

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 24

Hebrews 9:11-14

The Mediator of the New Covenant

December 23, 2018

Introduction

“The main point in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 is that Christ’s sacrifice is better than the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. In 9:1-10, the inadequacy of the OC sacrifices comes to the forefront. They don’t usher people into God’s presence, nor do they truly cleanse the conscience from guilt. The sacrifice of Christ is contrasted with the sacrifices of the OC in 9:11-14.”¹

“We will find the focus of chapter 9 falls on the topic of blood – either the blood of bulls and goats, calves and goats, or the blood of our Saviour (Heb. 9:12,14,18,19,22,25). He makes 3 points in chapter 9 we are examining now: 1) The superiority of Christ’s blood; 2) The power of Jesus’ blood, and 3) The purpose of Christ’s blood-shed for us.”²

Eternal Redemption: Bought & Paid For vv. 11-12

Notice how this section begins, *“But when Christ appeared...”*, which draws an immediate contrast between vv. 1-10, and what now follows to v. 14. First, in v. 11, we encounter the phrase, *“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come...”*. When Christ appeared, everything changed. He brought a competence and a surety of complete success to the high priesthood that the Aaronic priesthood could never have (and never did) achieve. The *“good things that have come”* are part and parcel of the application of certain aspects of the new covenant which are now able to be applied to NT believers, although it was still not fully actualized or finalized for Israel.

Philip Hughes points out;

“The good things that are ours in Christ come to us in two stages: united to Him, we are indeed the heirs of all things (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:21-23), but it is only hereafter that we enter into the fulness of our heritage (1 Pet. 1:4; 1 JN 3:2). Christ’s atoning work is the source from which all the blessings of the New Covenant flow: hence Paul’s rhetorical question, “He who did not spare His Son, but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?” (Rom. 8:32).”³

“then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places...” The author has made this point before about Christ’s presence in the heavenly realm (1:3-4; 4:14-16; 6:18-20; 8:1-2, and will again – 9:24; 10:12-14; and in 10:19-20, he points out that Jesus’ entrance into the heavenly places is the precursor to us being there as well! See also [Hebrews 12:2](#).

¹ Thomas Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 266

² Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 301

³ Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 327

This is, and is supposed to be reminiscent of the Israelite high priest's work on the Day of Atonement (9:7) as he entered the Most Holy Place to deal first with his own sins and then the sins of his people. Are we to consider this verse to be saying that Jesus literally entered bodily into a heavenly tabernacle or temple with His own blood carried in some container? Or is this a symbolic thing? Schreiner (p. 268) says "Jesus did not literally bring His blood into heaven. The blood stands for the giving up of his life which was offered as a sacrifice." This is likely a point we cannot really hope to come to full agreement on. There is some comfort in seeing Jesus' return to heaven here as literal and in fact, it may be what Jesus means when He says to Mary on Resurrection day, in JN 20:17, *"Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father..."*. Yet, conversely, He also said to the dying thief He had just saved, in LK 23:43, *"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

However, it only matters that the text is clear that, however Jesus' entrance into heaven took place, it was effectual – it secured for us an eternal redemption. The price of our sin had been paid in full by means of Jesus bloody sacrifice – for every one of His elect.

Verse 12 also contrasts Jesus' blood with the blood of bulls and goats, with the result of securing *"an eternal redemption."* But does all this mean that when Jesus' blood was shed on the Cross, that the sacrifice was not complete until He brought that blood in His resurrected state into the heavenly tabernacle? And did that not happen until 40 days later when He visibly ascended from the Mount of Olives?

Many commentators will assert that Jesus, at His ascension, brought His blood into heaven. A.W. Pink disagrees with this notion, and I agree with him. He is correct when he states, "What is affirmed in this verse took place immediately after Christ, on the Cross, triumphantly cried out, "It is finished!"⁴ He bases his view on 5 points:

1. Typically, the priest's entrance within the veil was immediately upon the victim's death. The body, once sacrificed, is taken outside the camp and burned – cf. Heb. 13:11-12
2. Aaron, the high priest, in Leviticus 16:4, laid aside his glorious garb, and put on linen garments – more in keeping with Christ's humiliation at the cross, than the triumph and glory of His ascension.
3. When the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, atonement was not complete until he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat – the propitiatory. If this a type, why would we say that antitype (Christ) wait 40 days for God to accept the offering?
4. While the high priest was in the Holy of Holies, the people would fear that he had failed to appease God. Similarly, Jesus' disciples were in fear and doubt for 3 days until they saw the resurrected Jesus. Their demeanour changed after His ascension, they were vastly different – cf LK 24:21,52,53.
5. The veil in the temple was torn at the moment of Christ's death – an outward, visible sign from God (MT 27:50-51) about what had taken place in heaven – Jesus' entrance (cf. LK 23:42-43). Atonement was complete.⁵

