

⁵Therefore, as he was coming into the world, he said:

**You did not desire sacrifice and offering,
but you prepared a body for me.**

⁶**You did not delight
in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings.**

⁷**Then I said, “See—
it is written about me
in the scroll—**

I have come to do your will, God.”^[a]

⁸After he says above, **You did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings** (which are offered according to the law), ⁹he then says, **See, I have come to do your will.** ^[b] He takes away the first to establish the second. ¹⁰By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

Custom

Custom made usually means something is fitted perfectly. Custom cabinets should mean that there isn't any wasted space. There are no filler panels, every inch is accounted for. They're custom after all that's what you're paying for and they should fit. In the same way a custom fitted suit or shoe should also fit. They conform to you. They fit you. They are perfectly suited for the job or task at hand. They work just as they are intended.

The writer to the Hebrews says the same of Jesus. His body was customized for him, for the purpose at hand. A body had been prepared for him by God, made to do God's will. The specific purpose was as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The problem comes in when we want to make alterations to the work of Jesus. Leave a little room for us and then inject ourselves into the equation. But another inch added to a cabinet means it won't fit in the opening. Take an inch away from tailored pants they won't fit as they should. While we too are as David writes, “*fearfully and wonderfully made... woven together in our mother's womb*” (Psalm 139:14), we can't save ourselves. Our sinful nature separates us from God. We sin because we are sinners. We feel the effects of sin in our bodies and in this world.

Our sins are many and we need a savior. We have one who is perfectly suited for the job.

But the Hebrews didn't like the fit. Jesus was uncomfortable. There was the pressure to conform and the temptation to add to the perfectly prepared body, which is why many of them wanted to turn back to the old way. It was something they could do. In fact it might even have been something they loved to do. The writer to the Hebrews argued, “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*” Why? They had to be offered year after year. These sacrifices could not take away sin because the people keep sinning. They were insufficient. But that's not the main argument made here.

The second point made is that God doesn't want your sacrifices. You might be thinking, “Wait... didn't God command the sacrifices?” He commanded many sacrifices, customized to the specific sin. Which sacrifices doesn't he want? He doesn't want any of them. And Psalm 40 lets us know, sacrifice, offering, whole burnt offering, and sin offering are all inclusive. *You did not desire sacrifice and offering, but you prepared a body for me.* ⁶ *You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings.* God didn't want sacrifices to be made. What he wanted from the very beginning was obedience to his law. He wanted a righteous and a holy people not those who had to atone for sin. So he covers every single sacrifice offered and states, “I don't want these.”

But that's not what the people remembered. They got bored while waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise, forgot, and tried to inject their works into the equation. They thought it was just about going through the motions. It's what God wants they thought. The mere act is enough. But it was far from enough. No, the point, the purpose

for sacrifices was to show how disgusting and revolting their sin really was. This is what sin deserves: death. This is what your sin smells like: death. The value of sacrifice was in demonstrating the seriousness of sin. It brings death. But over time God's people forgot and began to think more about what they were doing for God rather than what he was doing for them.

God doesn't want your sacrifices, he wants your obedience. We know that. We don't sacrifice animals here. We don't take the blood of a lamb and pour it out before us. PETA would have a fit if we did. But that doesn't mean we don't offer sacrifices. In many ways we make sacrifices on a daily basis. You are right now. You could have slept in, sat around at home, finished up yard work but instead you sacrificed your time to come and worship. You also sacrifice your talents and give back to the church with the abilities God has given you, through counting, cleaning, and caring for those around you. You sacrifice your money through offerings and support of the church.

But may we never think that this is something I add, inject into the equation of salvation. Sometimes we feel as if we must sacrifice our time or gifts in order to appease God. We'll feel like I've got to do something, suffer a little in order to share in my part of salvation. We may even feel like we've got to create custom feelings through emotional manipulation to feel just bad enough, guilty enough before we can be sure we are freely and fully forgiven. Show God I'm truly sorry for my sins. But God doesn't want your sacrifices any more than he wants your money. If you feel as if you are earning or adding anything to your salvation then you're better off keeping it.

