

CHAPTER 46

THE DIVINE INCARNATION

(~~890F~~ HEBREWS 10:5-7)

In the first four verses of our present chapter the apostle was moved to press upon the Hebrews the insufficiency of the Levitical sacrifices to bring about those spiritual and eternal effects that were needed in order for poor sinners being fitted to stand before God as accepted worshippers. His design in so doing was to pave the way for setting before them the dire need for and the absolute sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. First, he affirmed that the old covenant provided a "shadow" of the future "good things," but not the substance itself (verse 1). Under the Mosaic economy men were taught that ceremonial guilt, acquired through breaking the ceremonial law, severed from ceremonial fellowship with God, and that the offering of the prescribed sacrifices procured ceremonial forgiveness (~~890G~~ Leviticus 4:20) and restored to external fellowship, and thereby temporal punishment was averted. In this way there was adumbrated in a lower sphere what Christ's sacrifice was to accomplish in a higher.

That there was an insufficiency to the typical sacrifices was plainly intimated by their frequent repetition (verse 2). Had the offerer been so "purged" as to have "no more conscience of sins," that is, had his moral guilt been fully and finally expiated, then no further offering had been needed. Even though God's people continually commit fresh sins a new sacrifice is not required. Why? Because the one perfect Sacrifice *has made* complete satisfaction unto God, and is of perpetual efficacy before Him: therefore is it ever available to penitence and faith, for application unto fresh pardons. But no such sufficiency pertained to the typical sacrifices: a temporary and outward cleansing they could effect, but nothing more.

"For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap,
thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God"
(~~2402Z~~ Jeremiah 2:22).

There was no proportion between the infinite demerits of sin, the demands of God's justice, and the slaying of *beasts*. Whether the matter be viewed in the light of God's nature, of man's soul, or of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, it was obvious that the blood of bulls and goats could not possibly make atonement (verse 4). Nor was this fact altogether unknown in Old Testament times: did not one of Jehovah's prophets declare,

“Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves that are a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
(^{<3006>}Micah 6:6, 7)!

But later this light was lost to the carnal Jews, who, like the darkened Gentiles, came to believe that a real and efficacious atonement *was* made by the offering of animal blood unto God.

“It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with *better* sacrifices” (^{<3023>}Hebrews 9:23).

Yet patent as this now is to any renewed mind, it was an exceedingly difficult matter to convince the Jews of it. The Levitical sacrifices were of Divine institution and not of human invention. Their fathers had offered them for fifteen centuries; thus, to affirm at this late date that they were set aside by God made a big demand upon their faith, their prejudices, their affections. Nevertheless, the logic of the apostle was invincible, the force of his arguments unanswerable. But it is blessed to observe that he did not rest his case here; instead, he referred once more to an authority against which no appeal could be allowed.

As we have passed from chapter to chapter, and followed the inspired unfolding of the pre-eminency of Christianity over Judaism, we have been deeply impressed by the fact that, at *every* crucial point, *proof* has been furnished from the Old Testament Scriptures. When affirming the excellency of the Son over angels (^{<3004>}Hebrews 1:4), appeal was made to ^{<1970>}Psalms 97:7 (^{<3006>}Hebrews 1:6). When insisting on the exaltation of the humbled Messiah over all the works of God's hands (^{<3006>}Hebrews 2:6-9), ^{<1804>}Psalms 8:4-6 was cited. When declaring the superiority of Christ's priesthood over Aaron's, ^{<1904>}Psalms 110:4 was given in substantiation of it

(^{<303>}Hebrews 6:20). When pointing out the superseding of the old covenant by the new, ^{<243>}Jeremiah 31:31 was shown to have taught that very thing (^{<308>}Hebrews 8:8). And now that the all-important point has been reached for showing the imperative necessity of the abolition of the Levitical offerings, another of their own Scriptures is referred to as announcing to the Hebrews this identical fact. How all this demonstrates the inestimable worth and the final authority of Holy Writ!

“Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God” (verses 5-7).

