every morning and every evening, as long as the tabernacle or temple and its altar stood, this was the procedure for the morning and evening sacrifice, day after day, year after year, from the day of Aaron’s ordination until the Romans burned the temple to the ground in 70 AD—twice a day for nearly fifteen hundred years. That’s more than a million lambs.

But neither those lambs nor any other sacrifice atoned for the sins of the people. They were only a shadow of the sacrifice that was coming. Earlier in this chapter, the Holy Spirit tells us: “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (vs. 4).

And so we come to the word “Therefore” at the beginning of our text. Since it is impossible for animal sacrifices to take away sins, the Son of God entered into the world, in the body prepared for him. Of course, that happened 40 weeks before the birth of Jesus, when the Son of God was conceived in the womb of a virgin girl with no physical human father.

^a Leviticus 1:7; 6:9

^b 1 Corinthians 14:40

He was conceived without sin. And here we should pause to understand what that means, because some people misunderstand it. It is not that conceiving a child in a marriage is sinful. When a husband and wife conceive a child, they are fulfilling the command of God to mankind to be fruitful and multiply. The sexual act within a marriage is exactly where it belongs and is completely set apart from sin, the same way that getting an oil change is part of taking care of a car, digging weeds is part of taking care of a garden, fresh water every day is part of taking care of a pet, and regular play is part of taking care of a healthy body and mind. So also sexual intimacy is just part of taking care of the marriage.

But Jesus' conception apart from sin is all about the lack of sin in Jesus. He was conceived outside the usual connection to his sinful ancestors, Adam and Eve. His mother Mary bore him, gave birth to him, nursed him, and raised him, and was his mother in every sense, but he is the Son of God in every sense as well. He did not come to make animal sacrifices.

Now, the sacrifices were important to God's people until the Savior appeared. Four of the five sacrifices are mentioned here, and the order they were to be used was important. First came the sin offering or the guilt offering, because sin has to be addressed. Sin has to be dealt with. Next came the burnt offering and an accompanying grain offering, to show commitment to the Lord alone. And finally there was a fellowship offering to show, as we still show by our fellowship in the Lord's Supper, the vertical fellowship between the worshiper and God, and also the horizontal fellowship between the minister, the worshiper, and the others who are giving or receiving the sacrament.

The act of bringing an animal as a sacrifice did something that we do not have today: It forced the worshiper to confront his own sin, to say: "My sin caused this throat to be cut, this blood to be spilled, this flesh to be burned. This hide that might have become a coat, or a curtain, or a new pair of gloves, is now burned away into dust instead because of my sin. This meat that might have fed my family for a week is burned away into smoke on account of my bad choices.

God wants us to acknowledge our sin. A man may think nothing of it when twenty people he knows walk to the Lord's Supper to receive forgiveness, but he should consider and realize that his constant foul language causes other people to sin against God with the same words against the Second Commandment—and this weighs heavily on their consciences when confess their sins. Or his dirty jokes, his constant complaining about the government, his annoyance with everybody in the world who doesn't do things the way that he and only he knows better—this leads his children, his wife, his co-workers and his employees to do the same and to adopt his sins on top of their own as if they don't have enough already. He has dumped his garbage into their garbage pails so that when they come to confess their sins, they have to confess things that he put in their mouths, their ears, their hands, and in their hearts.

It's as if a woman's neighbor down the street was arrested for killing a man, and everybody is shocked, and everybody thinks, I'm not as sinful as that guy. And then the police come to that woman's door and arrest her, because the guy admitted in all honesty that he was listening to her spout off one day about somebody she thought wasn't fit to live, and all he did was act on her words, and now she becomes an accessory to murder. And maybe the law won't hold her to account, but her conscience sure will, and God will let her guilty conscience speak.

And there you and I have something that the ancient believers did not yet have: Not an animal sacrificed for them, but the Son of God. Jesus says, "I have come to do your will." This is what he did in our place, since we don't do the will of our heavenly Father even when we do the best and finest deeds we can possibly imagine. The stain and the stench of sin is always with us. But of course, we're always more aware of this in other people than in ourselves.

In the old Cowboy movies, you hear the cattle ranchers mock and jeer the sheep herders because of the stink of sheep on their clothes, but the cattle ranchers don't realize the stink of cow manure on their boots, and if you and I would go back to their time, we would be overwhelmed by the smell of horses everywhere and on everything, and they would be equally overcome by the acrid stink of cars and exhaust and the other pollutions of our time. None of our stink and our sin belongs in God's throne room.

Jesus' sacrifice covered all of our sins, the stain, the guilt and even the memory in the mind of the Father, so that no part of our sin remains.

And here our text takes up an important point of grammar in ever language, no matter what the translation or if you're reading the Greek text quietly in your pew even now. Jesus Christ came to do away with the first sacrifices to accomplish the one sacrifice. His sacrifice made us holy.

And this doesn't need to be done again and again. Christ was not incarnate a year after his ascension into order to do it all over again, and again thirty years after that, and thirty years after that, and so on. "Once for all" means "once for all." Once for all. One Savior, one sacrifice on the cross, one shedding of blood, for all sins, for all mankind, for all time, forever. This is what our Good Shepherd has done for us all.

When your sins trouble you, praise God that your conscience is at work and that you hear and believe the law as it convicts you. But say to yourself, "Jesus died for these sins of mine, and my Savior's blood covers them all." Then go about the work of the day, or close your eyes and sleep in peace. Jesus has paid for your sins, all of them, once and for all. Amen.

This paragraph was deleted due to the length of the sermon. It would have been the second-to-last paragraph in the sermon:

This is where the Bible disagrees with the teachings of those Churches that want to talk about the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice. It is not. Christ is not being sacrificed in the Lord's Supper, and the minister is not making a sacrifice when he consecrates the elements. It is a sacrament, a sacred act in which the value of Christ's sacrifice is offered to and given to the participants. This is also why our ministers are not called "priests," since a priest offers sacrifices. But Christ was our sacrifice once for all. Our title, "Pastor," means "shepherd,"^a

^a John 11:11, Latin Vulgate.