God's Law doesn't just demand good works. It demands a will and a desire that wants to do God's will. It's not the mere performance of an act but the will, the desire, the heart. He wants thankful hearts responding in joy, gladly doing his will. But since we've fallen short, we feel like we need to do a little catching up. We like to focus on the motions. We'll keep our attention on the actions and not the heart. God doesn't want these! He wants a righteous and holy people, a people who want to do their Father's will. Sadly when we don't look to Jesus completed work on the cross we are looking somewhere else.

The sacrifices offered on the altar in the Old Testament weren't to take away sin. They served another tailored purpose. They pointed to what sin deserves: death. The wages of sin is death. This is what we have earned for ourselves. But there was another purpose to these sacrifices. They pointed ahead to the one true sacrifice. They were a prototype of the one to come. And this is why Jesus came. He didn't cry out, "Try harder." But he did say, *You did not desire sacrifice and offering, but you prepared a body for me.*⁶ *You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings.*⁷ *Then I said, "See— it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, God."*^{8a]}

The writer to the Hebrews quotes from Psalm 40 and he puts these words in Jesus' mouth. He quotes from the LXX and not the Hebrew. If you look back you might be surprised to find *ears* and not *a body you have prepared for me*. The Hebrew speaks of ears you have dug for me. When the translators came across this they shifted the analogy from the part standing for the whole to the whole standing for the part. The point and purpose of an open ear or a fashioned body is still the same – to hear and do God's will.

Here these Words are placed in the mouth of Jesus. This is a conversation between the Father and the Son. The pre-incarnate Christ as *he was coming into the world*, and he is rejoicing in the body prepared for him by the Father. His desire was to make you holy and he spared no cost. He was the only one born into this world with a death sentence that he didn't deserve. He was born of the Virgin Mary so that he wouldn't inherit the sinful nature passed down from generation to generation. He was born into this world because the law demanded that sin be justified. Since the people were sinners a sacrifice was necessary. Jesus is that perfect sacrifice.

There on a cross he offered his body for the sin of the world. But it didn't start at the cross. It started with his entry into this world. He lived the perfect life God's law demands. He then gave that perfect life to you, to satisfy the law's demands. He came to do the Father's will and this has eternal consequences for you. His life, death, and

resurrection accomplish what all other sacrifices could not. It makes us holy. The writer to the Hebrews says, *By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.* This is what we look forward to celebrating this Friday and Saturday on Christmas. There can't be Christmas without the cross and that is what he has given to us.

We don't need any more sacrifices. We already have one and then, "*He takes away the first to establish the second.*" He takes away the prototype and gives us himself. We don't need tithing. We don't need prescribed acts of penance. We don't need liturgical forms or rituals. We have him. He is perfectly suited for the purpose of our salvation.

We don't have sacrifices but what we do have is the second, a new covenant, given to us in Baptism and Lord's Supper. Here on the altar we aren't offering an un-bloody sacrifice to God again and again (to do so would make a mockery of Jesus' completed work). We are remembering the once for all sacrifice that he has given to us. We remember his work, his word, his body and blood which he again gives to us for the full assurance of forgiveness. We do more than remember we also give thanks for it.

We offer our bodies as living sacrifices with a faith that praises God's name every day of your life. His sacrifices has changed our hearts and minds. God has made the unwilling willing. He has opened our ears to hear. He has given us our bodies to do his will. We willingly and generously give not only our offerings but ourselves to the Lord. Not for salvation but because we are saved. Not because they are commanded but because we want to do our Father's will. Our time, talents, and treasures are put to use serving him in his kingdom. This is what we were made for, custom, tailored to do good works which God has prepared in advance for you to do.

Jesus' sacrifice fits you perfectly, unlike a cheap suit or flat pack cabinets, there is no additional work that needs to be done. But there is work you can do. There may be sacrifices that you will make. But most importantly you have a God who came into this world to do what we could not do. That's what we celebrate on Christmas. We have a sacrifice for sin. We've been made pure and holy through the perfect sacrifice prepared for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.