

# The Tent of Meeting

By

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*“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. “According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.”*

*-Exodus 25:8-9*

We have been going over the fourth commandment regarding the Sabbath and discussing how our God, who is Holy and beyond comparison, communicates His presence to His people through various mediating structures. So far we have looked at visions of God and holy days, and now we are going to look at the structure of the Tabernacle. Like the other structures that we are looking at, the tabernacle, which is a word that means tent or temporary dwelling place, is a structure that God alights upon. It is a place where God allows His presence to dwell that the people of God might draw near and worship the God that they can't see directly.

However, for most people reading the book of Exodus, the sections of Scripture that describe the tabernacle are usually seen as the most tedious and difficult to get through. This is not only because of how exact the descriptions are, but because the tabernacle is described, in precise detail, multiple times throughout this book. From Exodus 25 to Exodus 27 it is described, but then it is described again when it is built in Exodus 36-38, and then it is briefly described yet again in Exodus 40. But why this redundancy?

I think the answer to that question is contained in verse 9 of Exodus 25: *“According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.”* When Moses receives a vision of heaven, he is shown a “pattern” that leads to the throne room of God. He then represents this pattern in a particular architectural pattern that is laid out in the construction of the tabernacle itself. But, as we have talked about before, the image of God, and His kingdom are spiritual in their essence. Meaning that what Moses “saw” was not an actual description of heaven itself, if such a thing could even exist, but instead a “pattern”, a symbol that communicates God to Moses.

This pattern is then laid out in an architectural design and then built so that the people of God can forever gaze into Moses' heavenly vision and draw near to God through

contemplating this Holy vision. This is what the early church father Gregory of Nyssa said about this:

*“That which is always the same, that which neither grows nor diminishes, that which moves to no change, neither for better nor for worse, is in fact alien to the worst and there is nothing better than it; that which is participated in by all and which is not diminished by this participation: this is that which truly exists and whose contemplation is the knowledge of the truth.”*

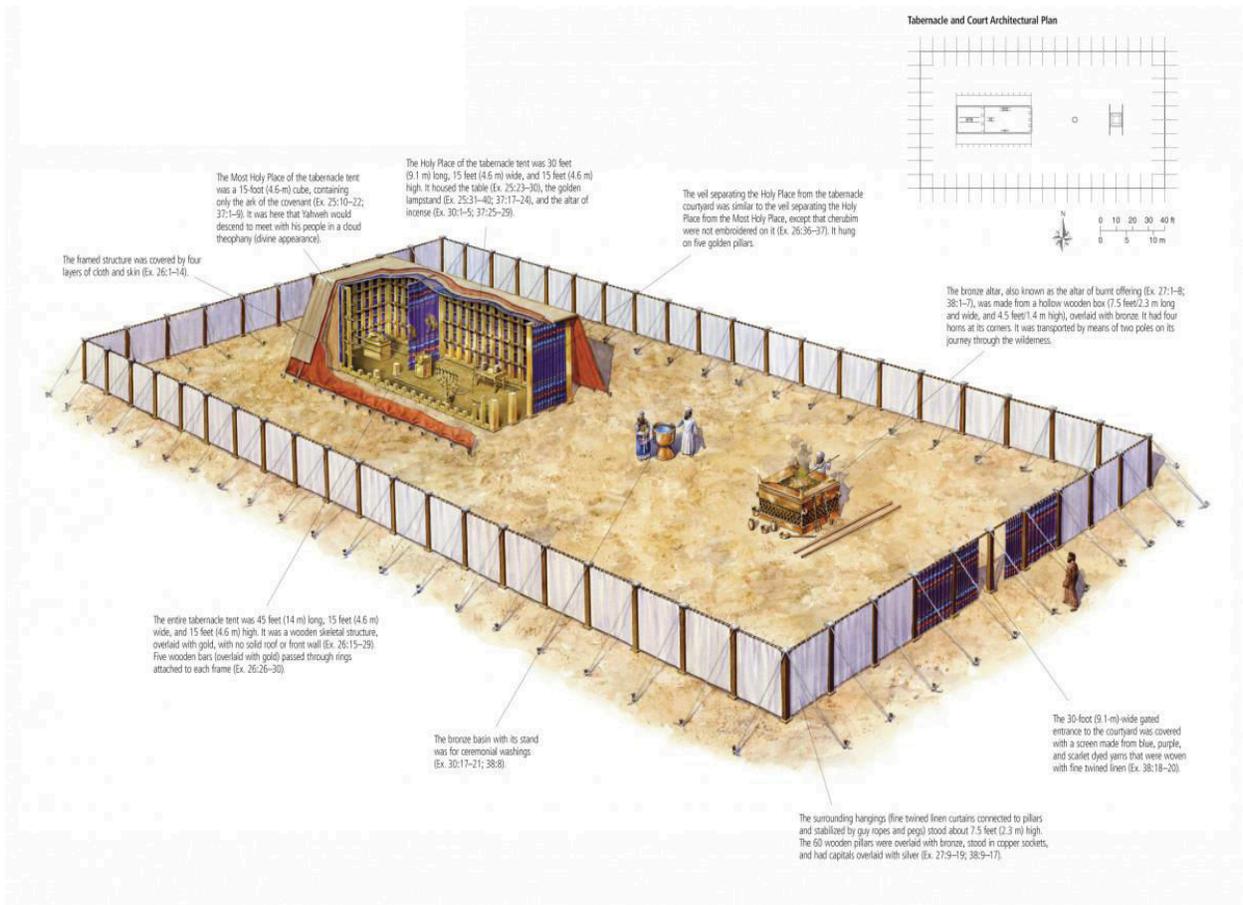
*-Gregory of Nyssa - “The Life of Moses”*

Just to reiterate that last line “whose contemplation is the knowledge of the truth.” The reason why the depictions of this tabernacle are so precise, and the reason why they are repeated multiple times is because the contemplation of this image is synonymous with contemplation of the character of God. Below I will include the shortest depiction of the tabernacle given at the very end of the book, however, since these depictions would be a little tough for most modern readers, myself included, I have included computer generated images of what the tabernacle, and items within the tabernacle were like.

