

# The Will of God, the Work of Christ, and the Witness of the Holy Ghost Hebrews 10

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the source of all blessing, which originates in the divine will, and the role of Christ's work in redemption and resurrection.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 10:1

**Topics:** "Assurance of Salvation", "The Sacrifice of Christ"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the contrast between the law and the work of Christ in Hebrews 10, illustrating that the law was merely a shadow of the good things to come, while Christ's single sacrifice offers true perfection and access to God. He explains that the source of all blessings is God's will, accomplished through Christ's work, and witnessed by the Holy Spirit, which assures believers of their standing before God. Darby stresses the importance of understanding that sin is fully dealt with, allowing Christians to enter God's presence with confidence. He warns against the dangers of abandoning this perfect sacrifice, highlighting the severe consequences of rejecting God's grace. Ultimately, he encourages believers to hold fast to their faith and remain steadfast in the face of trials.

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## Transcript

The basis of the argument of the apostle in this chapter lies more in the contrast than in the comparison between the law and the good things to come. The law, he says, had only a shadow, not the very image of things. For example, under the law the priests ministered in infirmity; now Christ ministers in glory. They offered oftentimes the same sacrifices, which could never take away sins; He one sacrifice - once for all. Then there was a veil; now there is none. Then the priests could not enter into the Holiest; now we have boldness to enter in by the blood of Jesus. The law had a shadow of good things to come, not the very image. It was a mere figurative witness of the things that were to be spoken after. Just as the shadow of a man gives some general indistinct idea of him, but does not present a single feature clearly; so it was with the law. It could never make the comers thereunto perfect, as the repetition of its sacrifices shewed. Now the unity of the sacrifice proves its perfection; and the present position of the worshippers gives the most complete contrast possible to that under the law, though there is a certain measure of analogy.

There are three things brought out in this scripture: firstly, the source from which all blessing springs; secondly, the means by which it is accomplished; and, thirdly, the testimony by which it is known.

This last is a most necessary part of the matter, in order to our communion; because, unless we know sin to be all put away, it would be absolute madness to attempt to enter into the presence of God: a Jew even would not have thought of such a thing, much less a Christian. If I am not as clean as an angel, the presence of God is no place for me; and the attempt to appear in it would be to follow the example of Cain, who thought to stand before God as a worshipper without blood. We may cry to Him from the depths, of course, and He will ever hear; but if the conscience be not perfect, we cannot go into His presence to worship.

With the Jews this perfection was of course only ceremonial; with us it is real: with them the veil hid God; now that it is gone, and that we enter into the holiest of all, there is the greater need of perfection of conscience. This is why the apostle insists so strongly on the word "once." Indeed all the reasoning of the chapter depends on it. "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." "Once, in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." If those sacrifices could have wrought perfection of conscience, would they not have ceased to be offered? Christ was once offered, thereby proving the perfect result of His word; it needed no repetition. That is why he says, elsewhere in this epistle, that, if this be rejected, "there remaineth no more offering for sin." If that has not made perfect, there is no hope. If that be rejected, there is only "a fearful looking for of judgment." In the repetition of sacrifice there was a remembrance made of sins. It was not God's saying, Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Christians now have often a mind to be in the same place still, and call their unbelief humility. With the Jews, of course, it must have been so, because it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats could take away sins. Therefore God changes the whole thing. "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

393 This brings out the first principle to which I alluded, namely, the source of all blessing. It originates in the divine will. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." It originates in the will of God, and not in the will of man: this is only sin. As a creature, man should have no will of his own, just as Christ had none. The principle of His obedience was not a controlling power, hindering the operation of His own will; but, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!" This was perfect obedience as a man. God's will was His; and that will alone brought salvation and life, where man's will had only brought sin and death. This gives stability and perfection to everything, to find its source and origin in the will of God. If it had been the result of my will, all would have been vacillating and changing as man's will is; and, moreover, if we had earned heaven by our own will, there would have been no love of God in the matter, and we should lose the sweetness of holding everything as the fruit of divine love.

