

“The Mediator of the New Covenant”

Heb. 9:15-28

- INTRO. - The passage of Scripture we are examining today is famous because of v. 22, which says (in part), “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (ESV)
- Our world does *not* understand the necessity of the shedding of blood, but the Bible is very clear on this. It has been said that you can cut the Bible anywhere and blood will flow out.
- The word “blood” is mentioned 427 times in Scripture. Years ago, W. A. Criswell delivered a famous five-hour sermon on “The Scarlet Thread Running Through the Bible.” It was a sermon that traced the theme of blood through the Bible.
- In the introduction to that sermon Criswell wrote, “Skeptics and scoffers may fire their arrows at the validity and historicity of the Scriptures, but believers throughout the centuries have seen this line of crimson weaving through every book of God’s Holy Word. It is the story of the redemption of mankind at the price of the blood of Jesus Christ.”
- The Apostle John wrote (in 1 John 1:7), “the blood of Jesus [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin.” And (of course) at the Last Supper Jesus declared to His disciples, “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
- We must never apologize for the blood of Christ because it is His precious blood that has provided the way into the new covenant and secures the promise of eternal life.
- Now, the second half of Hebrews 9 is a long section on Jesus’ role as the mediator of the new covenant. I don’t think we will get through all of it this morning, but our outline will cover vv. 15-28.
- We have already been told that Jesus is the Mediator of “a better covenant” and we have seen what that new covenant consists of (in 8:7-13, which is from Jer. 31:31-34).
- But *now* (in our present text) we see that the basis of His mediatorship is His sacrificial death. F. F. Bruce writes, “The first covenant provided a measure of atonement and remission for sins committed under it, but it was incapable of providing ‘eternal redemption.’” The best the old covenant could do was to cover over sin temporarily.
- But in contrast, the new covenant is *able* to provide “eternal redemption,” as Jeremiah said, (the Lord declares to those who know the Lord), “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember

no more.” (Jer. 31:34) The new covenant provides permanent, eternal forgiveness of sin.

- But Heb. 9:15-28 focuses on the role of Jesus as “the Mediator of the New Covenant,” and we will take this in four parts. We will see the securing of the stipulation, the symbolism of the sprinkling, the superiority of His sacrifice, and the salvation of His saints.
- That will be our outline for today and next Sunday. But let’s get right to it. The first thing we see (here) is:

I. THE SECURING OF THE STIPULATION (vv. 15-17)

- Look with me at v. 15, “And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order 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.”
- The phrase “for this reason” points back to what he had already said – that Jesus had become the Mediator of a “better covenant.” We saw *that* all the way back in 8:6.
- But notice that *here* (in v. 15) our author is concerned for those who committed transgressions

under the “first covenant.” In other words, this is addressing the subject of the OT saints.

- People often wonder how the OT saints were saved – and the answer is, they were saved the same way we are – by the death of Christ on the cross. They were saved by looking *forward* (in faith) to the Lord’s Messiah, in the same way that people today are saved by looking *back* (in faith) to His atoning work.
- We’re all saved the same way – through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. The difference is, that those who are OT saints were looking *forward* while we are looking *back*. In other words, you *could* say that Christ’s work on the cross was retroactive.
- *Here* we see that part of Christ’s work as the Mediator of the new covenant, is to provide the “promise of the eternal inheritance” to those who committed transgressions under the first covenant.
- This is *not* addressing Christians here. Christians have already been described in this book (in 6:17) as “the heirs of the promise.” But this is bringing in a new category of people. *Now* he is going to include OT saints as “those who have been called” to “receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”
- Now, this doesn’t mean that *everyone* in the OT era was saved. Only the ones who were “called” – only

those who believed God and put their faith in the coming Messiah.

- Of course, only God knows who those people are (in the same way that only God knows who the “elect” are today), but this verse tells us that it was the death of Christ (the Mediator of the new covenant) that provided them with the promise of an eternal inheritance.
- John MacArthur explains, “Because His blood was *not* shed until hundreds or even thousands of years after many Old Testament believers died, their salvation was, so to speak, on credit. By their obedient faith in God they were credited with what Jesus Christ, their promised Messiah, would one day do on *their* behalf and on the behalf of all sinners who *have* ever lived and who *will* ever live.”
- And there is a deeper theological truth here, that God already foreknew them, and that (in God’s mind) the sacrifice to atone for their sin had already been made “before the foundation of the world.”
- The phrase “the called” suggests God’s purpose in election. God did *not* save Israel en masse. He saved those who (in faith) looked forward to the supreme Sacrifice of Christ.

- Although God always has a different perspective than men – from *our* perspective, they were looking forward to the coming of the Lord’s Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ who would ultimately die on the cross and shed His blood to atone for their sins.
- In a sense, you *could* say that the ones who were saved in the Old Testament era were the ones who were looking ahead for the coming of the new covenant.
- They were the ones who understood that they could *not* keep the OT Law, and were putting their trust in the coming of the Messiah to atone fully for their sins.
- They were the ones who understood the sacrifices of the old order as pointing to a greater work of God. They were the ones who (by faith) came to understand that the old covenant was inadequate, and could never provide that “eternal inheritance” – that only the new covenant could do so.
- But go on to v. 16, “For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.” This is written as a statement of what is obvious. It is like saying, “Everybody knows this.”
- Everybody knows that, for a covenant like this to go into effect, the one who made the will has to die. Look at v. 17, “For a covenant is valid *only*

when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.”