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. “You shall put in it the ark of the Testimony, and partition off the ark with the veil. “You shall bring in the table and arrange the things that are to be set in order on it; and you shall bring in the lampstand and light its lamps. “You shall also set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the Testimony, and put up the screen for the door of the tabernacle. “Then you shall set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. “And you shall set the laver between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. “You shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen at the court gate. “And you shall take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it; and you shall hallow it and all its utensils, and it shall be holy. “You shall anoint the altar of the burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar. The altar shall be most holy. “And you shall anoint the laver and its base, and consecrate it... Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did. And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up... Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and*

fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”

-Exodus 40:1-38



As you can see, the tabernacle was divided into three areas. The outer court, which contained the altar of sacrifice, and a baptismal for ceremonial washings, here are more detailed pictures of those two elements:

The bronze altar:



Bronze Basin with stand for ceremonial washings:



Then there was the area of the inner court which included a table of “showbread”, the golden lampstand, and at the very edge was the golden altar of incense:

*The altar of Incense*



*The Golden Lampstand*



*The Table of Showbread*



Finally there was the center of the tabernacle that housed the Ark of the Covenant, (also called the Ark of the Testimony since it primarily was used to house the Ten Commandments which were the testimony of Israel's covenant with God), and was separated by a thick curtain bearing the image of a Cherub:

*The Ark of the Covenant*



This object is the central object in the Tabernacle and gives the rest of the edifice its proper purpose. Between the two Cherubim depicted on the lid was called the Mercy Seat. While it is a little unknown what exactly this “Mercy Seat” was, and why it was called that, what is clear in the text is that God chose to “alight” upon this “Mercy Seat”, in other words, He chose to place His earthly throne on this particular box held by this particular people.

It is important to note that most of the patterns that we are given in the text are reflective of Egyptian construction and religious purpose. Some of these similarities we will talk about later, but for now let’s look at the Ark of the Covenant to show this point. Here is an image of the Ark of Anubis designed to display the god Anubis for the Egyptian people:



The base of this Ark is indistinguishable from the Israeli Ark, including the golden poles used to transport it. Most ancient peoples had an object like this, an object designed to “house” their deity amongst the people. The big difference between this Ark and Israel’s Ark is on the lid. The Egyptian god bears a definite image, whereas the image of God is “covered” by the wings of the two Cherubim, this is to avoid violating the second commandment in forming an image of God.

The similarities here shouldn’t scandalize us, but instead it should re-emphasize the previously made point, this is merely a pattern to “express” God’s invisible image, not a literal depiction of heaven itself. In fact when the apostle Paul saw heaven, this is what he says about the experience:

*“...how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”*

*-2 Corinthians 12:4*

Paul claims that it would actually violate the law to try to depict even the words that he heard in his heavenly vision. The reason is exactly what we have been talking about, and why the tabernacle was so important. Our God is holy and above direct description, and so He reveals His nature through the various holy items and instructions that He gave to His people. Among all of these holy things, the tabernacle possesses the most holy, the Ark of the Covenant, the very place where God would meet with His people. Therefore, it makes sense that God would use a pattern that would directly speak to Moses and the people of Israel, a pattern that was not that dissimilar from the place of their birth, Egypt.

As such, the tabernacle, which later is turned into a temple by King Solomon, is the most direct expression of God's nature that the people of God had access to. However, the reason I haven't yet discussed the meaning of these things is because beauty calls us to understand meaning. This is how all artistic expressions work, and the tabernacle of Exodus is an artistic expression clearly meant to be beautiful as well as have a high purpose. Take for instance this passage:

*"See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship."*

*-Exodus 31:12-15*

The Spirit of God fills these men, not to prophecy or perform miracles, but He instead inspires them in their innate artistic abilities so that they can create a truly *beautiful* structure designed to express God's being. There is much more to say about this, and we will discuss it later on, but the importance of the point is that the structure of God was made first to be admired, then understood. Just like a movie or book, it is only when we enjoy the story that we want to understand the deeper meanings behind it. The beauty of the tabernacle was supposed to call God's people to draw near, and then to know. That being said, let's explore the deeper meanings of this structure.

Each item contained within and every facet of its construction "reveals" the very nature of our God. I like how this one commentary put this point:

*"Every piece of furniture in the Tabernacle would symbolize the nature of God. Gold symbolized God's deity and worth; Purple symbolized God's royal kingship, Scarlet symbolized the need for atonement or sacrifice; Oil/incense/spices symbolized fragrant worship; Lampstands symbolize light and God's Spirit; Water in the basins would*

*symbolize the need for cleansing of sin; and Bread on the tables symbolized God's fellowship to eat among His people; Veils/Curtains to separate the rooms of the Tabernacle symbolized the division of flesh and Spirit; the entrance to the to the Tabernacle court faced East (Ex 27:13, 38:13) like God placed cherubim with flaming swords to guard the entrance in Eden (Gen 3:24). Inside the Most Holy Place of God's presence would be the testimony of the Law (10 Commands) approached only after a sacrifice on the mercy seat (Ex 40:20) just as in Heaven is restored back in the center the tree of life (Revelation 22:22)."*

## Christ

This is why Jesus described His body as the temple:

*Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body."*

*-John 2:19-21*

Christ fulfills the purpose of the tabernacle and the temple. He gives the invisible nature of God direct expression in His body. The early church Father Gregory of Nyssa put this point this way:

*"...taking what has already been said as a simple starting point, we now say that Moses was prophetically instructed, in figures, about the mystery of the tent that covers the universe. This tent is Christ, God's power and wisdom, whose very nature is not made by man's hand, but who allowed it to be made, when it was convenient for this tabernacle to be built among us. So this tent is somehow created and created: created in its pre-existence; it comes to be created upon receiving this material existence."*

*-Gregory of Nyssa - "The Life of Moses"*

I particularly like how he calls the tabernacle, "the tent that covers the universe". The tabernacle was designed to cover the universal principle, namely God Himself. And Christ as the fulfillment of this image, then further elaborates on these images, but also more fully expresses the essence of God contained within these images. Gregory sees this point clearly in the fact that the Tabernacle contained a pre-existing pattern that was given form by the Israelites. In the same way, Christ has the same pre-existent pattern that is given "shape" by His earthly mother.

