

## The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 26 January 27, 2019 The Ratification of the New Covenant  
Hebrews 9: 18 - 28

### Blood Inaugurates the New Covenant

vv. 18-22

“Therefore” – once again, we find this word drawing our attention backwards to what we’ve been examining already. In this case, vv. 11-17. We have had one other “*therefore*” to start off v. 15 – “Therefore he is the Mediator of a new covenant”, and now, “*Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.*” So the blood, already mentioned a number of times in Hebrews, is a key, but what does the author mean by “*first covenant*”?

By “*the first covenant*”, he is not referring to the Noahic Covenant or the Abrahamic Covenant, but is bringing back into his argument the Mosaic Covenant – the one being replaced by the new covenant. But his main point is to show that it too was inaugurated with blood. Here it refers to the act of blood-shedding related to the offering of sacrifices.

To understand v. 19-20 here, we need to look back at Exodus 24:3-18 ( & Ex. 19:1-25 ). Note that, in Ex. 24:4, Moses built an altar and then, in v. 5, young men of Israel offered burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. Then, in vv. 6-8, Moses described his actions with the blood. Especially notice v. 8b – “*Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words [ v. 7 ]*”.

Now, v. 19 in Hebrews 9 does not follow exactly what takes place in Exodus 24:3-18 – because no calves or goats are mentioned in Exodus 24, and no hyssop, water or scarlet wool are mentioned there either. And Hebrews adds that the blood was also sprinkled on the book, not just the people. Is this variation a concern for us? Not really, because these elements were included later on, once the actual Levitical Law was written down. At Exodus 24, that had not yet occurred, but it would. John Calvin comments, “He [ the author of Hebrews ] seems to have mixed together the various kinds of expiations which have the same reference...there is nothing absurd in this since he is dealing in general with the question of cleansing in the OT, which was by blood.”<sup>1</sup>

V. 20 – Moses designated this blood, “the blood of the covenant.” Because it ratified the covenant at this special ceremony at which, a second time ( cf. Exod. 19:8 ) they pledge their allegiance to its precepts, and were then sprinkled with the blood from the sacrificial animals. Christ used very similar words and the same concept in Luke 22:20, when He said, lifting the cup, “*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*” ( cf. MK 14:24; MT 26:28; I Cor. 11:25 ) Hebrews 9:20 adds, “*that God has commanded for you*”; certainly interpreting Moses’ words in Exod. 24:8b – “*in accordance with all these words.*” IOW, the covenant was a book of commands,

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, cited by Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 374

hence the people's, *"All that the Lord has spoken, we will do, and we will be obedient."* In the new covenant, it is Christ's obedience on our behalf that fulfills the law – cf. Matt. 5:17-18.

V. 21 – The A.H. continues to pursue the truth of the necessity of blood for purification. The practice of sprinkling blood for purification was common procedure. It was sprinkled on the altar ( Lev. 8:19,24,30; 9:12 ), on the garments of the high priest ( Ex. 29:21; Lev. 8:30 ), before the tent of meeting ( Num. 19:4 ), before the veil of the sanctuary ( Lev. 4:16-17 ), on the mercy seat once per year ( Lev. 16:14-15 ), and on the doorposts of the Temple ( Ezek. 45:19 ).<sup>2</sup> And these were all 'legal' procedures, but we can't forget the initial sacrifice of blood as Israel became a dependent nation in Exod. 12:21-27 – the blood applied was physical salvation of the firstborn in every dwelling where the blood was faithfully painted on the door posts on the eve of their redemption.

In v. 22, we find a summary statement to encapsulate the importance of the shedding of blood throughout the OT, and it, in fact, is narrowed down to Jesus' blood in the NT. We all know how critical the blood is for physical life – we 'give' blood, we have our blood tested to see what may be infecting us or to identify a medical issue that may not have even shown symptoms yet. But for God, it has always symbolized life in death – an appeasement of His holiness to cover sins & imperfections, and a symbol of death for us to realize that apart from Christ's applied shed blood, we stand in mortal danger before a Holy God.