This will of God is not presented to man to do; it is the Son of God who says, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!" Men could never have done the will of God; the second Adam does it. As belonging to the first Adam, our place is to confess that we have not done, and that we never could do, the will of God. When brought back to Him, of course we have nothing else to do, for we are sanctified unto obedience; but, as regards acceptance, it is the result of the work of another. "By the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." God does all for us in grace, and leaves man out in both the will and work. Salvation is the result of God's will and Christ's work. And it gives quietness and confidence in this work, to see that it was not a work done to turn God towards us, as it were, but that from all eternity it was counselled by Himself. We have the source of all in the unchangeable purpose of God.

394 Secondly, we have the work itself. It is a wonderful thing for us to be thus let into what passed between the Father and the Son before the world was; and most blessed to see the freewill offering of Christ. If it were God's will to be the author of our salvation, it was equally Christ's to be the instrument of

it; and whilst He, in order to be so, makes Himself a servant, His divine power is still evinced in the very expression, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!" That could be said by none but by one competent to execute any command of God. Supposing that command had been to make a world, instead of to save one, Christ was the only one who could do such a will; and in fact, both divine power and divine love were evinced in redemption and resurrection, in a higher degree than in creation.

In verse 5, where the quotation is from Psalm 40, the verbal difference is considerable, but the sense identical. "A body hast thou prepared me," and "Mine ears hast thou opened," or "digged," are both expressions of assuming the form of a servant. The ear receives commands, and the boring of the ear was making one a servant for ever. So when a body was prepared for Christ, He took on Him the form of a servant. Thus far we have the will of God working in grace, and Christ undertaking to accomplish it.

Then in verse 11 we have the contrast between the priest standing, and Christ sitting. His work is finished - there is nothing further to do; and He sits down till His foes be made His footstool. "For ever," in verse 12, means "continually" or "constantly," not that Christ will never rise again; but as regards His sacrifice for sins He will never have to rise again to do anything more. Having offered one sacrifice for sins, He sits down till His foes be made His footstool. As regards His friends, all is done - not as to intercession of course - but as to acceptance and perfecting the conscience. But He has still to deal with His enemies; therefore is He waiting, still retaining His servant character, until God makes His foes His footstool. We too are expecting, till Christ rises up from the throne and judges His enemies. This is not done yet: else wickedness would be purged from the earth; and it explains the call for vengeance in the Psalms, which sometimes puzzles people, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered," etc.; and, "Of thy mercy cut off mine enemies." These surely are not the cries of the church. She does not want to see her enemies judged but saved. She goes to meet the Lord in the air. Not so the Jewish remnant. It passes through great tribulation; and "except those days were shortened, no flesh should be saved." So they call earnestly enough for deliverance. But such is not our part at all; we are associated with Christ while expecting; in grace now, and in glory by-and-by, but not in judgment.

395 In verse 12 we have seen that Christ's one sacrifice was such that He has sat down for ever; so in verse 14 we read; that "by one offering he hath perfected for ever" - or "continually" - "them that are sanctified." Thus we are continually perfect; not practically here - though the Spirit sanctifies the heart and affections as far as this goes - but here the work of Christ makes the conscience constantly perfect. "The worshippers, once purged, should have no more conscience of sins." Thus we are brought into the presence of God, never to have any more conscience of sins. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." We are called so to know Christ's work, as to see that it is quite impossible for us to have sin on us before God. Sin cannot be in God's presence. There is nothing but perfection there; and we are there because perfected forever by the one offering of Jesus. We are in God's presence because we are clean, as clean as He could wish us to be. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." It is quite true we have to keep a conscience void of offence, and not to grieve the Spirit; but we are sealed of God unto the day of redemption; and there can be no mistake. The Holy Ghost could not dwell in us unless cleansed by the blood of Christ; and then He is the witness, not to the fruits, but to the virtue of that blood. The fruits could not be produced unless He were there of course, because they are "the fruits of the Spirit"; and when produced, the order is, first, the internal ones, then all the rest. "Love, joy, peace," precede the outward manifestations of the Spirit's presence.