These verses contain a direct quotation from the ^{<190>}40th Psalm, which, equally with the 2nd, 16th, 22nd, 10th, etc., was a Messianic one. In it the Lord Jesus is heard speaking, speaking to His Father; and well does it behoove us to give our utmost attention to every syllable that He here utters.

The citation which is here made from the Old Testament Scriptures is introduced with, “Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith.” The precise force of the opening “Wherefore” is not easily determined: it seems to signify, In accord with the facts pointed out in the first four verses; or, in proof thereof, listen to the prophetic language of Christ Himself. John Owen suggested: ‘It doth not give an account why the words following were spoken, but why the things themselves were so ordered and disposed.’ The “Wherefore” is a logical particle intimating that by virtue of the impotency of the Old Testament sacrifices, Christ came not to offer those fruitless sacrifices, but to do the will of God in their room. The Mosaic worship, with all its complicated ritual, was superseded by something better coming in its stead. Christ took away the first, that He might establish the second.

The passage which is here before us calls for a whole book to be written thereon, rather than a single article: so blessed, so wondrous, so important are its contents. In it we behold the amazing grace and wisdom of the Father, the matchless love and obedience of the Son, and the federal agreement which was between the Father and the Son with reference to the work of redemption and the salvation of the Church. In it too we see demonstrated again the perfect harmony which exists between the old and

the New Testament and the declaration of these things. In it we are taken back to a point before the foundation of the world, and are permitted to learn something of the august counsels of the Eternal Three. In it we are shown the means which the Divine wisdom appointed for the carrying out of those counsels. It is both our duty and privilege to prayerfully inquire and diligently search into the mind of the Holy Spirit therein.

“Wherefore when He cometh into the world.” The One who is here before us is the second person in the Holy Trinity. It is He who had been in the Father’s delight from all eternity. It is none other than the One by whom and for whom all things were created “that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible” (⁵⁰¹⁶Colossians 1:16); who is “over all, God blessed forever” (⁴⁰⁰⁵Romans 9:5). This ineffably blessed and glorious One condescended not merely to behold, or even to send an ambassador, but to personally come into this world. And, wonder of wonders, He came here not “in the form of God,” bearing all the manifested insignia of Deity, nor even in the appearance of an angel, as occasionally He did in Old Testament times; but instead, He came in “the form of a servant,” and was actually “made under the law.” May our hearts be truly bowed in wonderment and worship at this amazing and unparalleled marvel.

“When the fullness of the time was come” (⁴⁰⁰⁴Galatians 4:4),

when the sinfulness of man and his utter helplessness to extricate himself from his dreadful misery had been completely demonstrated; when the insufficiency of Judaism and the powerlessness of the Levitical sacrifices had been made manifest; then it pleased the Son to become incarnate, execute the eternal purpose of the Godhead, fulfill the terms of the everlasting covenant, make good the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perform that stupendous work which would bring an incalculable revenue of praise to the Triune God, glorify Him above all His other works, put away the sins of His people, and provide for them a perfect and everlasting righteousness which would entitle and fit them to dwell forever in the Father’s House. So transcendent are these things that only those whom the Spirit of Truth deigns to illuminate and instruct are capable, in any measure, of apprehending and entering into their ineffable meaning and preciousness. May it please Him, in His sovereign grace, to shine now upon the hearts and understandings of both writer and reader.

“Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me.” Here we behold the perfect intelligence of the Son concerning the mind and will of the Father. In the eternal purpose of the Triune God, Christ, *as* Mediator had been “set up from everlasting” (~~2082~~ Proverbs 8:23). The Lord had “possessed Him,” He was “by Him, as One brought up with Him” (~~2102~~ Proverbs 8:22, 30). As such, nothing was concealed from Him; all the counsels of Deity were made known to Him. Therefore did He declare, after His incarnation,

“The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things”
(~~4050~~ John 5:20).

An illustration of this fact is before us in our present passage.

