
Words of Truth

Hebrews 10:1-4

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Our study in this article will be from the following text: *“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”* (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Take some time to think about a shadow. While out with my dog in the backyard at night, I can see a shadow of myself on our rock wall because of the flood lights we have out back. At first, my dog thought there was someone else out there with us. He barked at my shadow. Then, he saw his own shadow and barked at that too. He had to come to realize that these shadows were a rough outline of himself and me. However, those shadows were not really us. The word “shadow” is translated from the Greek word “σκία” (Strong’s # 4639). Part of the definition of the word is this: “an image cast by an object and representing the form of that object.”

Hopefully, if you have been studying these articles weekly, thinking of the Law of Moses as a shadow of things to come is not new to you. We have covered this already in our study of this letter (Hebrews 8:1-13). This epistle is not the only place in the Scriptures this is covered. The saints in Colosse were also taught that the Law of Moses was a shadow of things to come: *“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ”* (Colossians 2:14-17). For first century Jewish Christians wanting to stay under parts of the Law of Moses, they needed to understand they were serving a shadow. The real image was not in view with that thinking.

The Law of Moses was not intended to be eternal (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The Law pointed to good things to come (i.e. Deuteronomy 18:15-19; cf. Acts 3:18-26). So, it was time for those struggling with this to step back and see the real image rather than the shadow.

Had first century Jewish Christians missed the true image, to whom were they looking for their sins to be forgiven? The Law of Moses could never make those serving thereunder perfect. If they were to return to the sacrificial system in place under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 4:1-35, Leviticus 12:1-8, Leviticus 14:1-57, Leviticus 17:11, etc.), that would have meant they were rejecting Christ. The result of that would have been falling from grace (Galatians 5:4). As we know, it was not possible for the blood of those sacrifices to take away sins. These are all things we have studied already in the previous chapter of this epistle (Hebrews 9:1-28).

Seeing as how these things are a review, I want to use the remainder of this article to address being perfect. Before the Law of Moses, God expected man to walk before Him and be perfect. Think about Job: *“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil... And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil”* (Job 1:1; 1:8)? Regarding Noah, we read: *“These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God”* (Genesis 6:9). Notice what God told Abraham [Abram]: *“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect”* (Genesis 17:1). After the Law of Moses was delivered, notice: *“Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God... Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day”* (Deuteronomy 18:13 and I Kings 8:61).

So, from before and after the establishment of the Law of Moses, God wanted man to be perfect. That hasn't changed. Perfection is required under the Law of Christ as well (Matthew 5:48, II Corinthians 6:14-7:1, II Corinthians 13:11, Colossians 1:28, and II Timothy 3:15-17). Here is what has changed. In the past, once man erred and ceased to be perfect in the sight of God, there was no way to come back to that complete, whole, perfect state of being. The sacrifices, as our text of study states, did not take away sins. Those sins were brought to remembrance annually.

We are told to depart from iniquity (II Timothy 2:19). We are told not to use grace as an excuse for sin (Romans 6:1-2). We are told not to err (James 1:13-16). For them in the first century and for us today, if we cease to be perfect there is a way back to perfection. The way back to our Father was paved by Christ (I John 1:7-2:1). This too has been addressed in the Hebrew epistle (Hebrews 2:9-10, Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 7:24-25, and Hebrews 9:24). While we should not abuse the grace of our Lord and take forgiveness for granted (Acts 8:12-24), it is possible for Christians to err and then be restored (Galatians 6:1, James 5:19-20, Revelation 2:1-7, and Revelation 3:14-22). Therefore, the perfection that eluded followers under the Law of Moses is attainable and sustainable in Christ.