



## Salvation Negatives, 1

# Not by “Bulls and Goats”

*“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.’” After saying above, ‘Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will.’ He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:1–10).*

In order to see God's great salvation in all its fullness, it is necessary to consider both its negative side and its positive side. We are able to understand some truths more clearly if we observe in our study of them not only what they are, but also what they are not.

Speech writers have concluded that the best argument, the most convincing and telling presentation, is a well-worded and well-thought-out comparison, an analogy. Paul frequently chose to give both sides of a truth, making a vivid contrast between the two. For example, he said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that *not* of yourselves, it is the gift of God; *not* as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9; emphasis mine). To the Ephesians, he stated how people are saved, and then he compared the way to a road that is not the way. Again, he said, “He saved us, *not* on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5, 6; emphasis mine). In this passage, he gave a brief negative first, and then he stated the positive and elaborated upon it.

Through the guidance of the Scriptures, let

us look at the cross through its negatives, letting them relate us to and make graphic for us its positives. One of the greatest negatives of the cross is found in Hebrews 10:4, the negative of cleansing, not by “bulls and goats.” The text affirms this truth without any equivocation: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Why is this the truth?

Let us work through this negative. The first reason that this is the case centers on the will of God. *The sacrifice of bulls and goats was limited in its purpose.* It was never the will of God to use bulls and goats to procure our salvation. Yes, God had a purpose for them, but that purpose was not to take away our sin. From the beginning, God had planned that His Son would come into the world and become our Savior through the sacrifice of His body.

After mentioning the animal sacrifices, the writer of Hebrews said that God had never had pleasure in them: “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them” (Hebrews 10:8). He had no pleasure in them in the sense of designing them to remove our sins. His pleasure was to send His Son, give Him a body, and allow Him—in His

humanity and deity—to bear our sins “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

The offering of lambs, bulls, heifers, and goats was only a shadow of the full and complete sacrifice that God had planned. A pilot, as he comes into an airport at night, sees first the many little lights that direct him to the runway. These precursor lights are not the runway; they only point to it. A shadow, regardless of how long we may look at it or how many times that shadow may appear before us, is not and cannot be the reality; it only points to it. The writer of Hebrews used this very illustration: “For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near” (Hebrews 10:1).

Next, we come to another truth that must be clearly understood. *These animal sacrifices were limited by quality.* They did not have the ability to atone for sin. They were inadequate, insufficient, and incapable. All they could do was symbolize the atonement that would eventually take place. Through them, coupled with God’s grace, the burden of sin would be rolled forward year by year. The sins of the people were not removed; their sins were only moved forward in time and would have to be treated again and again, as each Day of Atonement came around.

Therefore, these Old Testament sacrifices had a grave limitation to them: They could not cleanse the conscience of the worshiper. When he offered the sacrifice, he knew that these sins were still charged against him and would have to be atoned for through animal sacrifices each year. Such sacrifices could never “make perfect those who draw near” (Hebrews 10:1b). The only kind of perfection the worshiper of the Old Testament era would ever know was a prospective perfection.

A third truth results from the first two. *It is the realization that the sacrifices of “bulls and goats” were limited by time.* In God’s great plan, the animal sacrifices were for the period of time that preceded Jesus’ coming into the world. They prepared the world for His great sacrifice. We

must pay close attention to this text: “He takes away the first in order to establish the second” (Hebrews 10:9b). It is only reasonable to believe that if the animal sacrifices were sufficient to atone for sin, then there would have been no need to replace them. Each sacrifice was used by God’s providence to prepare the way for the great sacrifice that God had planned from the foundation of the world.

This negative—that salvations is *not* by “bulls and goats”—sets the stage for a wonderful affirmation: “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:9). That is, we see what salvation actually is; it is salvation from sin through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus, the offering that has validity “once for all.” “By this will” suggests its purpose; “we have been sanctified” names its result; “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” identifies the method; “once for all” clarifies its scope. It is “once for all” time, “once for all” sin, “once for all” people. Jesus’ sacrifice towers above all other events that have ever occurred or ever will occur. It is the sacrifice that God planned before the foundation of the world was laid.

Our salvation does not come through the blood of “bulls and goats.” These sacrifices were limited in purpose, quality, and time. Jesus came as the fullness of God’s plan, the completion of His will, and the reality toward which all the shadows pointed. We have salvation if we come to Him, we have sanctification if we grow in Him, and we have security if we keep the faith and abide in Him.

Eddie Cloer



*Polycarp referred to Jesus as the “one suffering for the whole world of those who are saved.” In other words, every part of our salvation was purchased in one way or another through our Lord’s death on the cross.*

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<sup>1</sup>Polycarp *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.2.