It was for this reason why the destruction of the temple was so important to the Apostles. They thought that since the purpose of the temple was fulfilled in Christ, that God would allow for the earthly temple to be destroyed:

*“In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”*

*-Hebrews 8:13*

This culminated in the historic destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 under the Romans. But during this time, the Apostle John has a “revelation” of Christ. In this Revelation, John sees the history of the world laid out and the image of Christ, all wrapped up in a depiction of a heavenly pattern of the temple. Take for instance the following section where he seamlessly weaves one of God’s judgements to this heavenly seen:

*“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand.”*

*-Revelation 8:3-4*

Even after the earthly temple is destroyed, its preceding pattern remains intact in heaven itself, expressed in the person of Christ. The reason why it is so important that this image is contained in the last book of the Bible, is because symbolically, the mission of Christ is a reverse order of the fall of mankind, and this idea is present in the pattern of the tabernacle itself.

At the very center of the tabernacle structure is the presence of God that dwelt “between the Cherubim”, but more than this, this presence is surrounded by depictions of cherubim woven into the fabric of the tabernacle structure. This was the center of Eden. A place where God’s presence dwelt upon the earth with mankind, His priests within the visible creation. This existence was a perfect harmony between the angelic hosts and mankind all circling around their worship and praise of God, but this presence presided over a Holy Law that kept this fellowship intact.

However, man sought illumination outside of God, represented in the temptation to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Directly outside the inner sanctum that contained the Ark of the Covenant was the inner court which contained the golden lampstand, the table of showbread, and the golden altar of incense. The fall of man is depicted here. Instead of enjoying perfect knowledge, fellowship, and praise within God’s presence, man sought all these things outside of God’s presence and law. This inverted the pattern.

Now the very angels that covered man and woman now cover the presence of God and keep us from fellowship with Him. This is why it is important that these curtains are made of wool, the skin of an animal. When man is expelled from Eden, they are given clothes of animal skin. This moves man into the outer court where there is a basin for washing and an altar of sacrifice. This means that apart from God, man must discover his own way to purify himself, both spiritually and physically. This makes sense of all the world's philosophies and religions. They are all man's attempts to purify ourselves apart from God, to make our existence meaningful and righteous away from the true and living God.

This ends with the wilderness on the outskirts of the tabernacle. As lonely as our existence in the outer court might be, we are still within God's creation and as such are within the vicinity of His divine presence and providence. We still have access to God's goodness, though we are removed from fellowship with Him. Outside this structure though is the wilderness. It is a picture of Hell, complete separation from God, a place of wandering and aimlessness. This is why Hell is sometimes called "outer darkness", (Matth 8:12). It is the place of complete separation from the light of God, a place of eternal exile.

However Christ comes to re-enter Eden and re-establish the way. So even though the depiction of the temple is given in reverse order, which signifies the fall, Christ re-establishes the correct order. Christ enters into the world in order to offer Himself up on the bronze altar of sacrifice. Upon this altar He is baptized in water and blood both in the Garden of Gethsemane when He sweats blood, but also when He is pierced and water and blood flow from the wound.

Then His fellowship with God is cut off, the light of the world is darkened on the cross, and instead of praise, Christ cries out in His abandonment. Unlike Adam and Eve who were clothed when they left the presence of God and ate from the tree of knowledge, Christ is stripped naked and nailed to a tree.

*"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")*

*-Galatians 3:13*

Instead of the bread of presence and the wine of enjoyment, Christ is cut off from all food, mocked by His enemies, and offered bitter wine. And in His agony He offers up His spirit:

*“Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, “This Man is calling for Elijah!” Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said, “Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.” And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split...”*

*-Matthew 27:45-51*

Apart from the presence of God, Christ is offered up to His Father. But through this sacrifice, we can come to the altar of God, this is why we call it an “altar call” when someone receives the message of salvation. Through Christ we approach the basin that can actually make us clean, the basin of baptism. What was lost in the fall is re-established through Christ, man can now become clean once again.

*“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*

*-John 3:5*

Through that purity, man can regain his illumination, we can now know God through Christ. Which is why Christ relates Himself to the golden lampstand when He declares:

*“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”*

*-John 8:12*

This establishes fellowship with God signified by Christ in His miracles like His feeding of the five thousand, which He explains like this:

*“Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”*

*-John 6:32-35*

Through Him we can again commune with God, represented in the sacrament of communion, and in this communion we can be satisfied in Him. This then creates the new golden altar of incense that John saw in his vision of heaven, the altar that brings true praise directly to the throne of God:

*“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. “You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

*-John 4:20-24*

This then foretells a future time when, through this ministry of Christ, we can re-enter the presence of God and worship Him with the heavenly host. I love how the writer of Hebrews puts all these points:

*“Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”*

*-Hebrews 9:6-15*

Before we move to the next point I wanted to share a quote from Thomas Aquinas when he describes all this symbolism:

*“The figurative reason for all these things may be taken from the relation of the tabernacle to Christ, who was foreshadowed therein. Now it must be observed that to show the imperfection of the figures of the Law, various figures were instituted in the temple to betoken Christ. For He was foreshadowed by the "propitiatory," since He is "a propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). This propitiatory was fittingly carried by cherubim, since of Him it is written (Heb. 1:6): "Let all the angels of God adore Him." He is also signified by the ark: because just as the ark was made of setim-wood, so was Christ's body composed of most pure members. More over it was gilded: for Christ was full of wisdom and charity, which are betokened by gold. And in the ark was a golden pot, i.e. His holy soul, having manna, i.e. "all the fulness of the Godhead" (Col. 2:9). Also there was a rod in the ark, i.e. His priestly power: for "He was made a . . . priest for ever" (Heb. 6:20). And therein were the tables of the Testament, to denote that Christ Himself is a lawgiver. Again, Christ was signified by the candlestick, for He said Himself (John 8:12): "I am the Light of the world"; while the seven lamps denoted the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. He is also betokened in the table, because He is our spiritual food, according to John 6:41, 51: "I am the living bread": and the twelve loaves signified the twelve apostles, or their teaching. Or again, the candlestick and table may signify the Church's teaching, and faith, which also enlightens and refreshes. Again, Christ is signified by the two altars of holocausts and incense. Because all works of virtue must be offered to us to God through Him; both those whereby we afflict the body, which are offered, as it were, on the altar of holocausts; and those which, with greater perfection of mind, are offered to God in Christ, by the spiritual desires of the perfect, on the altar of incense, as it were, according to Heb. 13:15: "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise always to God."*

*-Thomas Aquinas - "The Summa Theologica"*

## Holiness and Unity

*“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*

*-Matthew 5:17-19*

As Christians we have a tendency to simply apply the structures of the Old Covenant to Christ's fulfillment and move on. But what Christ says about the Law is that it was not meant to merely point to Him, though it does that, but the Law is for all time and

continues to instruct and hallow the people of God. So, now that we have looked at the structure of the Tabernacle in relation to Christ and His ministry, let's see how this same structure expresses the nature of holiness, community, and identity.