Notice the remedy for the very first sin – Gen. 3:6-7, 20-21 – Man's effort to hide sin ( the fig leaves ) was worthless. God's was effective, because if by "skins" Moses means animal skins ( perhaps 2 sheep would be appropriate ), then that first God-provided remedy was the death and blood shedding of 2 innocent animals – animals that Adam himself had named! ( 2:18-19 )

It was Abel's shed blood that cried out to God from the ground when Cain slew him ( Gen. 4:10 ). And in Lev. 17:11, it is stressed by God that the life of the flesh is in that blood. Hence, it is an appropriate symbol of death, which, when applied by faith, gives life.

The various sacrifices in both Leviticus 1-7 and Leviticus 16 overwhelmingly ( not all ) involved the shedding of blood, even though some sacrifices were of grain and were offered to express thanksgiving or commitment to God. But when the offering involved forgiveness of sins, blood had to be shed and thus, a death had to occur, and this is precisely what the A.H. tells us, "Without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins."

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<sup>2</sup> Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 278

Jerry Bridges is helpful with this idea:

“It is important for us to note that this God-given system of animal sacrifice united three essential concepts: divine holiness, the consequences of sin, and the necessity of God’ intervention to supply the means of forgiveness. The atoning animal-substitute deaths were intended to impress those truths on every heart.

The great symbolic truth here is that God will not forfeit his holiness to his love. God will not allow his mercy to violate the spotless integrity of his uncompromised justice. By establishing the principle of sacrifice and its symbolism, God revealed that a satisfaction of divine justice was the only path to reconciliation between himself, a holy God, and sinful man. He heralded the indispensable necessity of atonement by a substitutionary death.

These sacrifices were not made merely as acts of homage to an invisible king, or as a renewal of allegiance, or as expressions of repentance; the purpose of the sacrifice was always atonement compensation made for sin, forgiveness and restored covenant favor with God. Without atonement, the sacrifice was meaningless, for “under the law almost everything is purified with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” ( Heb. 9:22 ).”<sup>3</sup>

Ray Stedman adds:

“Death was the penalty for breaking the covenant. Ray Stedman writes of this blood; “It was meant to impress on them that sin cannot be set aside, even by a loving God, without a death occurring. His judicial sentence, “The soul who sins is the one who will die ( Ezek. 18:4 ), must be carried out. The point was that the mark of death was upon this covenant and all its ordinances and stipulations.”<sup>4</sup>

## Once for All

vv. 23-26

“Hebrews 9 also presents a philosophy of history, very much in accord with Augustine’s “City of God”. Hebrews 9:23-28 provides a point of entry by recounting Christ’s return into heaven after his death and resurrection. We must always remember that Christ’s ascension is linked to the cross; it is all part of one integrated work in his first coming. Jesus was born of a woman under the law in order to be a fitting representative for man. He was made perfect under the law, so that he would have an accomplished righteousness to offer up to God. Both of these truths have frequently been emphasized in the Book of Hebrews ( e.g., 2:20-18; 5:9; 7:28 ). Jesus died on the cross to bear our sins, was raised from the dead by the Father in acceptance of that sacrifice, and finally ascended into heaven to reign forever as priest and king and to send the Holy Spirit for the salvation of his people. All of this forms one integrated work, centered on the cross.”<sup>5</sup>

Verse 23 begins with “thus” ( i.e., ‘therefore’ ), and this time it refers to vv. 15-22. Since blood was required to activate the NC, then it follows that death was a critical element for forgiveness of sins.

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<sup>3</sup> Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington, The Great Exchange, Crossway, 2007, p. 50

<sup>4</sup> Ray Stedman, cited in Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 316

<sup>5</sup> Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 316

When the A.H. refers to “*these rites*” purify the copies of “*the heavenly things*”, he of course means the tabernacle and temple ( see Heb. 8:5 & the lesson notes on that verse ). And the author goes on “*But the heavenly things themselves [ of which the tabernacle and temple were copies ] with better sacrifices than these.*” Obviously, we realize that heaven itself is not defiled or in need of any cleansing, and contrary to FF Bruce, this does not refer to our consciences. No, the author is here referring to the propitiation of God’s wrath – the Father who is in heaven ( Matt. 6:9 ) is the recipient of the appeasement sought and apprehended by the Son’s successful sacrifice. That this is the most important aspect of the cross is highlighted in Romans 3:21-26. The cross displayed God’s righteousness, which, had it not done that, would not have allowed Him, as holy, to forgive our sins. The heavens did not require cleansing, but the stench of our sins needed to be finally eradicated from God’s nostrils.