⁴ A.W. Pink, Hebrews, p. 489, Vol. 1

⁵ Pink, p. 489-490

Sometimes, when we look into theological details like these, asking and answering theological questions, which is a good thing – we lose sight (even momentarily) of the reality of the scene. Jeremy Walker comments in an excellent manner:

“Let us not forget His true agony. This salvation was hammered out with judgment, forged in the furnace of affliction. The jewels of these unsearchable riches were mined in the depths of Christ’s sorrows. They were brought up from the darkness of His dereliction on the cross, His isolation from men, and His forsakenness by God: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). This is where your salvation was won. When you begin to understand the price that was paid, only then will you begin to understand the blessings bestowed. Who can go as deep as Christ has gone? Who can suffer as intensely as He? Who can understand the price Jesus paid that we should be no longer cast out but brought in? Who can appreciate the agonies of body and soul that this God-man underwent? He bore in His body on the tree all the sufferings that His people deserved, exhausting God’s wrath, taking upon Himself the hell that His chosen ones deserved. He bore in His hands and head and side and feet, inscribed with nails, thorns and spears, the names of those He loved, their persons borne on His heart like the High Priest of old going into the Most Holy Place. There He goes as our sacrifice and representative. There the fire of God’s wrath descends on Him, and the hammer of divine judgment crashes down upon Him, and Christ, in the darkness of that day and of His soul, cries out of the depths of misery that only this Jesus could understand and experience, that He had been forsaken by His Father. Only then does He climb back out of the depths of His sufferings, and, before He gives up His Spirit, cry out in triumph, “It is finished!”⁶

Another phrase we don’t want to overlook in v. 12 is “*he entered once for all...*”. If that sounds familiar, it’s because of Heb. 7:27. The force of this phrase, in both places is to contrast the necessary repetition of the OT sacrifices – even the Day of Atonement ritual, though only once a year, but year after year with the offering up of Himself only one time by Christ. He entered the heavenly Holy Places once for all time. Near the end of chapter 9, notice vv. 24-26. The phrase in v. 26 shows up again, and there is no doubt about what the author is telling us: He did it once – and that is all that is necessary. It is finished!

“Thus securing an eternal redemption.” Here is the crux of the matter, the point to it all. The author has been leading us step by step to this, and he’ll repeat it as we move forward, to keep bringing us face to face with the truth of the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour.

He is about to develop this theme even more – although everything up to now has surely built a firm foundation for this theme. In fact, the rest of the letter serves to magnify the superiority of Christ for salvation from numerous more angles. The doctrinal portion of the letter ends at Heb. 10:18, and the stage is by that point set to transition into the remainder of the book, which provides outstanding application to apply in light of the doctrine that has been presented to that point. But we still have a lot to cover before we get to that stage of the letter.

⁶ Jeremy Walker, *Life in Christ*, RHB, 2013, p. 46

The Red Heifer & the Eternal Spirit vv. 13-14

The A.H. now adds another OT element, one that is less known than what he has shared thus far to most Christians – the concept of the sacrifice of the “*red heifer*”, coupled with the blood of bulls and goats. We’ve seen the ‘*blood of bulls and goats*’ argument already and will encounter it again in 10:4, at which point the author minces no words, “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*” But here in v. 13, he adds another element, a more obscure reference – “*The sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer⁷...*”.

Turn to Numbers 19:1-22. Sin and death were the things that defiled, and these (bulls and goats and the red heifer) were sacrifices that dealt with both of these great problems. They provided a solution (albeit temporary at best) to these things which separated sinful man from a holy God. What they did (these gifts and sacrifices: 9:9) restored the unclean to ceremonial cleanness, and thus to religious life in the community and nation.⁸

But, as we will see in v. 14, this is a ‘much more’ argument being laid out for us here. “*But there was a better blood to which they pointed, a blood that in its shedding would actually cleanse the inner man, and restore people to real fellowship with the holy God.*”⁹

Verse 14 is a wonderful, rich verse to show the immense contrast between Jesus and the OT Levitical system. Like Galatians 3:18-29 (key v. 24), is even clearer in the NKJV: (“*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*”) We have looked at those verses and that passage before, along with other passages that clearly show us the Person of Christ – the reality of His obedient life and His battles against temptation. As a man, he stood in the gap for us as our Mediator, rendered the full obedience required of us, on our behalf, and with divine blood of infinite value, offered Himself up to God, taking the penalty we deserved as our last Adam and Divine Substitute. Just examine Isaiah 52:13-53:12 which is the Gospel in one comprehensive OT passage.