The biggest thing that this structure communicates to us, is the relationship between holiness and purity. As we have spoken about before, the term holiness in Scripture indicates distinction and separation. To be holy, in other words, is to be set apart, separate and distinct from other things, usually in terms of righteousness or specialness. Think for a second about music. Even though we are surrounded by noises all the time, still if we hear music, there is something about its tone and harmony that appears distinct to us amongst the other mundane noises that we are, more or less, blocking out.

However, in order for the music to maintain its beauty, it must maintain its "holiness", its distinct nature from the surrounding noise. If we tried to mix the sounds together, far from making the music better, it would drown it out. The only way for ambient noise to compliment the music, it would first have to be brought into harmony with the music. At its core, this is what the structure of the tabernacle expresses, the importance of holiness and right division, but also how things can be brought into harmony.

As stated before, the structure of the tabernacle is a structure of hierarchy moving through levels of intimacy with God. Which means that this structure reveals to us the danger of improper mixture, and the mystery of divine unity. Outside the temple structure there is great diversity, symbolic of the pagan nations of the world. While these nations had great diversity, there was no true unity since they all worshipped different gods and had warring governments and cultures. Moving to the outer court, there still remained diversity, since this was the court that gentiles could enter into, but they had been welcomed into the worship of God through the ministry of the altar, which we will discuss more later. However the gentiles, and other types of people were forbidden to enter into the inner sanctum:

*"He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the LORD. "One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD. "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD forever..."*

*-Deuteronomy 23:1-3*

We can understand the eunuch as symbolizing those who couldn't add to the national identity of Israel, and so they were excluded. But in the same pattern would be those of

questionable birth, and foreigners, or gentiles. While these laws may seem harsh to us, they embodied a fundamental and important ethic, the danger of improper union and the danger of confusing identity. Just like with the example of music, any identity, whether individual or national, needs walls, things that distinguish it from other things. Without these lines of demarcation, there is nothing but confusion and chaos. This is a way to understand the world preceding the flood in Genesis:

*“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*

*-Genesis 6:1-6*

The flood was caused by an inappropriate mixture between heaven and earth. While we aren't totally sure of what historically was happening here, what is clear is that it caused the flood which resulted in the destruction of the human society being judged. These purity laws express the same basic point. When something has an identity, it has a nature, and that nature will inherently exclude things that are different from itself.

Think about the water basin at the front of the tabernacle and this might make more sense. Water “purified” by removing dirt and other forms of filth. The water doesn't make skin “more pure” it merely removes things that can't mix together, in this case dirt and other types of filth from the body. This is exactly what happens in the flood narrative. An improper mixture was occurring in the world that threatened the very identity of mankind. God then sends a flood to “wash” away this impurity, to cleanse the face of the earth so that Noah and his family could be preserved.

Some modern people have related this symbol to hygiene and have reduced all the purity laws, including the dietary kosher laws, to a utilitarian matter of hygiene. While this instinct isn't totally wrong, hygiene is itself a sub-category of this point, and not the overall point that God is making with these laws. So, let's apply this idea to germs and disease. Not every form of bacteria is dangerous or harmful to mankind, as such it can be harmlessly integrated into the human body. However, there are harmful germs and bacteria, that remain inert until they enter into the body.

To prevent contamination we use hygiene to clean our bodies, namely washing. But this fact points to the more important immaterial lesson of identity and contamination. Christ Himself shows this when He rebukes the Pharisees:

*“Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. “These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”*

*-Matthew 15:17-20*

The crime of the Pharisees was not that they wanted to be more hygienic, but that they had reduced this law to mere externals. They thought that these purity laws could be kept by merely washing their hands properly. Christ is showing His followers that these laws were pointing to a far more important spiritual point that the Pharisees had completely ignored. What “contaminates” the identity of a man is not necessarily an imbibing of wrong foods, or even imbibing dirt or grime, (though this might make us physically ill), but wrong behavior and intents can make the nature of a man truly corrupt.

Once we understand this principle other purity laws begin to make more sense:

*“You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled. “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. “You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together. “You shall make tassels on the four corners of the clothing with which you cover yourself.”*

*-Deuteronomy 22:9-12*

These laws might sound odd to us, especially since we can't find a true naturalistic, utilitarian argument for why God would command these things. But they are obviously not there because God really cares about the fabrics that make up certain garments, they are here to express the same point that we have been making. From the fields that fed them, to the animals that they utilized, to the very clothing they wore, this warning of improper mixture was imbedded into the consciousness of the Israelite people. But lest someone think that I am reaching interpretation, a preceding verse talks about gender:

*“A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.”*

*-Deuteronomy 22:5*

In order for the female identity and the male identity to be special and holy, they have to be separate. But then the following verses in Deuteronomy 22 talk about sexual immorality:

*“If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.”*

*-Deuteronomy 22:22*

With each commandment given there is the phrase “put away the evil from Israel.” In other words cleanse the community, or purify the community from such contaminants. Just as a body has an identity that discriminates, so a sexual union forms a type of body. When two people become one flesh they have formed a unique identity. This identity then becomes an important facet of the overall communal identity of their surrounding society. If another person enters into that unity, they represent a contaminant that necessarily distorts and corrupts the purity of the marriage. This in turn corrupts and pollutes the surrounding society, starting with the family and then emanating out to all the other people that were invested in this couple’s life and sanctity.

But the ultimate point of these commands is given by Christ Himself. These obvious material applications merely help to understand the far more vital spiritual point that leads us to understand God and the nature of sin and impurity.