- Remember now, this kind of “covenant” was like a “will.” Everybody knows that a will does *not* go into effect until the one who made the will dies. As long as he is alive, he can alter the will, or even annul it – but once he is dead, the will becomes settled.
- And the point (in this section of Hebrews) is that *death* is required to bring the testament (the covenant) into effect. There *has* to be the shedding of blood. It is death that secures the stipulation of the will.
- In fact, the word for “valid” (in v. 17) is the Greek word “bebaia,” which means “guarantee.” Literally, this verse *could* read, “upon the death of the testator the will becomes guaranteed.” But the death of the testator is required to make it effective.
- In fact, as you read through this passage, it becomes obvious that there is a requirement of death. In v. 15 he says “since a death has taken place.” In v. 16 he says, “there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.” In v. 17 he says, “a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead.”
- The one who made the covenant has to die before it goes into effect – and that becomes the theme of this chapter – Christ died in order to establish the

new covenant. In order for us to experience the blessings of the new covenant, there had to be a death.

- But once Christ died, that which was only a “promisory note” became an actual reality. The “eternal inheritance” became real. It became something that was no longer promised for the future, but something they could actually claim as their own.
- And you and I can claim it as well. We are looking back on the cross, but we too can receive the “eternal inheritance” of the new covenant. We too can become spiritual children of Abraham.
- By the way, (before we move on), it is interesting that scholars devote entire pages in commentaries debating whether this “covenant” is a will or *not*.
- The Greek word is “diatheke,” and it can refer to several different kinds of covenants. However, it should be clear to us *here* that it *is* (in fact) referring to a will – because a will (or testament) is the only kind of “diatheke” that depends upon the death of the one who made it.
- Moulton and Milligan point out that, in the papyri and the inscriptions that have been found by archeologists, “the word [diatheke] means *testament*, [or] *will*, with absolute unanimity.”

- This is why the KJV (and other English translations) use the terms “testament” and “testator.” These words are closely associated with another word which means “intestate.”
- It clearly points to what we (today) would call a will. And the people to which the author of Hebrews wrote would have been very familiar with this legal terminology.
- But there is a second element we see in this passage, and that is the element of:

II. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SPRINKLING (vv. 18-22)

- In vv. 18-22 the author ties in the need for *blood* by going back to the old covenant. Before any worship could ever take place in the earthly Tabernacle, everything had to be purified, and that was done through the sprinkling of blood.
- Look with me at v. 18, “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.”

- This is all based on an account in Exodus 24:3-8. *That* passage is in the context of the covenant the people made with God on Mount Sinai. When they agreed to obey the laws of God, Moses took the blood of a sacrifice and sprinkled it on the people and on the “book of the covenant” (the scrolls that contained the law).
- You *could* call this a “blood covenant” because the sprinkling of the blood is what sealed the covenant. Moses declared to the people, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.”
- But the main point (as we see in v. 22) is that the blood of the sacrifice is what purified (or cleansed) the Tabernacle. Without blood there is no cleansing.
- Now, the interesting thing about this, is the fact that the Tabernacle did *not* even *exist* when Moses did this. In the next chapter you see where they began to take up an offering for the construction of the Tabernacle.
- This “sprinkling of blood” was obviously anticipatory of the Levitical system of worship in the Tabernacle (and later the Temple). This was the inauguration of that system, which would require a never-ending flow of blood to atone for sin.

- It was *not* until later – once the Tabernacle was built – that Moses sprinkled the blood over the Tabernacle and all the “vessels” to cleanse it for worship. In other words, Heb. 9:21 talks about something that happened at a later point.
- But by adding the fact that all these other things were sprinkled as well, the author is emphasizing the point that *all* things were purified by blood under the old covenant.
- And the key verse is v. 22. Look at it with me, “And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”
- Why is this true? Why blood? Why does forgiveness require the shedding of blood? The answer is, “Forgiveness is very costly.” That’s not always our perspective, but it is the perspective of God. We often take lightly the forgiveness of God, but it is a very costly thing.
- Sin is more serious to God than we can comprehend. Therefore the ultimate price must be paid to atone for it. The holiness of God is greater than we can fully grasp. This is why the blood of Christ is necessary to cover it.
- And we need to understand -- blood is a symbol of death. This goes back to the very beginning of

creation. When Adam and Eve sinned, God killed an innocent animal to cover them. This was a picture to them that sin is serious and it requires a shedding of blood to deal with it.

