

9. The New Covenant and the Old Covenant Compared

Chapter 8 began greatness of Jesus as high priest at the right hand of God, serving in the true sanctuary set up by the Lord. Heb 8:1-2 taught, "1 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man." This same high priest, Jesus, made the old covenant obsolete and established a new and better covenant. Chapter 9 continues to establish the superiority of the new covenant comparing the spiritual nature of the new covenant and the new priesthood in a detailed comparison to the old covenant.

The Gifts and Sacrifices of the Old Covenant Unable to Clear the Conscience of the Worshiper.

Heb 9:1-5. 9:1 Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. 2 A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. 3 Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, 4 which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. 5 Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

The writer begins by listing the specific items provided by the regulations for worship and for the earthly sanctuary under the old covenant of Moses. The items that he lists, but does not discuss, become important to the metaphors and symbols of the rest of this chapter and chapter 10 (See Heb 9:5). Each item is a copy and shadow of what is now in heaven. Heb 8: 5 has already taught this principle: "5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" A copy and a shadow are never the real thing. As one reads forward from this point, the copies and shadows of the old covenant find one to one relationship to what is in the church and in heaven. No ambiguity exists between the old covenant that became obsolete and disappeared and the new covenant that is eternal. The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary have given place to the church and heaven, which constitute the sanctuary of the new order with Christ as high priest and Christians as priests.

Heb 9:6-10. 6 When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. 8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. 10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

Just as the priest of old entered into the outer room to fulfill their ministry, so do Christians today – the holy priesthood of God – minister in the church daily to perform spiritual services and declare the praises of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5 describes our priesthood and spiritual sacrifices we offer, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." This royal priesthood is synonymous with holy nation, which is the church of the

firstborn, Christ. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." The Hebrew writer will summarize the words synonymous with the church and the comparisons begun and developed here in Heb 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the **church of the firstborn**, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Emphasis added.

The gifts and sacrifices of the old covenant could not clear the conscience of the worshiper. They were only external regulations of the old order. In the next paragraph, the writer asserts that the blood of Christ is able to cleanse our consciences.

The Blood of Christ Able to Cleanse Our Consciences

Heb 9:11-14. 11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Christ, as high priest is over the good things that are already here, eliminates any future developments. For example, his priesthood and kingship exists fully in the church and in heaven. There were no, and will be no, developments after his resurrection to the right hand of God. The greater and more perfect tabernacle is the Most Holy Place. What a big difference it is that he entered by his own blood. His blood is unblemished, and the redemption through his blood is eternal. This precious blood of Christ cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death, making it possible for us to serve the living God as priest offering spiritual service. We must not minimize the power that is in the cleansed conscience. Our priestly service begins with the act that brings us to the blood of Christ. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:21-22:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

No Forgiveness without the Shedding of Blood

Heb 9:15-22. 15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

16 In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, 17 because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. 18 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19 When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20 He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." 21 In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. 22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without

the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Christians receive an eternal inheritance, because Christ mediates a new covenant. The Hebrews under the old covenant had no such promise. When he died, he set them free from their sins. This ransom was necessary to put his covenant into effect. In the old covenant, the blood of calves constituted the blood of the covenant, and so it was said, "This is the blood of the covenant." When he instituted the Lord's Supper, Christ dedicated his new covenant forever. Matt 26:27-29 records, "27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.'" The conclusion is obvious: without the shedding of Christ's blood there could be no forgiveness

Christ Appearing Once for All To do Away with Sin by the Sacrifice of Himself

23 It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The blood of Christ is a sacrifice far superior to the copies used under the old covenant. Also, the sanctuary – heaven itself – is the true one. That Jesus appears for us in God's presence is a blessing beyond others. The summary of the discussion is in verse 26, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Verse 27 is an often quoted principle eternal: It is appointed once for a man to die and after that comes the judgment." This truth, which should get the attention of all mankind, is a corollary of another truth: Christ was sacrificed to take away sins; he will appear a second time to bring eternal life to those who are waiting for him.