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THE LIMITATIONS OF OLD COVENANT WORSHIP

Hebrews 9:1-10

Introduction: Access Denied!

I. Old Covenant Worship Focused on an Earthly Place (v.1-5)

- A. God Commanded Moses to Build a “Tent” (or Tabernacle)
 - o In the desert wanderings this tent was movable
 - o Once the Israelites settled in Jerusalem, a permanent Temple was built
- B. The Tent/Tabernacle Had Two Chambers
 - o Outer Chamber: The Holy Place
 - Lampstand: Golden, seven branches, priests make sure it’s always lit
 - Bread of Presence: 12 loaves, baked fresh weekly, eaten by priests (along with wine)
 - How do these items point to Christ?
 - o Inner Chamber: The Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies)
 - Represented the divine presence of God and blocked by a “curtain” (v.3)
 - Altar of incense: represents the prayers of God’s people before God’s throne
 - Ark of the covenant: supreme object of holiness containing manna, Aaron’s rod, and ten commandments
 - Ark was a symbol of God’s throne (“mercy seat”)
 - “Cherubim” were the frightening angelic attendants of God
 - What would God’s real throne room be like? Is 6:1-7; Ezek 1; Rev 4
- C. Key point: Under the Old Covenant, Access to God was Physically Restricted!
 - o Worship of Yahweh (in the formal sense) was not available everywhere—one had to travel to Jerusalem
 - o The Journey to the Temple was one filled with restrictions, one after another
 - o How did the work of Christ changed both of these realities?



II. Old Covenant Worship Focused on an Earthly Priest (v.6-7)

- A. Priests Would Enter Regularly into Holy Place (v.6)
 - o God appointed the descendants of Levi (“Levites) to work in the temple/tabernacle. Some of the Levites (those descended from Aaron), functioned as priests.
 - o They performed their duties “regularly” (διὰ παντός)—which means “repeatedly”. Their work was never done!
- B. The High Priest Entered Holy of Holies Once per Year (v.7)
 - o The Holy of Holies was severely restricted to one visit per year on the Day of Atonement
 - o Because the High Priest was a sinner, he could not enter “without taking blood, which he offers for himself” (v.7)
 - o “Tell your brother Aaron that *he may not come whenever he wants* into the holy place behind the veil in front of the mercy seat on the ark or else he will die” Lev 16:2
- C. Key Point: Under the Old Covenant, Aaronic Priests Even Had Limited Access
 - o “By this the Holy Spirit indicates the way into the holy places is not yet opened” (v.8)
 - o Even rightfully appointed priests could not just march into God’s presence! Is that who you want representing you?
 - o Contrast with this statement: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace [mercy seat!], that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” Heb 4:16

III. Old Covenant Worship Focused on Earthly Sacrifices (v.9-10)

- A. “According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper” (v.9)
 - o “The Strange Persistence of Guilt”
 - o What do people do to alleviate a guilty conscience?
- B. Whatever offerings made by the earthly priests could not get the job done—they merely look forward to the time of “reformation” (v.10), that is the new covenant
- C. Key Point: Did you really want to rely on old covenant offerings to deal with your sin problem?



Discussion Groups

1. How does a passage like this help you see that Christ is present even in the Old Testament? What features of the OT tabernacle stood out to you and why?

2. Does this passage change the way you think about the unprecedented access Christians have to God? What does more “confidence” look like (or not look like) as we come into God’s presence?

3. In what ways have you sought to alleviate a guilty conscience? How are you encouraged today to find that solution only at the cross?