“He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me.” But here a difficulty presents itself: the Levitical sacrifices had been instituted by God Himself, how then could it be said that He willed them not? The solution is simple: the language here (as is not infrequently the case in Scripture) is to be taken relatively, and not absolutely. There was one real sense in which the Old Testament sacrifices were acceptable to God, and another in which they were not so. The reference here is not to the actual appointment of the sacrifices, for ~~3108~~ Hebrews 10:8 tells us they were “offered according to the law” which God had given to Israel. Nor is the reference to the obedience of the people concerning them during the Mosaic economy, for God both required and approved them at their hands. Nor is it that the apostle is merely speaking from the *present* viewpoint (as some have superficially supposed), i.e., that the sacrifices were *no longer* pleasing to Him. No, our text strikes much deeper: God willed not those sacrifices for the *ends* which He ordained the Sacrifice of Christ to effect.

“But a body hast Thou prepared Me.” The first word of this clause serves to define the preceding one: the body of Christ is placed over against, substituted in the stead of, replaces, the Levitical offerings. Let the reader recall the whole context: there the Holy Spirit has shown the utter inadequacy of the blood of bulls and goats, the impossibility of its meeting the highest claims of God and the deepest need of sinners. God had not appointed animal sacrifices for *those* ends: He *never* took pleasure in them with reference thereto; according to the will of God they were altogether insufficient for any such purpose. From all eternity it was Christ, the

“Lamb,” who had been “foreordained” to make satisfaction unto God for His people (⁴⁰¹²1 Peter 1:20). The Levitical sacrifices were never designed by God as anything more than a temporary means to shadow forth the great Sacrifice. This, the Mediator Himself was fully cognizant of from before the foundation of the world.

“But a body hast Thou prepared Me.” The term “a body” is a synedochial expression (a part put for the whole, as when we say a farmer has so many “head” of cattle, or a manufacturer employs so many “hands”) of the whole human nature of Christ, consisting of spirit and soul and body. As to some of the reasons why the Holy Spirit here threw the emphasis on Christ’s “body” rather than on His “soul” (as in ²⁵¹⁰Isaiah 53:10) we would humbly suggest the following.

First, to emphasize the fact that the offering of Christ was to be by *death*, and this the body alone was subject to.

Second, because the new covenant was to be *confirmed* by the offering of Christ, and this was to be by blood, which is contained in the body alone.

Third, to make more evident the conformity of the Head to His members who were “partakers of flesh and blood.”

Fourth, to remind us that Christ’s whole human *nature* (that “holy thing,” ⁴⁰¹⁵Luke 1:35) was not a distinct *person*.

“But a body hast Thou prepared Me.” The verb has a double force: the humanity of Christ was both foreordained and created by the Father. The first reference in the “prepared” here is the same as in ²³¹³Isaiah 30:33. “Tophet is *ordained* of old, for the king it is *prepared*”; “the things which God hath *prepared* for them that love Him” (⁴⁰¹⁰1 Corinthians 2:9);

“the vessels of mercy, which He hath afore *prepared* unto glory”
(⁴⁰²²Romans 9:23).

In His eternal counsels, God has resolved that the Son should become incarnate; in the everlasting covenant the Father had proposed and the Son had agreed that, at the appointed time, Christ should be made in the likeness of men. The second reference in the word “prepared” is to the actual creating of Christ’s humanity, that it might be fitted for the work unto which it was designed.

“But a body hast Thou prepared Me.” Commentators have needlessly perplexed themselves and their readers by discovering a discrepancy between these words and ^{<1916>}Psalm 40:6 which reads, “Mine ears hast Thou opened” or “digged” (margin). Really, there is no discord whatever between the two expressions: one is figurative, the other literal; both having the same sense. They refer to an act of the Father towards the Son, the purpose of the action being designed to make Him meet to do the will of God in a way of obedience. The metaphor used by the Psalmist possessed a double significance. First, the “ear” is that member of the body whereby we hear the commands we are to obey, hence nothing is more frequent in Scripture than to express obedience by hearing and hearkening. Here too the part is put for the whole. In His Divine nature alone, it was impossible for the Son, who was co-equal with the Father, to come under the law; therefore did He prepare for Him another nature, in which He *could* render submission to Him.