- This is why Abel’s offering was accepted by God while Cain’s was *not*. Abel’s was a blood sacrifice. This is what God had apparently communicated to them was required, but Cain brought the fruit of the ground instead. And the response of God (in rejecting Cain’s offering) was intended to re-inforce the fact that blood is always required to deal with sin.
- It connects with the biblical principle that “the wages of sin is death.” That is symbolized by the shedding of blood – and this is the “scarlet thread” that runs through the entire Bible.
- In Egypt, when the death angel was about to take the firstborn of all the Egyptians, the Lord’s people had to take the blood of the Passover lamb and place it over their doorposts as a covering for sin and a protection against God’s judgment.
- Over and over again in Scripture we see where the covering of sin always required the sprinkling of blood. We see it very clearly in the Levitical priesthood and the constant sacrifices of animals in the Tabernacle.

- On the Day of Atonement the high priest had to take blood into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle it on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people. Without the shedding of blood there could be no atonement (no covering) for sin. There couldn't be any forgiveness apart from the blood.
- Of course, *we* understand that all this is pointing to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The blood that was shed under the old covenant was never adequate and never permanent.
- On the other hand, the blood of Christ was absolutely sufficient to atone for sin forever. This is what we see later in this passage. In other words, everything in the old dispensation was a picture (a symbol) of the ultimate atoning work of Christ.
- But think about the scene the author of Hebrews is pointing to here. Why did Moses sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the people (as he inaugurated the covenant of Law)? He did it as a symbolic covering for sin. It was a symbolic cleansing of the sins of the people.
- He's going to tell us (later on) that the blood of bulls and goats was always inadequate to deal with sin, but from the beginning, the blood of a sacrifice was intended by God to point us to the ultimate death of Christ on our behalf.
- People today say, "You have a bloody religion. We need to get rid of all these hymns about blood." I say, "Praise God for the blood that was shed to atone for my sins!!! Don't try to take away the most important element of the gospel! We must never pretend that we could ever have any hope of eternal life apart from the shed blood of Jesus Christ on Calvary."
- Now, that's the *preaching* part, but let's go back to the *teaching* part. Going all the way back to v. 18, what was Moses doing? He was inaugurating the old covenant. He was establishing the fact that the blood of animals was going to be used by God to cleanse the people under the old covenant.
- In Lev. 17:11 God told them, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement."
- The word for "atonement" (there) is the Hebrew word "*kaphar*." It literally means "to cover." The idea is that the blood covers over our sins, so when God looks at us He no longer sees our sin, but He sees the blood of the atonement instead.
- And the truth of the matter is, that this is the only basis in which we can ever enter into the presence of God. We can never enter God's holy presence on the basis of our own efforts. We can never enter

into His presence on the basis of going to church, or doing good things, or being better than most, or because we give generously, or because we are a model citizen.

- No, there is only one basis upon which we can enter into His presence, and that is the basis of the blood of Christ applied to our hearts (through faith) as a covering for our sin.
- It is the atoning death of Christ on Calvary that makes all the difference! In Matt. 26:28 Jesus said, “this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”
- The new covenant was *also* established by blood – but in *this* case it is the precious blood of Christ. And unlike the old covenant, it provides for absolute and eternal atonement for sin.
- Listen, so-called sophisticated people today may object to a “bloody religion” but God does *not*. Blood has always been God’s answer for sin – and that is ultimately true with the blood of Christ.
- Oh my friend, please understand, if the death of Christ had *not* been necessary to win our salvation, God would never have willed it. But it *was* necessary. Without the shedding of His blood we could never have been forgiven.

- Go back to 9:22 for a moment. The word for “forgiveness” is the Greek word “aphesis.” It means “dismissal, release, or pardon.” Some translations have the word “remission” but it has to do with the idea of being released from the guilt of sin.
- Someone who is “pardoned” is someone who does *not* have to answer for their sin. They are released from the penalty of it. That is what the shed blood of Christ has accomplished. Those who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ are set free from the condemnation of sin.
- Now, when v. 22 says “*one may almost say,*” that may point to the fact that there were a couple of exceptions. Someone who was too poor to offer a blood sacrifice could bring an offering of fine flour instead (for example), but this does *not* minimize the main point, that it takes blood to atone for sin. It does *not* negate the emphatic declaration that “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”
- In fact, chapter 9 tells us six important things that sacrificial blood can accomplish: it provides access (v. 7), it purges the conscience (v. 14), it inaugurates covenants (v. 18), it consecrates people (v. 19), it cleanses cultic instruments (v. 21), and it purges many things under Old Testament law.

- But, of course, all *that* was imperfect under the old covenant, but has become fully efficient under the new. All of that pointed to the true spiritual cleansing of the grace of God under the provisions of the new covenant.
- That is clearly laid out in the next section, but we are going to stop here for today. The bottom line is that all those who have the blood of Christ applied to their hearts through saving faith have a full pardon from sin and inherit eternal life.
- The atoning work of Christ on the cross is absolutely sufficient to permanently cleanse and purify us forever. Nothing else ever needs to be added to that. When Jesus Christ washes away our sins, He does an absolutely perfect and eternal work.
- We have freedom from the past and victory for the future. It doesn't matter how shameful our past may have been, we can live in victory in the present and in full assurance of the future – knowing that His blood has cleansed us fully and completely and eternally.
- MAKE APPEAL
- PRAYER