## The Outer Court

This is the best way to understand the outer court of the tabernacle. The outer court was an open area of the tabernacle structure and therefore was open to all people. However, to enter into the tabernacle, one had to “purify” themselves through sacrifice and washing. What God is communicating to His people is that He has an identity, and that identity necessarily judges those that are impure. This is why God expresses Himself as a fire. A fire has a very harsh identity, anything that enters into the fire will ultimately be consumed, it will lose its identity and become ash. But God also uses the metaphor of the body sometimes:

*“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”*

*-Revelation 3:16*

Just like a person's body "judges" dangerous and bad material by expelling it, so Christ is saying that He would expel the impure nature of the the people in question. But while the outer court represents the division between God and man, and the danger of God's holiness to the impure character of mankind, it also provides a promise of hope. This same promise is expressed by Christ to the people that He condemns in the above verse:

*"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."*

*-Revelation 3:18*

This is going to be very important in a moment, but notice that the promise is not to make them fully pure, but instead to *clothe* them in material that is pure. This means that while the structure of the tabernacle, and the adherent purity laws and rituals, warn us about the danger of improper mixture, these also teach us the mystery of true integration and purity. Because the same passage that warns about mixing fabrics, also prescribes a twisting of fabrics the edge of the garment to prevent it from separating. I love how the author Matthieu Pageau puts this point:

I love how the author Matthieu Pageau puts this point:

*"On the other hand, confusing opposites and changing one opposite into another are acts of "summoning time." Such actions are strictly forbidden in Mosaic Law because they are interpreted as catalysts of instability and transformation that could eventually lead to exile and the flood. Do not crossbreed your cattle with diverse species. Do not sow your field with a mixture of seed. Do not wear clothing with a mixture of diverse fabrics (Leviticus 19:19). The reason why certain forms of hybridization were forbidden in the Mosaic Law is that they symbolized the return of ambiguity and confusion." You shall make fringes on the four corners of the garments with which you clothe yourself (Deuteronomy 22:12)... prescribed by Mosaic Law, included fringes called tzitzit at its edges... In accordance with the symbolism of the Sabbath, the fringes of the garment keep the textile from unraveling by allowing loose threads at the margins. The law that prescribes the fringes in the book of Deuteronomy comes right after a verse which forbids the mixture of fabrics called shatnez in regular garments: You shall not wear a mixture of wool and linen together (Deuteronomy 22:12). Importantly, the law that prescribes fringes is often interpreted as an exception to the previous rule, which means mixing is permitted and perhaps even encouraged at the margins of the textile."*

*-Matthie Pageau - "The Language of Creation"*

*Image of Jewish Tzitzit*



While the outer courts of the tabernacle stress purity the inner courts of the tabernacle reveal strange unity, not total purity. If the purpose of the tabernacle was to stress the point of total purity, then the materials making up the tabernacle would themselves be totally pure. However, you can see that the canvas of the tabernacle weaves together different colored threads, and even the fabrics covering the structure are made of varying animal skins, goat hair, and linen.



Even the holy furniture is not made of pure gold, but instead they are wood covered in gold.

This idea is further illustrated by the Cherubim who are composite creatures of man, ox, eagle, and lion. But this mixture isn't confusion, it is a true synthesis. Even the ark itself contains the symbol of ethics, the law, the symbol of authority, the rod, and the symbol of potential and necessity, the manna. But all these are contained together under the presence of God. Here we get to the crux of the matter, the great mystery of the tabernacle is how God can pull all of these disparate things together without confusing their identities.

So while God is hidden in the holy of holies, man is able to commune with God in the inner sanctum, offer prayers to Him, and bask in His divine light. While the veil ultimately separated man from God, it also spoke of an incredible mystery of how God and man could be integrated. This is fully expressed in the wooden furniture covered in gold. The common could never become divine, but the divine could come upon the common. To put this more simply, man could never become God, that is the temptation that caused our initial fall, but God can certainly become man, and He has.

But this mystery does not just communicate the beauty of God integrating man into Himself and fully removing the veil, it also communicates integration in every area. So let's take some basic examples to understand this point.

The wall outside the structure separates the holy from the mundane. This outer court was the section of the tabernacle structure that could be used by gentiles and Jews. But even for gentiles, they had to have a common aim of worship. Meaning that the tabernacle was not the place for general sacrifice to any deity, it was the earthly dwelling place of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But if a gentile was willing to seek after the God of Israel, they were welcomed into the outer court, but were kept from the inner sanctum, usually for multiple generations.

Even for Jews though, in order to move through the hierarchy, purity was essential. The first object that needs to be utilized is the bronze altar which purifies from sin, then the bronze laver which makes one ritually pure and clean. Then there is the inner sanctum that allows for communion, praise, and illumination. But in the holy of holies, God alone dwells and only the high priest can visit once a year to make atonement for the people.

Since these symbols can seem archaic to us today, I will express them in terms of identity to hopefully make them more clear. As individuals we have an identity that is made up of many different things like our ethnicity, our nationality, the place where we were born, the culture that we were raised in, our beliefs, our interests, and so on. While all of these things make us who we are, there are things that are more important to our identity than others.

The things that are most essential to who we are would be placed within the holy of holies. This is the place of greatest purity and reverence, where nothing ever really changes, but it is sanctified periodically, we will get back to all these images in a bit. There are other things that are important, but not as important, this allows for some change but, mostly the change is upkeep and intentionality. This would be the inner sanctum that needs to have the oil refreshed, the bread restocked, and the altar of incense kept burning.

Then there are things that are less important to us, things that allow for great change and transformation. This would be the "outer court", the place of sacrifice and purification. This also helps us understand relationships and intimacy. The things that are most sacred to us are usually kept private for those that we have the deepest level of intimacy with. So there are people in our life who are in the "outer court". We are acquainted with them, but they are not privy to great intimacy with us.

This outer court is also important because it allows for greater relationships. Meaning that the things that we find most sacred are things that must be shared in common with those we associate with. To be an acquaintance with someone does require some level of compatibility, but not a deep level. It is only when we become more intimate with people that compatibility becomes more important. Think about a nation to understand this point better. A nation has an “outer court”, this would be foreign allies, or temporary immigrants. To be an ally or visitor of a nation doesn’t actually require deep levels of compatibility, only a common aim.

So for instance, the United States allied itself with Soviet Russia during World War 2, even though we didn’t particularly like the Soviets or agree with them on much of anything. But since we had a common enemy, Germany, we could make a temporary alliance. In a similar way, someone could be a tourist in our country, even if they don’t really like us, as long as they agree to follow our laws while they are here. However, with all these things, if we wanted to move something, or someone, into a higher level of intimacy, they first would have to go through the rituals of sacrifice and purification.

## Sacrifice

*“Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.”*

*-Exodus 24:5-8*

This sacrificial system of the Old Covenant is probably the most scandalizing element to the modern reader. Passages like this seem barbaric, cultic, and savage. They certainly don’t seem, to us, to be beautiful or sacred, which is how most of our ancient ancestors would have read chapters like this. It is important to note that all of our ancient ancestors partook in this type of ritualistic sacrifice to their gods. But why?

