

Week 16: FORMED Series

Re-evaluating our Spiritual Practices

Hebrews 9:1-10

Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.² A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place.³ Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place,⁴ which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.⁵ Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

⁶ When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.⁷ But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.⁸ The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.⁹ This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.¹⁰ They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

From this week's sermon:

In the message this week, David explained some of the spiritual practices of the Israelites under the Law. Highlighting:

1. The tabernacle liturgy and symbols all point to Jesus' future work.
2. Under the Law access to God was restricted, yet through Jesus we have full access.
3. The Law could not fully cleanse the heart, yet through Jesus sin has been dealt with once and for all.

Scholarly Insight:

Cockerill's Comments:¹

The artistry of the pastor's presentation is like a symphony in three movements (8:1-13; 9:1-22; 9:23-10:18) developing these three themes—sanctuary, sacrifice, and covenant.⁵ Each movement begins with the theme of sanctuary (8:1-2; 9:1-10; 9:23-24) and ends with covenant (8:7-13; 9:16-22; 10:15-18). At the center of each is the ever-expanding theme of sacrifice (8:3-6; 9:11-15; 9:25-10:14). The pastor appeals to his hearers through the growing beauty of his presentation as well as the cumulative cogency of his argument. When the author as conductor has finished his symphony, he would leave his hearers overwhelmed with the magnitude and wonder of this High Priest and ready at all cost to persevere through the benefits he affords.

¹ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans, 2012), 347.

The unity of 9:1–10 is beyond question.¹ In v. 1 the pastor announces his topic as the “regulations for worship” and “earthly sanctuary” of the First Covenant.² Verses 2–5 describe this sanctuary, and vv. 6–7 the First-Covenant worship appropriate for such a sanctuary. Verses 8–10 conclude by unveiling the significance of this sanctuary and liturgy as intended by the Holy Spirit.³ The structure of the earthly sanctuary (vv. 2–5) is determinative for its worship (vv. 6–7). Both structure and liturgy have a twofold significance: First, they demonstrate the impossibility of approaching God through the old sanctuary. Second, they anticipate the “new and living way” (10:20) of approach to God through Christ.

Guthrie's comments:²

... the author begins this extensive treatment of Christ's superior offering by describing the worship regulations and tabernacle of the old covenant (9:1–10). After a brief introduction to these topics in verse 1, the passage develops in two movements, the first dealing with the earthly sanctuary (vv. 2–5) and the second with the old covenant's guidelines for worship, including the significance of these guidelines in light of the new era (vv. 6–10). In these two movements, moreover, the hearers are introduced to the (earthly) place of sacrifice (vv. 2–5), the blood of the sacrifice (v. 7), and the perpetual nature of offerings under the old covenant (vv. 6–7)—themes to be developed later as they are placed in contrast to the superior sacrifice of Christ.

For Discussion:

1. Did the Holy Spirit highlight anything to you as you listened to the sermon (and/or) read Hebrews 9:1-10? Be encouraged to share one thing that stood out.
2. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, only once a year, and never without blood (verse 7). Sit with that restriction for a moment... what would it have felt like to be a worshiper under that system where even your priest could only approach God once a year?
3. As a group, discuss: in what ways do people (even Christians) still functionally treat access to God as restricted or conditional today?
4. Now, through Jesus we have been granted full access to God, His sacrifice was once and for all. [Personal Reflection] Do you feel that you can approach God with anything and at any time? Or do you feel that there are things that restrict your access? ... sin/guilt/shame/unworthiness?
5. The spiritual practices and liturgy of the Israelites taught them about God and established a way of relating to Him. Similarly today, our spiritual practices form our thinking and help (or hinder) our relationship with God. If you were to do a spiritual practice audit (eg. prayer, bible reading, worship, gathering with other believers) which practices are helping you draw closer to God? Are there any where you are “ticking a box”?
6. After reading this text, what is one practical step you can take this week to live freely under the priesthood of Jesus and be intentional in your spiritual formation?

² George Guthrie, Hebrews, (Zondervan Academic, 2009), 297.

Pray for each other:

Jesus, our great high priest, thank you that have provided full access to the Father through your sacrifice once for all. Help us to evaluate our spiritual practices and show us where we're truly meeting you and where we're just going through the motions. Holy Spirit encourage us to make any adjustments to our attitudes, rhythms or activities so as to experience more of you and become more like Jesus.

Amen.

Formation Practice:

As we exploring being Formed by Jesus this series; we want to encourage you to do this simple exercise every day for the next 2 months. It can take 5 minutes or more, whatever you are able to achieve (and as you do it more and more, you'll likely find it easier to spend longer listening and reflecting).

"Draw Near Daily" Rhythm (5–10 minutes)

- ***Come:*** *Quiet yourself before God.*
- ***Confess:*** *Be honest about sin/struggle.*
- ***Receive:*** *Remember what Christ has done.*
- ***Respond:*** *Take one step of obedience.*