



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Christ's Once for All Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:23-28

October 18, 2009

²³Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

- ❖ One of the most famous expressions in our modern vernacular reportedly originated on January 10, 49, B.C., when Julius Caesar led his army across the River Rubicon in northern Italy. This simple act by Julius Caesar represented an act of defiance of the Roman Senate and it also sparked a long and bloody civil war which would ultimately lead to his assassination.
- ❖ Yet, as he ordered his troops across the River, he reportedly declared, “**the die is cast.**”
- ❖ What Caesar meant was simple: by crossing the River Rubicon, he and his troops had crossed the “point of no return.” **This act was so significant** that once they made this step, things would never be the same again for him, his troops, or even for Roman Empire.
- ❖ Author and historian David Schwartz explains, “[Caesar] meant that he had made his decision, and success or failure was now in the hands of Fortune [the Roman

Goddess of Luck]. This was one of the most momentous decisions in Roman history, and therefore Western Civilization, and its author put it down a roll of the proverbial dice.”

- ❖ Yet, as significant as Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon was, it most certainly was not the most momentous act in history.
- ❖ Yet, as we read the Book of Hebrews, it is clear from our author that, in his mind, the most pivotal event in all of history was atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ Since Christ’s birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, things have never been, nor will the ever be, the same again.
- ❖ Contrary to the ancient Greeks, and many modern-day atheists, history is not cyclical. It is linear, and all ancient events looked forward to, and all modern events look back to, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ And this is the focus of **Hebrews 9:23-28**.
- ❖ These six Verses focus on the three “Appearings” of Jesus Christ: (1) His Incarnation; (2) His Ascension); (3) His Second Coming.

- 1. At His First Appearing (The Incarnation) Christ Dealt with Sin**
- 2. At His Second Appearing (The Ascension) Christ Purified the Heavenly Things**
- 3. At His Third Appearing (The Second Coming) Christ will Save His People (and Judge His Enemies)**

I. At His First Appearing (The Incarnation) Christ Dealt with Sin

²⁴For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

²⁵**Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own,** ²⁶**for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.** ²⁷**And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,** ²⁸**so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...**

- Few passages in all of Scripture speak to the definitive and absolute nature of Christ’s sacrifice than Hebrews 9:28: **“So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...”**

- Furthermore, with tremendous force, the author states, in **Verse 26**, “[**Christ**] **has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.**”
 - This was the expressed purpose of His first coming: **to put away sin..**
 - Yet, notice *when* Christ appeared: **at the end of the ages.**
 - The point was that Christ’s first coming was so significant, that it marked the end of one ages (past). It ushered it, as our author states at the beginning of this epistle, “**these last days.**”
 - Furthermore, the words “**at the end of the age**” point to a time of fulfillment, **an appointed time.**
 - Matthew speaks of the significance of Christ’s coming in a similar fashion, calling it the “consummation of the age” (Matthew 13:39, 49; 24:3; 28:20); Peter calls it the “end of the times” in 1 Peter 1:20.
 - This is also what the Apostle Paul is speaking of when he writes, in **Galatians 4:4-5** (see also 1 Corinthians 10:11):

⁴But when **the fullness of time** had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- The point of our author (and the author New Testament authors) is clear: **Christ’s first coming occurred at EXACTLY the point in time when God the Father ordained it. Christ’s coming was just how – and when – God had planned it. It was not an after-thought.**

- Notice, though, the **purpose** of Christ’s first coming:

²⁵**Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own,** ²⁶**for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.** But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages **to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.** ²⁷And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸**so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...**

- First of all, the author explains that the purpose of Christ’s first coming was **NOT** to offer Himself repeatedly (as the High Priest would offer sacrifices repeatedly, year after year on the Day of Atonement).

- Notice the contrast between Christ’s sacrifice and those in the Old Covenant, from **Verse 25**: (1) Christ offered Himself once; (2) The blood Christ offered was His own.
- Notice the logic here as well: if Christ came as an Old Testament High Priest, offering someone – or something – else’s blood, the sacrifice would need to be repeated continually (“**Since the foundation of the world**”).
 - The same Greek word (“repeatedly”) is used in **Hebrews 10:11**: “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”
 - Notice, here, the death of animals in the Old Covenant could not effectively take away sins and cleanse the conscience. Not only this, it had to be repeated again and again.

John Brown writes, “The general principle involved in these words is, plainly, that in expiating the victim must correspond in dignity to the nature of the offenses expiated, and the value of the blessings secured. Animal blood might expiate ceremonial guilt and secure temporary blessings, but in order to secure the expiation of moral guilt and the attainment of eternal blessings, a nobler victim must bleed.”

- The author’s point is clear: **Christ’s First Coming, and subsequent sacrifice, was a ONCE-FOR-ALL, NEVER-TO-BE-REPEATED event.** It was sufficient to save every man who has ever lived, yet it was effective for “all who are called.”
- This truth underscore the blasphemy of the Roman Catholic Mass as well.

Roman Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott explains the necessity of the Mass in Roman Catholic theology, writing, “The holy Mass is a true and proper sacrifice. It is physical and propitiatory, removing sins and conferring the grace of repentance. Propitiated by the offering of this sacrifice, God, by granting the grace of the gift and the gift of Penance, remits trespasses and sins however grievous they may be.”

- In others words, the Roman Catholic Mass is **necessary** to remove sins.

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Yet, **praise be to God** that His sacrifice alone was sufficient to remove our sins (EXPIATION) and satisfy the wrath of God (PROPITIATION). This is also why it is proper to say that we are NOT saved by **faith** (which changes), but rather, we are saved by God’s **grace** which does not change. And that unchanging grace of God which saves us is based upon and rooted in the **ONCE-FOR-ALL sacrifice** of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

- ❖ Finally, the author states that Christ’s appearing was to **bear the sins of many**. This statement is a clear reference to the Suffering Servant passage of **Isaiah 53:12**: “...yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”
- ❖ Consider as well **1 John 3:5**: “You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.”