It was to this one-time sacrifice that all of the OT rituals, types, and prophecies were pointing.

Verse 24 enhances what v. 23 says, telling us that Christ did not enter “*holy places made by hands*” [ tabernacle, temple ] “*which are copies ( 8:5; 9:23 ) of the true things*”, even though when He offered Himself up, it was as an incarnated Man. No – even as a real man, He did not go into the earthly Holy of Holies as a High Priest, as the earthly high priest would, to deal with our sin problem in an eternal way, a once-for-all way, effectively putting an end to a sacrificial system that was just a shadow of what He did, pointing to this finalized event.

In the earthly Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant represented at least two things: (1) God’s dwelling presence, and (2) the Law ( inside the Ark ), which we had broken and which created the rift between man and God. So, as Mediator and supreme sacrifice, Christ “*appeared in the presence of God on our behalf*”. Richard Phillips points out;

“This ark and the ten commandments represents mans’ greatest problem. Our first problem is not our relationship with other people, not our jobs, and not our finances. Our problem is that we stand in judgment before His throne. We are in jeopardy of eternal damnation. This is the heavenly reality symbolized by the ‘earthly copy’ – that was the ark of the covenant.”<sup>6</sup>

In vv. 25-26 the author provides another contrast between the earthly and heavenly tabernacles and that is this fact: Jesus did not need to perform this sacrifice repeatedly, and He did not do so with blood that was not His own. His entrance into heaven after His singular sacrifice of shedding His blood on the cross brings a fulfillment of His offering, thus proving its effectiveness. This is of course seen in His resurrection. When compared to OT sacrifices of the thousands of priests and the high priest, which was repetitive ad nauseum, only temporarily effective until the next offering, Christ’s offering was unique – “once-for-all” – and effective to produce the results intended and planned for since before the foundation of the world by God ( cf. Eph. 1:11 ).

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Phillips, p. 324

The ‘every year’ is more than a hint that the A.H. and the Holy Spirit has in mind the Day of Atonement, and the High Priest’s annual entrance into the Holy of Holies, which was never intended to be a permanent ‘fix’ for man’s condition before God. A further point of contrast is provided, by stating in the negative “*with blood not his own*” – which highlights the OT high priest, who entered the chamber with the blood of an animal ( Lev. 16 ), but Christ’s own blood was the offering He brought into the reality of heaven’s tabernacle, into God the Father’s presence.

This verse is of extreme importance in the argument of Hebrews. Jesus’ sacrificial, cleansing work, were it not effectual, would never be finished and He would be required to suffer often “*since the foundation of the world.*” But that is not the way that God has crafted His program of redemption. Note what the verse says, “*He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages...*” IOW – at a particular point in world history ( Gal. 4:4 ), He was incarnated for this particular purpose ( “Born to Die” ), and this is also expressed in John 1:14, and in Hebrews 1:2, we see this verse as an echo of the opening points of this letter, “*...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*” The last days, the end of the ages, and the fulfillment of God’s promises have arrived in Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Also note I Pet. 1:20 & I Cor. 10:11. Sin has not been set aside through animal sacrifices performed by solely human priests, but by this particular High Priest – the self-sacrifice of the Messiah! Notice what Philip Hughes points out:

“Unless Christ’s offering, in contrast to the offerings of old, which because of their imperfection had constantly to be repeated, was perfect and therefore complete and final, it could hardly have claimed as an advance on the Levitical system in that it too would have required repetition. Yet, while it is readily conceivable that a high priest should repeatedly offer up as sacrifices victims other than himself, involving the shedding of blood other than his own, it is not conceivable that a man should offer up himself to death more than once. For one thing, as verse 27 is about to remind us, “it is appointed unto man once to die”. For another, the repetition of sacrifices under the former system necessitated a multiplicity of victims for the same reason that no victim was able to suffer and die more than once. Again, even assuming the possibility of Christ’s suffering repeatedly, say for each successive generation from the foundation of the world onward, this would have argued for the limited and inadequate effectiveness of his self-offering, which in turn would overthrow the whole argument of the epistle. He appeared once for all, argues Calvin, “because if he had come a second or third time there would have been a defect in the first sacrifice which would deny its fulness.”<sup>8</sup>