A big reason for this is something that we have already spoken about. Ancient people didn’t see the world the way that we do. They saw everything as being harmonious and participatory. This had many implications, but for our purposes today, that means that they didn’t explicitly understand their wisdom, they acted it out in ritual. The symbol of sacrifice is actually a pretty simple one if we stop to think about it for a second. A

sacrifice is something that we currently have that we are willing to lay down for some future benefit. This can be as simple as a child “sacrificing” their appetite by eating their vegetables in the hopes that they can eat dessert later. But it can also be as holy and complex as a person laying down a valuable possession, like an ox, to please their deity.

But why was blood sacrifice the preferred type? For that matter, why do Christians still sing about the blood of Jesus? I think that C.S. Lewis puts this point well when he was speaking of the Medieval mindset, which was far closer to the ancient mindset than our modern sensibilities:

*“...this phantom liaison-officer between body and soul, was called Spirit or (more often) the spirits. It must be understood that this sense does not at all overlap with the sense which enables us to speak of angels or devils or ghosts as ‘spirits’. To pass from the one meaning to the other would be merely to make a pun. The spirits were supposed to be just sufficiently material for them to act upon the body, but so very fine and attenuated that they could be acted upon by the wholly immaterial soul... They arise—we still speak of our spirits rising—from the blood like an exhalation; in Milton’s language ‘like gentle breaths from rivers pure’ (Paradise Lost, IV, 804). Bartholomaeus Anglicus in the De Proprietatibus (thirteenth century), Englished by Trevisa, gives the following account of them. From blood, seething in the liver, there arises a ‘smoke’. This, being ‘pured’, becomes Natural Spirit, which moves the blood and ‘sendeth it about into all the limbs’. Entering the head, this Natural Spirit undergoes a further refinement—is ‘more purged’—and so turns into Vital Spirit, which ‘worketh in the artery veins the pulses of life’.”*

*-CS Lewis - “The Discarded Image”*

Since this is from one of C.S. Lewis’ more academic works, I find it necessary to explain it just a bit. What he is saying is that, for ancient people, they didn’t think of “spirit” as a wholly intangible thing. They really did think that “spirit”, or in the Latin “Anima” was everywhere, infused all things, and even had “tangible” forms. For living things, this took the “shape” of blood.

This is why ancient people would sacrifice animals by bleeding them out, and why more barbaric tribes would cut the heart out of their victims, and even drink the blood in certain cultic rituals. This was done because they didn’t see blood the way we do. In the modern west we see blood in a purely medical way. We know the function of blood in the body and so we reduce its identity to its utility. For ancient people, who were ignorant to the medical nature of blood, they saw it as a tangible expression of life, or spirit. To shed blood was to draw out spirit, to materialize it in a very real sense.

But herein is a distinction between Jewish offering and pagan offering. The blood of the animal belonged to God alone, and was not for the consumption of man, but why is this? I think that Thomas Aquinas the sacrificial symbolism really well in his book "The Summa Theological":

*"There were three kinds of sacrifices. There was one in which the victim was entirely consumed by fire: this was called "a holocaust, i.e. all burnt." For this kind of sacrifice was offered to God specially to show reverence to His majesty, and love of His goodness: and typified the state of perfection as regards the fulfilment of the counsels. Wherefore the whole was burnt up: so that as the whole animal by being dissolved into vapor soared aloft, so it might denote that the whole man, and whatever belongs to him, are subject to the authority of God, and should be offered to Him. Another sacrifice was the "sin-offering," which was offered to God on account of man's need for the forgiveness of sin: and this typifies the state of penitents in satisfying for sins. It was divided into two parts: for one part was burnt; while the other was granted to the use of the priests to signify that remission of sins is granted by God through the ministry of His priests...The third kind of sacrifice was called the "peace-offering," which was offered to God, either in thanksgiving, or for the welfare and prosperity of the offerers, in acknowledgment of benefits already received or yet to be received: and this typifies the state of those who are proficient in the observance of the commandments. These sacrifices were divided into three parts: for one part was burnt in honor of God; another part was allotted to the use of the priests; and the third part to the use of the offerers; in order to signify that man's salvation is from God, by the direction of God's ministers, and through the cooperation of those who are saved...But it was the universal rule that the blood and fat were not allotted to the use either of the priests or of the offerers: the blood being poured out at the foot of the altar, in honor of God, while the fat was burnt upon the altar (Lev. 9:9, 10). The reason for this was, first, in order to prevent idolatry: because idolaters used to drink the blood and eat the fat of the victims, according to Deut. 32:38: "Of whose victims they eat the fat, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings." Secondly, in order to form them to a right way of living. For they were forbidden the use of the blood that they might abhor the shedding of human blood; wherefore it is written (Gen. 9:4, 5): "Flesh with blood you shall not eat: for I will require the blood of your lives": and they were forbidden to eat the fat, in order to withdraw them from lasciviousness; hence it is written (Ezech. 34:3): "You have killed that which was fat." Thirdly, on account of the reverence due to God: because blood is most necessary for life, for which reason "life" is said to be "in the blood" (Lev. 17:11, 14): while fat is a sign of abundant nourishment. Wherefore, in order to show that to God we owe both life and a sufficiency of all good things, the blood was poured out, and the fat burnt up in*

*His honor. Fourthly, in order to foreshadow the shedding of Christ's blood, and the abundance of His charity, whereby He offered Himself to God for us."*

*-Thomas Aquinas - "The Summa Theologica"*

The first part of the quote merely distinguishes between the three primary types of sacrifice that the Jews could offer on the altar, but the latter part helps us with our current discussion. Our God, who is the God of all spirit and flesh, the maker and sustainer of all life, to Him alone would be worthy to receive the offering of blood. This means, contrary to what most people believe, sacrifice was not merely to atone for sin. Sacrifice was a constant reminder to the people of God, in everything that they ate, that God was the giver of all life, that all spirit and flesh belonged to Him alone.

To put this point as succinctly as I can, the symbolism of sacrifice was the mystery of how to turn material blessings into spiritual praise. This is why the flesh and blood of the animal are "transformed" into smoke that moves up to heaven. A person was able to take their material wealth, and offer these things "up" to God in the form of smoke or incense. It is similar to why we as Christians pray before we eat:

*"For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."*

*-1 Timothy 4:4-5*

This helps us understand the ancient obsession with the blood of Christ. It wasn't that Christ needed to bleed, literally, for God to be satisfied, but that His spirit, His life, had to be offered in order to satisfy the wrath of God. The blood was simply a perfect symbol for our ancient ancestors of this act, that Christ bled and died for us. And that when we symbolically drink of Christ's blood in communion, this is what we are doing, we are partaking in His Spirit, His life. But we will discuss this a little more later.