It is impossible that anyone should have ears of any use but by having a body, and it is through the ears that instruction unto obedience is received. It is to this the incarnate Son made reference when, in the language of prophecy, He declared,

“He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (^{<2804>}Isaiah 50:4, 5).

Thus the figure used in ^{<1916>}Psalm 40:6 intimated that the Father did so order things toward the Messiah that He should have a nature wherein He might be free and able to be in subjection to the will of God; intimating, moreover, the quality of it, namely, in having ears to hear, which belong only to a “body.”

The second significance of the figure used in ^{<1916>}Psalm 40:6 may be discovered by a comparison with ^{<0216>}Exodus 21:6, where we learn of the provision made by the law to meet the case of a Hebrew servant, who chose to remain in voluntary servitude rather than accept his freedom, as he might do, at the seventh year of release. “Mine ears hast Thou digged” announced the Savior’s readiness to act as God’s “Servant:” ^{<2411>}Isaiah 42:1, 53:11. Only it is to be duly noted that in ^{<0216>}Exodus 21:6 it is “ear,” whereas in ^{<1916>}Psalm 40:6 it is “ears” — in *all* things Christ has the “pre-eminence!” There was never any devotion either to Master or Spouse which could be compared with His: there was (so to speak) an over-plus of

willingness in Him. “A body hast Thou prepared Me” presents the same idea, only in another form: His human nature was assumed for the very purpose of being the vehicle of service. Christ came here to be the substance of all the Old Testament shadows, ^{<0200>}Exodus 21:1-6 not excepted. In becoming Man, the Son took upon Him “the form of a servant” (^{<0100>}Philippians 2:7).

“A body hast Thou prepared Me.”

“The origin of the salvation of the Church is in a peculiar manner ascribed unto the Father — His will, His grace, His wisdom, His good pleasure, His love, His sending of the Son, are everywhere proposed as the *eternal springs* of all acts of power, grace and goodness, tending unto the salvation of the Church. And therefore doth the Lord Christ on all occasions declare that He came to do the Father’s will, seek His glory, make known His name, that the praise of *His* grace might be exalted” (John Owen).

It was by the Holy Spirit that the human nature of the Redeemer was created. His body was “prepared” not by the ordinary laws of procreation, but by the supernatural power of the third person of the Trinity working upon and within Mary. There is thus a clear allusion here to the Virgin-birth of the Lord Jesus.

“He prepared Him such a body, such a human nature, as might be of the same nature with ours, for whom He was to accomplish His work therein. For it was necessary that it should be cognate and allied unto ours, that He might be meet to act on our behalf, and to suffer in our stead. He did not form Him a body out of the dust of the earth, as He did that of Adam, whereby He could not have been of the same race of mankind with us; nor merely out of nothing, as He created the angels whom He was not to save (^{<014>}Hebrews 2:14-16). He took our flesh and blood proceeding from the loins of Abraham. He so prepared it, as that it should be no way subject unto that depravation and pollution, that came on our whole nature by sin. This could not have been done, had His body been prepared by carnal generation — the way and means of conveying the taint of original sin, which befell our nature, unto all individual persons — for this would have rendered Him every way unmeet for His whole work of mediation (^{<026>}Hebrews 7:26).... This body or human nature, thus prepared for Christ, was exposed unto all sorts

of temptations from outward causes. But yet was it so sanctified by the perfection of grace, and fortified by the fullness of the Spirit dwelling therein, that it was not possible it should be touched with the least taint or guilt of sin” (John Owen).