Andrew Murray comments;

“It was the life of God that dwelt in Him. That life gave His blood, each drop of it, an infinite value. The blood of a man is of more worth than that of a sheep. The blood of a king or a great general is counted of more value than hundreds of common soldiers. The blood of the Son of God! – It is in vain the mind seeks for some expression of its value; all we can say is, it is His own blood, the precious blood of the Son of God!”¹⁰

⁷ Heifer – definition: a young cow, especially one who has had no more than 1 calf; or a female calf.

⁸ Richard Phillips, p. 302

⁹ IBID, p. 302

¹⁰ Andrew Murray, as cited in R. Phillips, Hebrews, p. 303

Peter also points out the value of Jesus' blood in I Peter 1:17-25. The blood of bulls and goats was God-appointed for temporary, ceremonial cleansing only. The blood of Christ was superior in that it accomplished, when applied, actual and eternal redemption from sin. cf Acts 4:12

And that blood, Himself, was offered "*through the eternal Spirit*". Of course, now we have to understand what is meant by "the eternal Spirit". Is this the Holy Spirit? Or is this a reference to Christ's essential divine nature as the Son of God?

As you might have guessed, theologians are divided on this. I am not going to delve into the arguments here, but will present my understanding having read almost all the arguments. It is my contention that this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. My reasons are these:

1. The author says "the eternal Spirit", and not 'his eternal Spirit', which would have been much clearer if he'd have had Christ's Spirit in mind.
2. It would have been odd to say "Christ's eternal Spirit" as a reference to His humanity, and in fact, FF Bruce concurs with this point, when he says, "behind our author's thinking lies the portrayal of the Isaianic "Servant of the Lord" "who" in the power of the Divine Spirit...accomplishes every phase of His ministry."¹¹ Schreiner says, "It also seems that the word "eternal" emphasizes the deity of the Spirit. Perhaps there is also an emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy so that Jesus' self-offering was in accord with the eternal plan of God. Furthermore, there is the suggestion that someone who is merely a human being cannot atone for sin. Atonement must be secured by someone who is both human and divine for the sacrifice rendered to be efficacious. The offering through "the eternal Spirit" secures "eternal redemption" (9:12), "eternal salvation" (5:9), and an "eternal inheritance" (9:15)."¹²

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was "offered without blemish to God". Back in Exodus 12:5, God's instructions to Moses regarding the Passover lamb is presented. This is bolstered by the law in Lev. 22:17-25. In Malachi, a part of God's rebuke to Israel was because they were not following this clear prescription – note Malachi 1:10-14.

Both the OT and the NT are very clear in depicting Jesus as sinless (Ps. 45:7; Isa. 32:1; 53:9; Jer. 23:5; LK 1:35; 23:41, 47; JN 8:46; 14:30-31; Acts 3:14; 17:31; Rom. 10:4; I Cor. 1:30; 2:11-16; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Col. 1:15-19; I Tim. 6:14-16; Heb. 1:9,12; 4:14-15; &:16, 26-27; 9:14; 13:8; James 1:13; I Pet. 1:17-20; 2:22; II Pet. 1:1; I JN 1:5) and I Peter 1:18-21 makes it plain, even in v. 22 where he parallels what Heb. 9:14 also says. His offering had to be, and was, "*without blemish*". It had to be without blemish in order to accomplish what the rest of v. 14 says.

They are dead works because unbelievers are 'dead in sin' according to Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13; Heb. 11:6; and all of our works in any attempt to please God apart from faith in Christ are doomed to abject failure, because, as Isa. 64:6 says, to God "*All of our*

¹¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT) Eerdmans, 1990, p. 217

¹² Schreiner, *Hebrews*, p. 271

righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” Or, as the KJV calls them, “*filthy rags*”. Note what Romans 3:20 forcefully says.

But v. 14 says that Christ’s sacrifice purifies us (our conscience) “*from dead works to serve the living God.*” In Hebrews 2:14-15, we looked at this from a different perspective – he defeated the devil (cf. Col. 2:9-15) and delivered us from ‘*lifelong slavery*’ – cf. Romans 6:6-14.

Ephesians 2:8-15 lays it out for us. He saved us (Titus 3:5) for ‘good works’, works that are alive. John Calvin points out: “We are not cleansed by Christ so that we can immerse ourselves continually in fresh dirt, but in order that our purity may serve the glory of God.”¹³

¹³ John Calvin, cited in P. Hughes, Hebrews, p. 362