This cleansing, this putting away of sins by Christ’s unique blood is the turning point of history. When Hebrews says, “*He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages...*” it is that very point that is being pressed in v. 26 & in fact, in the entirety of the Book of Hebrews. Here, Richard Phillips again offers a worthwhile comment;

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<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, p. 286

<sup>8</sup> Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 385-386

“Before Christ went into the heavens, having died on the cross and been raised from the dead, there was no way for sinners to have fellowship with the holy God. It had been promised and symbolized, that is true. That is what OT Israel was all about. But when our great high priest entered into heaven with his own saving blood, everything changed forever for those who come to God through him. His appearing there for us is the definitive act of history so far as the salvation of sinners is concerned.”<sup>9</sup>

## Death: The Great Equalizer

vv. 27-28

If you are a person who has witnessed to anyone, and have been able to engage in a meaningful Gospel conversation as a result, you have likely used this verse. It can be an effective part of a biblical apologetic, because people can relate to it because, in their experience, they have loved ones, friends, teachers, neighbours, co-workers, etc. who have died. So, although they have not experienced it personally, they are quite aware of death’s encroachment on life, because they have observed and experienced it in the death of loved ones, and yet, like most people, attempt to suppress it.

This verse, the first half of a sentence that ends in v. 28, is written by the A.H. to connect certain death with certain judgment. It is a useful way to add ‘meat’ to what has preceded it in chapter 9, which speaks of sacrifice, death and blood, and the need for a Mediator – take note especially of v. 22. The argument is critical here, because death does not just end life, or why would there be any judgment at all? And then, why is there a need for the forgiveness of sins before the end of this life?

These 2 verses are more than implying this fact: God’s redemptive work is related to the personal history of every single person ever born or who will ever be born on this planet. First of all, *“It is appointed for man to die once...”*. Appointed by whom? Our life is held in God’s hands, because He is the giver and sustainer of every life – note Acts 17:22-26. Notice the phrase, *“having determined allotted periods”* (ESV) or *“their pre-appointed times”* (NKJV). According to Paul, this was appointed by (v. 24) *“The God who made the world and everything in it...”* Note Psalm 139:13-16; Job 14:5; both passages speak of the specific limits of life that God has established for each person and there are plenty of other passages which also give God the glory / credit for every life and every death.

Verse 27 continues to tell us that once death has come, judgment follows. Again, this begs the question, “Judgment by whom?” Judgment after death more than implies some conscious ability to acknowledge such judgment after physical life is over. But what does this judgment entail, where does it occur and who is the judge?

Although there are 3 major judgments of the dead identified in Scripture: (1) The Bema Seat of Christ judgment – for believers only ( I Cor. 3:11-15; II Cor. 5:10 ); (2) The judgment of the sheep and goats ( Matt. 25:31-46 ) which takes place just prior to

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Phillips, p. 325

entrance into the Millennial Kingdom on earth; and (3) The Great White Throne Judgment ( Rev. 20:11-15 ). Only the damned are at the GWTJ. Daniel 7:9-10 & 12:1-2 describe the GWT at the end of time. In Matthew 10:26-33, Jesus tells us that it is God who is in control of every soul in life and in death. John 5:22 tells us that God has given the authority of judgment to His Son. Other verses say the same thing – cf. Acts 17:31-32; JN 6:40; 2 Tim. 4:1 & Romans 2:16.

So death and judgment are certainties, but only believers in Christ will not be condemned ( Rom. 8:1 ) because by grace through faith, their sin has been carried and paid for in full by Jesus Christ's Calvary sacrifice. There is therefore no need for Christians to stand at the GWTJ – they no longer are responsible for the sins they have committed – cf. Romans 7:24; 2 Cor. 5:21, and Romans 5, etc.