396 The Christian ought to keep himself in the present communion of his known place before God, because then, besides the joy, the Holy Ghost has its full flow in using him as a vessel to others, in God's

service; whereas otherwise He must occupy us with ourselves. I have not only communion, but power, only as thus in immediate intercourse with God in His presence.

We now come to the third point. Having seen the source of all in the divine will, and the accomplishment of all in the divine work, we get the testimony to it all in the divine witness. "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us; for after that he had said before, This is the covenant," etc., then He said, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." And here is the secret of settled peace. If I think that God will ever remember sin, I am denying the will, the work, and the testimony of God. In short, if a believer in Jesus, it comes to being a sin to have the least thought of God's ever imputing a sin to me. It is just as much a work of the flesh as to commit the sin. He does not now impute sin, and He never will. "Where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin," sweeps away every refuge of lies, and lays the blessed foundation for full confidence. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus," shews that the very way we enter into God's presence proves that the thing which shut us out is gone for ever.

"Our bodies washed with pure water," refers to the priests, who were washed with water, sprinkled with blood, and anointed with oil. The latter is not mentioned here. After they were once washed, the priests needed only to wash their hands and feet. The anointing with blood of the ear, the thumb, and the toe, was the application of the work of Christ to the whole moral man. The work of Christ is always set first, then follows the work of the Spirit. In Ephesians it is said, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Therefore in the tabernacle the first thing you meet is not the laver, but the altar. As a sinner, I must first meet the blood; then I am fitted for service, by the removal of all that is contrary to God: but I cannot skip the altar to reach the laver; I must there own myself a sinner first; then I can delight in the holiness of God, and understand it, too.

397 The apostle then goes on, "Consider one another to provoke unto love," etc., that is, having got to God in grace, we must be diligent in acting towards others in grace. He introduces "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together," to meet the tendency there was to avoid public testimony, and to think that private faith would do in times of persecution such as these were. This was their natural tendency; and, whether it be persecution or reproach, it is the same thing. The latter is perhaps our snare. "And so much the more as ye see the day approaching"; for judgment is surely coming. If the power of evil increases there is the more need to cling closely to Christ. And we must not suppose that the world is improving because the Spirit is working; on the contrary, this is just the proof that judgment is nearing. The more rapidly souls are gathered in, the more reason have we for believing the coming of the Lord to be at hand. Whilst the long-suffering of God is salvation, the hope should ever be a present one to the church. It was the wicked servant who said, "My lord delayeth his coming"; yet He did delay it.

Then, in verse 26, it is as though he said, If you do not hold fast - if you will give up, and abandon this perfect sacrifice, then there remains nothing further; there is no year of atonement to come round again with a new offering; but just as those who believe are eternally perfect, so he who refuses is left remediless. It was he who despised Moses' law who died without mercy, and not he who broke it; so it is he who counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and does despite to the Spirit of grace, that shall be counted worthy of a sorer punishment; not he who fails. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins"; such is the gracious provision for failure through infirmity - advocacy, righteousness, and propitiation. But if a man, after having seen all the grace and fulness that are in Christ, deliberately choose sin as his portion; and, rejecting the blood of the new covenant as insufficient, turns back again, then he must take the consequence. God's grace is

His last resource, so to speak, for winning man. If that does not suffice, judgment must take its course; and "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." On this ground the position is at once that of "adversaries," and we know Him that hath said, "Vengeance is mine, I will recompense." "Let us, therefore, hold fast our confidence, which hath great recompense of reward"; and let us remember that we shall "have need of patience; but yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry."

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