

5. The writer provided his readers with a brief summary of the Israelite sanctuary and priestly ministration, and then immediately turned his attention to their new covenant counterparts (9:11-14). He followed the same general pattern, first describing the sanctuary associated with Jesus' ministration, and then the ministration itself.
- a. He described the new sanctuary in terms four particulars, all of which distinguish it from its predecessor (9:11). The first two descriptors form a pair, as do the second two. So also, the first pair speaks to the sanctuary's relative *quality*, while the second pair speaks to its unique *nature*.

First, then, this new sanctuary is *greater* and *more perfect*. As noted, these are qualitative descriptors that compare it with its Mosaic counterpart. In themselves, both descriptors are non-specific, and so must be interpreted in context. "Greatness" and "perfection" can mean different things, depending on the thing they're associated with and the particular concern with that thing. Here, the writer was comparing the two sanctuaries associated with their respective covenants, and so the question is, *in what sense(s) is the new sanctuary greater and more perfect than its predecessor?*

The two adjectives themselves provide some help, but the most important clue is the second pair of descriptors: the latter sanctuary is greater and more perfect in that it transcends this creation; it isn't a physical structure erected by human labor. Furthermore, it serves the better ministration suited to the "good things" that have come in Jesus, the priest according to a new priestly order.

Viewing greatness and perfection from this perspective, then, shows that these qualities pertain to ultimacy and efficacy. They are descriptors that speak to the superiority of *fulfillment* over *promise*. The latter sanctuary is greater and more perfect in the sense that it is the ultimate and everlasting reality that the former sanctuary both modeled and predicted. It is the heavenly counterpart underlying Israel's tabernacle; the transcendent reality that has now penetrated time and space to be established in the world in connection with Jesus the Messiah.

The radically different nature and quality of this new sanctuary shouldn't have surprised the Israelite people, for their prophets spoke of it throughout their generations, and especially since Yahweh revealed His intent to destroy and replace the Jerusalem temple. Yes, the prophets described this new sanctuary using the language and imagery of the tabernacle/temple, but always in a way that suggested that it would transcend Yahweh's dwelling place as Israel had known it. From the very beginning, before the first tabernacle existed, God revealed to Moses that what Israel was to build only modeled a transcendent counterpart – a sanctuary "not of this creation," not "made with hands." The children of Israel recognized that their God who inhabited the earthly sanctuary in the form of His glory-presence (shekinah) was actually enthroned in heaven; indeed, He filled all of time and space and couldn't be thought of as dwelling in one place (cf. 1 Kings 8:1-29; Psalm 68:29-35; Jeremiah 23:23-24).

The Creator-God filled His creation, and yet He was peculiarly present with His human creature; the One who was enthroned in the heavenly realm also dwelt in the midst of Israel. And not just proximally, but *relationally*: Yahweh was present with His covenant children so as to inhabit their praises (Psalm 22:3). Yes, He directed Moses to build a physical sanctuary so that He might dwell among His people (Exodus 25:1-8), but this dwelling was only symbolic. In reality, Yahweh sought a dwelling place beyond a physical structure erected by men. The dwelling He sought to inhabit is a *human sanctuary* – the sanctuary that is the heart and mind of the lowly and contrite (cf. Isaiah 57:15 with 66:1-2; also Psalm 68:16-18, 84:1-4; Haggai 2:1-9; and cf. Ezekiel 36:22-28 with Zechariah 2-4).

God's eternal intent was to inhabit a human sanctuary, and He had determined to realize this goal through one man – the son of Eve, Abraham and David (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4 with 11:1-13; ref. also Isaiah 28:16; Ezekiel 37; Amos 9:11-12; Zechariah 6:9-15). Jesus understood Himself to be this man (cf. John 2:14-19 with Mark 14:58; also John 4:1-26, 14:1-7, 18-23 w/ 17:20-23), and the truth of a new human temple – a sanctuary “not made with hands” having Jesus as the cornerstone – was a key theme in the early Christians' gospel witness (ref. 3:5-6; cf. John 1:14-18, 2:13-22; Acts 4:1-11, 7:44-51, 17:22-31; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 21-22).

And so this new sanctuary shouldn't be conceived in physical terms, as some sort of literal temple sitting up in heaven, a dwelling place where God has His throne and Jesus goes in and out, performing priestly activities as the appointed high priest. This is important precisely because the writer used this sort of language in describing Jesus' sacrificial and mediatorial work (9:12-24). But He did so, not as a literal description of Jesus' priestly activities in heaven, but to underscore that the Levitical priesthood and its ministration were a prophetic parable pointing to Messiah's self-giving sacrifice and enduring mediation. The symbolic depiction of the new sanctuary applies to the new priesthood as well.

- b. The author described Jesus' atoning work using the imagery of Yom Kippur, but not because He actually carried His blood into a literal “holy of holies” up in heaven, or even because he was writing to a Jewish audience who thought in those terms. He spoke in this way because he recognized that Israel's God had devised the entire Levitical system, with the Yom Kippur ordinance as its apex, to prefigure what He was going to perform and accomplish in His messianic Son. Thus verses 12-14 have the writer addressing the *significance* of Jesus' death at Calvary in terms of the priestly ministration that prefigured it; it is *not* an account of a literal action Jesus undertook following His death. However, many Christians have understood this passage in just this way, either as Jesus presenting His blood to His Father in heaven during the time of His entombment, or after He had ascended back to the Father (Acts 1:9). But this is to carry the Yom Kippur correspondence too far. In the first place, Israel's high priest didn't carry his own blood into the holy of holies. So also, the writer didn't say that Jesus entered the holy place *with* His blood, but *through* it – that is, *by means* of it (9:12).