II. At His Second Appearing (The Ascension) Christ Purified the Heavenly Things

□ Our author writes, in **Verses 23-24**: “²³Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”

- Verse 23 is a difficult passage to understand, and commentators have offered varying interpretations of the passage.

○ **What is clear is that the author is comparing the cleansing of the items in the Old Covenant tabernacle by the High Priest (with the blood of bulls and goats) with the cleansing of the corresponding “heavenly things” by Christ with His blood.**

- Yet, if heaven is perfect and free of defilement, “Why would the heavenly things need to be cleansed?”
- **There are several possibilities:**

1. The furniture in the Old Testament tabernacle represented various aspects of our supreme privilege of relating to and having fellowship with the holy God of Israel. The lampstand represented God’s revelatory light; the table of showbread (or presence, faces) spoke to our intimacy face-to-face with God; the altar of incense speaks to the privilege of prayer. However, since we have sinned, we are no longer worthy of the privilege of divine fellowship. **Therefore, the application of Christ’s blood to the “heavenly things” represents the purification of each of the aspects of our relationship with God the Father.** Richard Phillips states, “[With the blood of Christ] applied to every aspect of our relationship with God who lives in heaven, there are forgiveness, acceptance, blessing, light, and life. The cleansing blood provides us with a relationship with God in this life and secures for us a place in heaven.”
2. Another interpretation is that Christ’s blood does not purify heaven, for heaven needs no purification; however, it sets heaven apart as the place where sinful man

can approach and meet God. It is the place where we can approach the throne of grace, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, “just as the earthly sanctuary was purified by sacrificial blood and set apart as the place where sinful humans could approach God, so also the true, heavenly sanctuary has now been set apart by the sacrifice of Christ as a meeting place for sinful people to enter, drawing near to God through the blood of Jesus.”

3. Another interpretation is by F.F. Bruce who proposes that the author is building upon the truth that the blood of Christ, unlike the blood of goats and bulls, “purifies our consciences” (**Hebrews 9:14**). He writes, “...the people of God are the house of God, that His dwelling-place is in their midst. It is they who need inward cleansing, not only that their approach to God may be free from defilement, but that they may be a fit habitation for him. Just as the tabernacle in the wilderness, together with its furniture, had to be anointed and sanctified so that God might manifest his presence there among his people and they might serve him there, so the people of God themselves need to be cleansed and hallowed in order to become “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).” Consider as well **1 Peter 2:5**, “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

A.W. Pink seems to echo this interpretation, “Yet there was also an internal ‘purification’ of most of these ‘heavenly things.’ The souls and consciences of the members of the Church were *really* cleansed, purified and sanctified with an inward and spiritual purification: Ephesians 5:25, 26, Titus 2:14. It has been ‘washed’ in the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5) and is thereby cleansed from all sin (1 John 1:7). And Heaven itself, was in some sense purified – as the tabernacle was, because of the sins of the people in whose midst it stood (Leviticus 16:16).”

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- Also, here, the author writes that Christ now appears “in the presence of God on our behalf.”
 - The Greek word here for “presence” is literally “face” (*prosopon*). The point is once again clear that Christ is face-to-face with the Father, at the place of greatest intimacy, on our behalf.
 - Not only this, but He remains there, face-to-face with the Father, unlike the Old Covenant High Priest who had to come out from behind the curtain year after year.
 - Consider the words of Ben Sira, recorded in the Apocryphal Sirach 50:5-10, when he recorded the joy of the people when the High Priest Simon

the Just emerged from the Holy of Holies after performing his duties on the Day of Atonement:

How glorious he was when the people gathered round him as he came out of the inner sanctuary!

Like the morning star among the clouds,
Like the moon when it is full;
Like the sun shining upon the temple of the Most High,
And like the rainbow gleaming in glorious clouds;
Like roses in the days of the first fruits,
Like lilies by a spring of water,
Like a green shoot on Lebanon on a summer day;
Like fire and incense in the censer,
Like a vessel of hammered gold
Adorned with all kinds of precious stones;
Like an olive tree putting forth its fruit,
And like a cypress towering in the clouds.

- **How much more glorious it is though that when Christ entered through the Holy of Holies, He did NOT return, but He tore the curtain and remains face-to-face with the Father on our behalf.**

III. At His Third Appearing (His Second Coming) Christ Will Save His People (and Judge His Enemies)
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- Finally, the author speaks of Christ's **third** appearing, writing, “²⁷And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”
- Here, our author compares the once-appointed death of man to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.
- Our author's point is clear: It is appointed [by God] for man to die once. **Physical death is final.** It is the result of living in a sinful world. This Verse certainly refutes any belief in reincarnation; however, that is not the particular intent of the author.
 - For the author then says, “...and after that comes judgment.”
 - His point is not that *immediately* after physical death comes judgment, but that sequentially after death comes judgment.

- **No man can escape death and judgment, except through the provision of Jesus Christ.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ For it was Christ who was judged on behalf of the many for whom He died.
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- Finally, our author says that Christ will appear a second time **not to deal with sin – FOR THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DEALT WITH AT HIS FIRST COMING**; but, rather, “to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.”
 - Therefore, Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, will appear at the Second Coming and save all of us for whom He died.
 - Yet, Jesus Christ, as the crucified and risen Son of Man, will appear and will judge all who have rejected Him.

Consider the words of the great Puritan John Owen: “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 so to do...At the second appearance of Christ there will be an end of the business of about sin, both on his part and ours.”