

Hebrews 9:11-28

Jesus' Sacrificial Blood

The emphasis in Hebrews 9 and 10 is on the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus Christ is all sufficient for the reconciliation of sinful man to a holy God.

As our redeemer Jesus Christ purchased His people with the price of His blood. This redemption became eternally valid when He figuratively entered the Holy of Holies to intercede on our behalf.

The author Hebrews draws a strong contrast between the sacrifices of the old covenant Levitical system with its animals and the perfect self-sacrifice of Christ.

The radical difference between the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and that of animals under the old covenant is expressed in the words of Jesus. "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17-18). It was freely His own choice; no one imposed it upon Him. Jesus was unblemished, undefiled, morally perfect who of His own volition made the decision to die in the place of the sinner.

The Blood of Christ Cleanses Our Conscience (Hebrews 9:11-14)

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:11-14) All Scripture references are from New American Standard Bible 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

The image before us in this chapter is the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. In the immediate context of 9:13 the author refers to the "ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh." He takes us to Numbers 19 to describe the practice of sprinkling the unclean person with water of cleansing made from the sacrifice of the red heifer which was in perfect health that had never been harnessed. She was slain and burned and her ashes were gathered and kept for ceremonial cleansing.

In sharp contrast the author states "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus did what no red heifer sacrifice could ever do.

It has already been established in Hebrews that Christ is the great High Priest. His priesthood is permanent because He continues for ever (Heb. 7:24).

Under the old covenant the animal sacrifices cleansed from external defilement, but they could not touch the inner defilement. The heart is defiled, deceitful and desperately wicked. Christ was undefiled sinless Lamb of God and therefore as priest and victim He would make the perfect sacrifice to atone for sin.

Jesus is also the victim of the sacrifice. In the passage before us Jesus the High Priest is offering up Himself on the altar to atone for sins. He did this "through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

This passage also tells us something about the nature of His sacrifice. Jesus was "without blemish."

The author tells us He did this "through the eternal Spirit."

"Through the eternal Spirit" can refer to the work of the Holy Spirit anointing Christ accomplish His mediatorial work as High Priest. Jesus was quoting Isaiah 61:1 when He addressed synagogue members at Nazareth saying,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

Everything Jesus did in His ministry was under the perfect power and presence of the Holy Spirit. No one has ever lived the Spirit-controlled life as Jesus did. He lived the perfect sinless life and offered the perfect sinless sacrifice in the power of the Holy Spirit. Again the words of the prophet Isaiah give insight. "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1). This verse may have been in the mind of the author of Hebrews.

What Christ accomplished has eternal value. John Brown said, "It was the living God manifested in flesh who was both our High Priest and victim." No human being could ever offer himself as an eternal propitiation for the sins of the whole world. He accomplished His priesthood "according to the power of an indestructible life" (Heb. 7:16b). He was the eternal Son of God who became flesh. Jesus fully understood the will of God with all of its implications as no human being could possibly know. Christ offered Himself as the eternal Son of God.

The consequence of this sacrifice for all who appropriate it is to "cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." This sacrifice does something that no animal sacrifice could ever accomplish.

The sacrifice at Calvary accomplishes a radical purging of the conscience, and is the basis of our reconciliation to God.

How are our consciences cleansed?

The author states it is by "the blood of Christ." With the poet we sing with all our hearts:

"For my cleansing this I see--
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my pardon this my plea--
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

Jesus Christ served at the altar as the High Priest, and was laid on the altar as the perfect sacrifice to atone for all our sins. He shed His precious blood on the cross and figuratively as our High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies. The work of offering Himself as our sacrifice was completed on the earth at the cross. Moreover, as High Priest He entered "the greater and more perfect tabernacle" in heaven in the very presence of God.

The author stresses it is "repentance from dead works to serve the living God" (v. 14).

The conscience is purified by the blood Christ "from dead works." The author spoke of "dead works" in 6:1.

Every unregenerate person produces "dead works." In fact, man is "dead in his trespasses and sins" and can only produce "dead works." He is incapable of producing living works that could satisfy a holy God. What our corrupt depraved nature will produce is described in Galatians 5:19-21. "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). Jesus said these dead works come from out of our depraved hearts. "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:20-23).

In fact, we can produce only dead works until the Holy Spirit creates a new spirit within us. By the grace of God we are "made alive together with Christ." Paul stresses "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:5).

"The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sins will surely die." Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse of these dead works. We have been cleansed, washed in the blood of Jesus so that our purity may serve the glory of God.