Beyond that, it's absurd to think that Jesus needed to present His own blood to His Father in heaven, so that He could then assess the Son's sacrifice and pass judgment on it. Such a notion implies a distinction between Father and Son that doesn't exist. Worse yet, *such a distinction actually undermines the truth of Jesus' person and work*. It's true that the Father didn't shed His blood as an atoning sacrifice (He has no blood to shed), but Jesus' sacrificial death was every bit His Father's self-sacrifice. And not just in the sense that the Father sent Him, but because the Son came into the world as the human embodiment of the Living God (John 1:1-18); in Him all the fullness of deity dwell bodily (Colossians 2:9), so that the activity of the man Jesus is the activity of Israel's God and His Spirit. Thus the incarnation was fundamental to God's determination to give *Himself* for the creation He loves, so that the Son has no need to present His sacrifice to His Father in the hope of that He will receive it; the Father acted in that sacrifice.

*“God ranges Himself on the side of the sinner in opposition to their sin that he may deliver them from their bondage in sin and make them free for fellowship with him. God's love is his unconditional assertion that he is **for** man, on man's side. And therefore it is the love of God that makes humanity's lost and ruined cause God's own cause, so that God stoops to take their cause upon himself in order to emancipate men and women and reconcile them to himself.”* (Torrance)

And so, the writer's language mustn't be understood as indicating a transaction between Father and Son, as occurred between Yahweh and Israel's high priest on Yom Kippur, but their absolute *solidarity* in the work of atonement. Father and Son were perfectly and comprehensively one, not just in the act of incarnation, but in every dimension and aspect of Jesus' ministration as true High Priest.

- c. The author alluded particularly to the atoning work of Yom Kippur, but he had the overall priestly ministration in mind (9:11-13; cf. Leviticus 16:1-10; Psalm 50:13). Atonement for sin was front and center in his treatment of Jesus' priestly work, but he was equally concerned with the matter of *cleansing from defilement*, whether due to personal sin or the corruption inherent in the fallen creation (ref. 9:9-10, 22-23, 10:1-2). Thus his specific mention of the ordinance of the red heifer as the Law's appointed means for addressing all manner of uncleanness (9:13, ref. also Numbers 19 and Deuteronomy 21:1-9).

This shows that the writer was thinking about Jesus' priestly ministration comprehensively – not just in terms of satisfaction for guilt incurred through sin and transgression, but also purification and the restoration of the offender. This is important, because many Christians (and non-Christians) tend to think of Jesus' cross primarily in terms of satisfying the demands of divine justice against wrongdoing. The result is that the crucial atonement aspects of cleansing and renewal get minimized, or even overlooked altogether. Thus getting right with God is seen more as a legal matter than an ontological one; it is more about satisfaction than sonship. But the Scriptures show that God prioritizes things differently – under the Israelite covenant as much as the new covenant in Jesus.

Yes, violation (of principles of truth as well as explicit directives) incurs guilt and imposes a just penalty, but the greater issue is the *iniquity* – the inward contrary bent of the mind and heart – that underlies and provokes violation. If sin is “missing the mark,” that tangible deviation results from the inability to aim straight. Thus Yahweh found fault with Israel, not because of outward conduct per se, but because of the inward corruption that insured and perpetuated their alienation and rebellion. Israel’s law-breaking was *harlotry*, i.e., relational infidelity. Whatever the specific violation, the underlying issue and ultimate offense was the failure of the offender to love God as a son loves a father (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 10:12-13, 11:13-14; Matthew 22:34-40). And whatever their intent and commitment, Israel, the covenant “son,” was constrained to lovelessness because their hearts and minds were skewed and alienated, not only from their God, but from one another.

And so, when Yahweh pledged covenant renewal, He was promising human renewal; He was promising *new creation*. God’s intent was to have sons and daughters who know Him and conform to Him in the inner person (8:7-12), and this meant that the renewing work had to extend beyond forgiveness resulting from an acceptable sin offering. It even needed to transcend cleansing, for that which is washed clean can become unclean again. No, the Lord’s work – the work performed by His messianic High Priest – was to be a work of complete renewal: satisfaction, forgiveness and cleansing, yes, but unto *sonship* (Ephesians 1:3-6; cf. Romans 8:1-17). The work of atonement is the work of *at-one-ment*: a work of reconciliation and renewal in which the beneficiaries are enlivened to share in the life of God Himself, and so become His dwelling place (Ephesians 2:1-22).

The Sinai Covenant and its priestly ministration could never achieve this, for they could only define, prescribe and symbolically represent God’s intent for His human creature and His plan to realize it. The provisions of the Levitical system could touch the outer man and bring about outward cleansing, and so convey a sense of relief and renewed consecration to God (sanctification), but they couldn’t address the underlying problem that insured the perpetuity of the priestly work. In the words of the writer, they couldn’t “*cleanse the conscience from dead works to serve the living God*” (9:14b). However much it conformed to the Law’s demands, every Israelite’s piety (including Israel’s priests) was “dead works”: the exertions of humans severed from God’s life and alienated from Him (Ephesians 4:17-18). In this condition of *death*, it is impossible to truly serve the *living God*.

Unlike the Levitical ministration, Jesus’ priestly work reached beyond the surface of human defilement to purge it at its root. Jesus’ ministration accomplished what Aaron’s only symbolized and foreshadowed. He, too, was an Israelite, like His brethren in all things (2:17). But unlike the former priests, Jesus was *man of the Spirit* – man animated, informed and led by God’s Spirit in living union with Him. It was as True Man, empowered by the Spirit, that Jesus intervened for man (Isaiah 42:1-7). And not just to secure full forgiveness and cleansing, but to see men become all that He is; true sons in the True Son (Isaiah 53-54; Romans 8).