For now, let's use our smaller examples to understand this point more clearly. Let's say a tourist in our country wanted to be drawn into our community and become a citizen. In order to do this, they would have to sacrifice to the center of American culture. Remember at the center of the Tabernacle of meeting there was the Ark of the Covenant that housed the ten commandments, the rod of Aaron, and a pot of manna. In other words, when you are the citizen of a nation, that nation has become "holy" to you. You offer it a supreme allegiance that eclipses all other national allegiances in which you devote yourself to the law of the nation, the leadership of the nation, and your fate is bound to the prosperity of that nation. Here is the oath that immigrants have to give in order to become naturalized citizens of this country:

*"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."*

*-Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America*

I believe that this point is made perfectly by a woman famous for assimilating to the Jewish nation, Ruth:

*"Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God."*

*-Ruth 1:16*

When Ruth says this she is "sacrificing" her identity as a Moabite to assimilate into the nation of Israel. The way that the nation of Israel could know her sincerity was her willingness to sacrifice to their God and to serve the good of an Israeli woman, namely her mother-in-law. This concept is a huge modern stumbling block. There are some who are championing total purity within our borders, wanting to completely exclude the foreigner. While others want to welcome foreign people groups in with no fear of contamination. The image of the tabernacle gives us the true answer. Integration through assimilation. There are other considerations like scale to take into account, but at the base of the issue should be this idea.

A society has to have walls, but there should be an "outer court", a place that can integrate the stranger.

## The Tabernacle and the Church

This should help us understand the church itself. After His death, the church is later called the temple of God:

*"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"*

*-1 Corinthians 6:19*

Christ, who is God, is the fullest expression of God's nature to man, and the church, as Christ's mystical body, is the fullest expression of Christ on this earth. That which was made unclean by sin and depravity was made clean by the ministry of Christ. This then has brought us into fellowship with God and allowed us to dwell with Him, and He with us. This is why the modern church is not merely a reflection of the ancient Jewish Synagogues, (the place where Jews weekly meet up on the Sabbath to study Torah and worship God), but it is also a reflection of the temple itself, since each individual member of the church is a dwelling place for God. I like how C.S. Lewis puts this:

*“Every temple in the world, the elegant Parthenon at Athens and the holy Temple at Jerusalem, was a sacred slaughterhouse... But even that has two sides. If temples smelled of blood, they also smelled of roast meat; they struck a festive and homely note, as well as a sacred... The synagogues were meeting-houses where the Law was read and where an address might be given - often by some distinguished visitor (as in Luke 4:20 or Acts 13:15). The Temple was the place of sacrifice, the place where the essential worship of Jahweh was enacted. Every parish church is the descendant of both. By its sermons and lessons it shows its ancestry in the synagogue. But because the Eucharist is celebrated and all other sacraments administered in it, it is like the Temple; it is a place where the adoration of the Deity can be fully enacted. Judaism without the Temple was mutilated, deprived of its central operation; any church, barn, sickroom, or field, can be the Christian's temple.”*

*-C.S. Lewis - “Reflections on the Psalms”*

The church expresses the nature of Christ to the world. So when we gather together we are doing more than merely studying the word of God, we are mystically participating in the very body of Christ, and in His holy sacrifice made for our forgiveness and salvation. And so the church's “altar”, which is usually located at the front of the church and is where the communion is prepared, we have combined multiple elements of the tabernacle. This altar is all at once the altar where Christ's sacrifice is represented, the table of showbread where the people of God commune with God, the golden lampstand where the church is illuminated by the presence of Christ within the church, but also, is the renewed tree of Life, giving us true light and life in Christ. and the new life in His seed and the basin that makes us clean. This then frees the church to offer the sacrifice of praise to our God who hears us and delights in our offering:

*“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”*

*-Hebrews 13:15-16*

This is what is accomplished when the church of Christ gathers together. We express the very body of Christ upon the earth. We act as priests to God as we partake in the new holy ordinances, and worship our God through the ministry of our great High Priest, namely Christ Himself, drawing near to the very presence of God Himself.

*“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

*-Hebrews 10:19-25*

## Repentance

*“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”*

*-Luke 5:32*

While there is literally an infinite amount of things to say about the tabernacle structure let's end this paper by applying these principles to personal repentance. On a large scale this is how salvation works, but this is also how we repent, or change, or purify ourselves from various issues of sin. For the purpose of salvation. Someone is drawn to the outer court of the tabernacle by the presence of God at the center. This “call” looks differently for different people, but the reason why the pillar of cloud, or fire, specifically emanates from the holy of holies, and why this same “pillar” is the one that guides the people of God is because it is the presence of God that calls a person to repentance.

While an evangelist can bring the gospel message to someone, they are merely acting in participation with the divine calling of God for this person.

*“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain...”*

*-John 15:16*

It is Christ who calls a person, but as they are drawn to Christ they enter into the outer court and confront a “wall”, in the case of the tabernacle this wall was made of wool, but

the temple structure had a literal wall. This wall separates them from the inner sanctum and confronts someone with their issues of sin.

But the same court that teaches them of their separation, also communicates the hope of integration in the altar and the baptismal. What we can't do in our strength, Christ did for us by offering Himself for our sin. By accepting this offering, and then entering into a new life with Christ through baptism, they are welcomed into the inner sanctum, which is pure fellowship and communication with God.

However, within this inner sanctum is the golden lampstand. This lampstand provides warmth, comfort, and greater knowledge of God, but it also reveals to us our inner corruption. Therefore the structure of discipleship, the structure of continued illumination and intimacy with God is found in repentance. This is why the Jews were constantly moving between the courts. They would enter into the outer court, perform sacrifice, washing, enter into the inner court, and then leave the inner court again to go home. When they went back to the temple they would have to go through the sacrificial and purification rituals once again before they entered back into the temple.

For the Christian, while we never really leave the presence of God, since God has made our bodies His new temple, but the continuance of repentance requires us to contemplate again the altar and the baptismal. This is why the church places the altar in the church, not outside it. This is also why we take communion so often. We are never outside the presence of God, but we do need to re-apply the sacrifice of Christ to our lives that we may walk in continued repentance and renewal in His presence.