Summing up this important point: though the actual operation in the production of our Savior’s humanity was the immediate work of the Holy Spirit (~~“4013”~~ Luke 1:35), nevertheless, the preparation thereof was also the work of the Father in a real and peculiar manner, namely, in the infinitely wise and authoritative contrivance of it, and so ordering of it by His counsel and will. The Father originated it in the decreptive disposition of all things, the Holy Spirit actually wrought it, and the Son Himself assumed it. Not that there was any distinction of time in these separate actings of the Holy Three in this matter, but only a disposition of *order* in Their operation. In the *same* instant of time the Father authoritatively willed that holy humanity into existence, the Holy Spirit efficiently created it, and the Son personally took it upon Him as His own.

“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure”
(verse 6).

These words amplify and define the central portion of the preceding verse. There we hear the Son, just prior to His incarnation saying to the Father, “Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not.” Against this a carping objector might reply, True, God never willed those sacrifices and offerings which our idolatrous fathers presented to Baal, nor those which the heathen gave to their gods; but that is a very different thing from saying that no animal sacrifice satisfied Jehovah. Such an objection is here set aside by the plain declaration that even the Levitical offerings contented God not.

“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure.” In these words Christ comprehended *all* the sacrifice under the Mosaic economy which had respect to the expiation of sin and also the worship of God. In verse 5 the term “sacrifice” includes all those offerings which the Israelites brought to the Lord for the purpose of obtaining His pardon; under the word “offering” was embraced all the gifts which they brought with the object of expressing thanksgiving for blessings received at His hands. Here in verse 6 the latter are, by a synecdoche, referred to by “burnt offerings,” and the former by sacrifices “for sin.” Concerning both of them Christ said to the Father “Thou wouldest not” (verse 5) and “Thou hast had no pleasure.”

The difference between “Thou wouldest not” and “Thou hast had no pleasure” is, the former declares that God had never *designed* the Levitical offerings should make a perfect satisfaction unto Himself; the latter, that He *delighted not* in them. Such language is to be understood relatively and not absolutely. God *had* required sacrifices at the hands of Israel: He had “imposed” them “until the time of reformation” (~~scrio~~ Hebrews 9:10). Absolutely they could neither be said to be wholly nugatory in themselves nor displeasing to God, but as they could not produce any real atonement for sin, they did not correspond in the proper sense of the term either to the Divine pleasure nor to the law of God, but only foreshadowed what was to come. God had ordained a satisfaction possessing such moral obedience and personal excellency that there would need no more repetition thereof. These words “*in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure*” serve as a background to bring out in more vivid relief the blessedness of

“This is My beloved Son in whom I *am* well pleased”
(~~scrio~~ Matthew 3:17)!

Once more we would point out how that the teaching of these verses supply a timely warning against our making a wrong use of symbolic ordinances.

“Whatever may be the use or efficacy of any ordinances of worship, yet if they are employed or trusted unto for *such* ends as God hath *not* designed them unto, He accepts not of our persons in them, nor approves of the things themselves. Thus He declares Himself concerning the most solemn institutions of the Old Testament. And those under the New have been no less abused in this way, than those of old” (John Owen).

“Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God” (verse 7).

Those words express the readiness and willingness of the Son to do all that had been ordained unto the making of a full satisfaction to God and the salvation of His people. They contain the second branch of the antithesis pointed in the quotation which is here made from the Messianic Psalm. They record the response of the Son’s mind and will to the design and purpose of the Father. They conduct us back to the eternal counsels of the Godhead, in which the Father had expressed His determination to have an

adequate compensation for the insult to His honor which sin should give, His disapproval of animal sacrifices as the names thereof, His decision that the Son should become incarnate and in human form magnify the law and make it honorable; with the Son's free and perfect acquiescence therein.

“Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.” That “will” was not only to “take away sins” (verse 4),

which the Levitical offerings had not effected, but was also to make His people “perfect” (verse 1 and cf. ^{<3864>}Hebrews 5:14). It was the gracious design of God not only to remove all the effects of sin, original and personal, which provoked His judicial hatred of us (^{<4005>}Ephesians 2:3), but also to provide for and give to them such a righteousness as would occasion Him more cause to love us than ever, and loving to delight in us. His “will” meant not only peace and pardon to us, but grace and favor: as the angels announced to the Bethlehem shepherds, the coming of Christ meant not only “glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,” but also “good will toward men.” He had predestinated not only to forgive us, but to have us adopted and graciously “accepted,” and that “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (^{<4005>}Ephesians 1:5, 6).