"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. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). Can a better statement of God's purpose for man be found?

The purpose is that every true believer is to produce good works that will serve the living God. He saves us "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

Could there be a stronger antithesis than "dead works" and the "living God"? They are completely incompatible. Dead works come from total radical depravity and await the judgment of the living God. The living God gives eternal life.

The Blood of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15-22)

"For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:15-22).

The basis of Christ being our mediator in the new covenant is His death. He was the innocent victim who died on behalf of the people.

The shed blood of Jesus Christ accomplished what the old covenant priesthood with animal sacrifices could not achieve.

It was not God who failed under the old covenant, but sinful defiled man. Only the new covenant with the perfect sacrifice of Christ could meet once and forever the needs of sinners.

Sinful man needs to stand just in the sight of God, but the law could not do that. It could point out our sin problem, but it could not resolve it. What was the purpose of the law? The apostle Paul says, "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

In the wonder of God's grace the people who put their faith in God before the coming of Christ were redeemed by His death. They also have an "eternal inheritance" along with us. The promised inheritance is received on the basis of faith in the redeeming death of Christ. All of heaven will sing redeemed by grace through the death of Christ. The atoning sacrificial death of Christ answers the demands of the law.

The only basis for cleansing and reconciliation is the shedding of the blood of Jesus. Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The apostle Peter wrote, "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). The apostle John affirmed "the blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Christ has "released us from our sins by His blood" (Rev. 1:5). Moreover, He has clothed us in His righteous robes "made white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14).

The whole thrust of the author of Hebrews is the absolute superiority of the blood of Jesus in His new covenant. The new covenant of Jesus is superior to the old. Christ "appeared once for all because if He had

come a second or third time there would have been a defect in the first sacrifice which would deny this fullness," wrote John Calvin. It was a once-for-all eternally perfect sacrifice for sin.

The inheritance God provided for us became effective in full force, in the manner of a will the moment Christ died on the cross and declared "it is finished." The instrument of death insures the present reality of our eternal inheritance. God cleansed us of all our sins and brought about reconciliation to Himself by means of that sacrifice. "For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Ephesians 2:18-19). Moreover, we have a new status with God. "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:15-17).

The Perfect Sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:23-28)

In a sense that is what this whole chapter has been about. There is only one totally all sufficient sacrifice for sin. It is the death of Christ for the sinner. Animal sacrifices could not accomplish this.

Christ's blood is only basis for God's people to enter into heaven. Without the shedding of Christ's blood God could not open heaven up to us. The only sacrifice God will accept is the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

We stand before God guilty, and as a result heaven is closed to us unless we are permitted to enter based on Christ's death. The blood of Jesus opened the door for us, and it is on the basis of that shed blood that God will allow us into His holy presence in heaven. The blood of Jesus redeems us and sanctified our presence before the Father.

"Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Hebrews 9:23-28).

I hear echoes of the prophet Isaiah all over this passage.
"As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.
Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:11-12, NASB95)

Christ sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay my sin debt. He died the death I deserved. Jesus died on our behalf and appeared in the presence of the Father. He is our High Priest who offered the perfect sacrifice to satisfy the righteousness of God on our behalf. "The wages of sin is death," and Christ paid our debt on our behalf. Now, He intercedes for us at the throne of God's mercy.

Christ "Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Our salvation has been achieved by a unique sacrifice of a unique one of a kind individual. There is none other like Him, or ever will be. He is infinite in holiness.

I have the privilege of being deeply involved in world missions. One of the great joys I look forward to in heaven is singing with that great host of redeemed from all over the world down through the ages. The apostle John peered into heaven and heard a new song, with great multitudes singing to Jesus: "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10).

How beautiful are the three "appearings" of Christ at the end of chapter nine. In verse 24 Christ appeared in heaven "now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." In verse 26 "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." In verse 28 we await for His appearing a second time, "not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him." Wow. What a day that will be! Even so, come Lord Jesus.

That was the apostle Paul's hope: "in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). The apostle John looked forward to that same day. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). By the grace of God we are even being transformed into His likeness today. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). I am looking forward to the day I see Jesus face to face and can sing saved by grace. We are saved by grace alone.

There is only one reason we will sing.

"For nothing good have I
Whereby Thy grace to claim;
I'll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.
Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow" – Elvina Hall 1865.

Christ is coming a second time, but not to deal with our sin. He has already done that for all who will believe on Him alone for salvation.

Are you ready and "eagerly waiting" for His coming? In whom or what are you trusting for that day?

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