*“The two great graces essential to a saint in this life, are faith and repentance. These are the two wings by which he flies to heaven. Faith and repentance preserve the spiritual life—as heat and water preserve the physical life... Repentance is never out of season; it is of as frequent use as the artificer’s tool or the soldier’s weapon. If I am not mistaken, practical points are more needful in this age than controversial and disputable matters.”*

*-Thomas Watson - “The Doctrine of Repentance”*

Unfortunately many Christians don't talk like this any more, but it is a truth that we would do well to remember. The great act of repentance that brought us into the presence of God remains vital for growing in our relationship with God. it is similar to a marriage. The same attraction, communication, and negotiation that brought a couple together in marriage, now serves as a way to grow the intimacy within the marriage. So let's look at the process of sacrifice in the Law to help us learn what the new process of repentance looks like for us:

*“And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin.”*

*-Leviticus 5:5-6*

The first thing that someone has to do when they are caught in sin is first confess that sin and seek atonement. For the Christian, the sacrifice was already made by Christ, so we don't need to offer anything new, but we should confess our sins before God when we fall short. When Christ taught His disciples to pray, one of the components of His prescribed prayer is:

*“And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.”*

*-Matthew 6:12*

Christ encourages His followers to consistently confess sin to our Father, and seek forgiveness from Him. The good news is, that forgiveness is always offered to those who approach God through the atoning sacrifice of His Son:

*“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”*

*-1 John 1:8-10*

However this practice of confession is not merely to be done in private, there is a social aspect to our confession. This isn't because the modern pastor functions like an old testament priest, more on this when we talk about the priests. Instead it is because we do need the help of another believer to understand the purposes of God, and the practical way forward. I like how Dietrich Bonhoeffer put this point:

*“What happened to us in baptism is bestowed upon us anew in confession. We are delivered out of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. That is joyful news. Confession is the renewal of the joy of baptism. ‘Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning’ (Ps. 30.5). The day of the Lord’s Supper is an occasion of joy for the Christian community. Reconciled in their hearts with God and the brethren, the congregation receives the gift of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and, receiving that, it receives forgiveness, new life, and salvation. It is given new fellowship with God and men. The fellowship of the Lord’s Supper is the superlative fulfilment of Christian*

*fellowship. As the members of the congregation are united in body and blood at the table of the Lord so will they be together in eternity. Here the community has reached its goal. Here joy in Christ and his community is complete. The life of Christians together under the Word has reached its perfection in the sacrament.”*

*-Dietrich Bonhoeffer - “Life Together”*

I love how he relates confession to sacrifice and washing. For the Christian we aren't making a *new* sacrifice before God and seeking to be cleansed *again*, instead we are seeking to be *reminded* of the sacrifice and cleansing that we already have. The pastor, or spiritual mentor, doesn't act as the priest procuring new cleansing or atonement, but instead he acts as a reminder of what Christ has already given. Accepting the sacrifice of Christ, like the altar, leads to cleansing.

Cleansing ourselves of wrong, symbolically, means that we are seeking to rid ourselves of the sinful behavior. This is a more complex action in which we are trying to not only alter the sinful behavior, but even to address the heart that leads to this action. This makes repentance a difficult and arduous process. It isn't merely done with the confession, but it is sought after sincerely with effort, consistency, and a heart that has genuinely grappled with the depth of its own depravity and is seeking change at all costs. Look at how the apostle Paul describes repentance:

*“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”*

*-2 Corinthians 7:10-11*

This is not a simple thing. It is a diligent pursuit that transforms the heart and behavior of the one pursuing it.

But there is more to it than that. In the act of sacrifice the Israelites were called to understand the cost of their sin. That while their sin was committed in private, the consequences of sin emanate out towards our community. Just as sin separates us from God, it also separates us from others. This happens both through the weight of shame, but also through practical division caused by misdeeds.

The weight of shame is a terrible burden to bear. When we sin we feel like we are cast out due to a deep feeling of unworthiness. When the voice of our own condemning conscience is so loud, it is almost impossible to hear the forgiving voice of the Spirit.

The other brother and sister in Christ that we confess to then acts as the voice of the Spirit, reminding us of the great forgiveness of our God. This, again, is made manifest in the giving of communion. In this act we remember the cost of our forgiveness, but also the offer of Christ who is willing to come into our lives and dwell with us.

But there is also a practical element here. Just as Christ condemns a purely material explanation for washing laws, He equally condemns a purely spiritual interpretation of the sacrifices:

*“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, “leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

*-Matthew 5:23-24*

While seeking atonement with God is important, one can argue the most important thing we can do, this doesn't negate the importance of seeking atonement before our fellow man. Christ says that, as a matter of fact, if you haven't tried to make amends with the one you have offended, then you are not to make an offering on the altar of God. The lesson is pretty clear. While the sacrifices on the altar were efficacious in the Israelites finding forgiveness before God, they were also symbolic of how to make things right before their neighbor.

When we have done something wrong to our brother, we must equally approach them with humility, offer confession, and seek to make amends for what we have done.

*“Though it is true that confession is an act in the name of Christ that is complete in itself and is exercised in the fellowship as frequently as there is desire for it, it serves the Christian community especially as a preparation for the common reception of the holy Communion. Reconciled to God and men, Christians desire to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ. It is the command of Jesus that none should come to the altar with a heart that is unreconciled to his brother. If this command of Jesus applies to every service of worship, indeed, to every prayer we utter, then it most certainly applies to reception of the Lord's Supper.”*

*-Dietrich Bonhoeffer - “Life Together”*

Communion is then held, not only in the presence of God, but in fellowship with our fellow man. We confess not merely to find a deliverance from our shame, but to seek the practical process of how to make amends. But as Paul put this point in the passage quoted earlier, the best way to make amends is to reveal to genuine state of repentance that we are supposed to be dwelling in. Meaning that Paul made amends with the

Corinthians, not merely because they said they were sorry, but over time Paul was able to observe a genuine change in their lives. This showed him that they were legitimately sorry and moving away from the behavior that broke their fellowship in the first place.

While again, there is almost an infinite amount of things to say about these passages, I merely hope that this discussion has opened up your spirit to study these this structure with more intentionality and reverence. That though Christ has fulfilled this pattern, the pattern that Christ fulfilled remains a present hope, instructor, and encourager for all God's people to this day.

*"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."*

*-Hebrews 13:10-16*