The “will” of God which the Son came here to execute was that

“eternal purpose which He had purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (^{<4011>}Ephesians 3:11).

Had He so pleased, God could have “taken away sin” by taking away sinners, and so made a short work of it, by removing them both at one stroke — as Ezekiel speaks (^{<3125>}Ezekiel 12:3, 4). But instead, He purposed to take away sins in such a way that favored sinners should stand justified before Him. Again, had He so pleased, God could have taken off the sins of His people by a sole and sovereign act of pardon. To *hate* sin is an act of His *nature*, but to *express* His hatred *by punishing* sin is an act of His *will*, and therefore might be wholly suspended. Were it an act of the Divine nature to punish sin, then whosoever sinned would die for it immediately; but being an act of His will, He oftentimes suspends the punishment. Seeing He is prepared to forebear for a while, He *could* have foreborne forever. But His wisdom — the “*counsel* of His own will” (^{<4011>}Ephesians 1:11) deemed it best to require an adequate satisfaction.

What has just been said receives plain confirmation in the words used by the suffering Savior in Gethsemane: “And He said, Abba, Father *all* things

are possible unto Thee: take away this cup from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt.” Here the incarnate Son lets us know that the reason why it was not possible for the awful cup of wrath to pass from Him was because God had *ordained* that He *should* drink it, and *not* because there was *no* other alternative. We indeed can perceive none other, and *relatively* speaking there was none other *after* the everlasting covenant had been sealed; yet *absolutely* considered, speaking from the viewpoint both of God’s infinite wisdom and sovereign pleasure, He *could*, had He so pleased, have saved us in another way. Never allow the thought that sin has produced a situation which in anywise limits or restrains the *Almighty*. It was *by* His will that sin entered!

Had God so pleased, He *could* have accepted the blood of beasts as a full and final atonement for our sins. The *only* reason why He did not was because He had decreed that *Christ* should make atonement. He determined in Himself that if He had satisfaction it should be a full and perfect one. *Everything* must be resolved into and traced up to the *sovereign* pleasure of Him who “worketh *all* things after the counsel of His own *will*” (^{<4011>}Ephesians 1:11). It is in the light of what has just been said that we must interpret ^{<3104>}Hebrews 10:4: it was “not possible” because of the eternal purpose of the Triune Jehovah. God would have satisfaction to the full, or none at all. This the Son knew, and to it He fully consented.

The Son was in perfect accord with the will of the Father from before the foundation of the world. As ^{<3163>}Zechariah 6:13 tells us “and the covenant of peace shall be between Them *Both*”: the reference being to the “everlasting covenant” (^{<3133>}Hebrews 13:20). The “counsel of peace” signifies the compact or agreement which was between the Father and the Son. It was, then, by His own voluntary consent that the Son was made “*Surety* of a better covenant” (^{<3072>}Hebrews 7:22), a title which necessarily imports a definite undertaking on His part, namely, His agreeing to yield that obedience to the law which His people owed, to make reparation to Divine justice on behalf of their sins, and thus discharge the whole of their debt. By a free act of His own will, the Son consented to execute that stupendous work which the Father had proposed unto Him.

This consent of the Son to His Father’s proposal to Him before the foundation of the world, was, *renewed* by Him at the moment of His incarnation: “Wherefore *when He cometh into the world*, He saith... a body hast Thou prepared Me... Then said I, Lo, I come..., to do Thy will O

God.” He freely acquiesced in assuming to Himself a human nature, to take on Himself the “form of a servant,” to be “made under the law,” to become “obedient unto death.” He told the Father so in the above words, which are recorded for His glory and for our instruction, wonderment and joy. The further consideration of them, as well as the meaning of “in the volume of the book it is written of Me” we must defer (D.V.) till our next article.