Verses 27-28 also rule out the Post-Mortem Evangelism theories put forth by soft-hearted but soft-headed 'theologians' such as Clark Pinnock and others. He bases his idea that people who die unsaved will be confronted with a chance to repent after death but prior to being judges and sent to hell, based on 2 passages – I Peter 3:19-20 & 4:6. However, Hebrews 9:27-28 refute this idea and this interpretation of these I Peter passages. The idea of PME was developed in rebellion against the sovereignty of God in salvation by Arminian thinkers.

The Roman Catholic 'doctrine' of Purgatory is a theory which attempts to soften the blow of the reality of death and hell, and also hangs on the thread of only 2 verses – Matthew 12:31-32. Here, in RC doctrine, almost every person who dies does not ( cannot ) go immediately to heaven or hell, but rather to a place called 'Purgatory', where some remaining sins – those stubborn ones Jesus simply could not root out – are purged or burned off by sufferings until the debt is fully paid. Of course, the deceased's loved ones are encouraged to donate money to the RC Church to help speed up the process. Then the person, unseen by anyone on earth, can finally enter heaven. As ridiculous as this sounds, millions of people believe it, and it was a key element of RC doctrine ( along with trans-substantiation ) which was behind the Protestant rebellion we call the Reformation.

However, the Bible is extremely clear that judgment follows death, and that those not saved by Christ will "*Go away into eternal punishment.*" ( Matt. 25:46 ). John 8:24 and John 3:18 make it plain that those who refuse Christ will perish ( physical death, followed by eternal, conscious death in hell ) – cf. Rev. 14:9-12; 20:11-15 & II Thess. 1:7-9.

Of course there are difficult questions to answer – such as, "What about those who never hear the gospel?", and "What about babies, infants and those without the capacity to comprehend the gospel and exercise faith in Christ?" There are answers to both of these questions provided by thoughtful evangelical theologians, none of which involve PME theories.

With this topic, it is relatively easy to lose sight of the passage itself because so much conjecture and societal rejection against the raw theology of these 2 verses, but let's read v. 28 again see how this chapter wraps up.

The point of these verses is to show that Jesus' death and appearance in heaven as our redeemer is a once-for-all event that changes everything! His death was effectual – it achieved what He meant it to achieve. It happened only once ( “it is appointed unto man once to die” ). His blood offering was 100% sufficient to save everyone God intended to save and need not be repeated even once more, let alone year after year!

From our own limited perspective, we discover – to our alarm – that we have to live with the continuing reality of sin in our lives. We contemplate a judgment we are now quite aware of and we try desperately to seek forgiveness out of our own resources and capacity to repent, but in and of ourselves, even saved, we do not have the ability to maintain an unblemished life by our faith. But we are saved by Christ, not our faith – by His grace through faith. Until we die, we are not done with sinning. His death saved us, and that was once-for-all, there is nothing for us to add, we are only to trust in Him.

According to v. 28, we eagerly await His return. He was offered once to ‘bear the sins of many’, so if you are a believer, although you still sin on occasion, Jesus has borne the wrath of God that your sin – all of it – past present and future, has earned. We still must contend with sin, and strive to be holy, and fight temptation off because sin has been defeated, but not eradicated in you completely until you die or are raptured and enter into glory. ( cf., Rom. 8:18-25 ).

The cross is the turning point, the focal point of human history. Of that, there can be no doubt, but it is not the end of history. Our verse tells us “He...will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

John Owen says,

“Faith in the second coming of Christ is sufficient to support the souls of believers, and to give them satisfactory consolation in all difficulties, trials and distresses. All true believers do live in a waiting, longing expectation of the coming of Christ. It is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of a sincere believer to do so...At the second appearance of Christ there will be an end of the business about sin, both on His part and ours.”<sup>10</sup>

“Judgment is inevitable. Sin is not. We will not have to put up with sin forever. It is not simply the way things are or always will be. It has been dealt with, and even as we war against it still, we know a victor's crown lies not far ahead.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Owen cited by Richard Phillips in Hebrews, p. 330-331

<sup>11</sup> R. Phillips, p.331