

The Book of Hebrews

Lesson 9: Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice -- Hebrews 9:1-28

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel did something no one else could do and no one else was allowed to watch. He passed through the veil into the Most Holy Place, the inner room where the ark of the covenant stood, and there, in the thick darkness, he sprinkled blood before the mercy seat. It was the holiest moment in the religious calendar, and it was also a confession of failure. The very fact that he had to do it again every single year was proof that it never finally worked. The blood of bulls and goats could buy another year, but it could never wash a conscience clean. The door to God's presence opened a crack, once a year, for one man, and then closed again.

The writer of Hebrews walks us through that old sanctuary with great care, describing the lampstand, the table, the bread, the golden altar, the ark, the cherubim. And then he tells us what it all meant. By this arrangement, he says, the Holy Spirit was indicating that the way into the holy places had not yet been opened as long as the first section was still standing. The whole elaborate system was a parable, a living lesson, saying over and over that the gifts and sacrifices offered could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper. They dealt with outward, ceremonial cleanness. They could not reach the guilty heart. Something more was needed, something the old system could only point toward but never provide.

Then comes the turn, and it is glorious. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. He did not enter a tent made by hands; He entered heaven itself. He did not bring the blood of animals; He offered Himself, without blemish, to God. And here is the question the writer wants ringing in your ears: if the blood of bulls and goats could make people outwardly clean, how much more will the blood of Christ purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? The thing the old system could never do, Christ did. He cleansed the conscience.

And He did it once. This is the drumbeat of the chapter, struck again and again: once for all. He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 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. The old priests stood and offered, stood and offered, year after year, and the work was never done. Christ offered one sacrifice and sat down, and the work was finished forever. There is nothing to add. There is nothing to repeat. It is done.

Group Discussion: Under the old covenant, the same sacrifices had to be offered over and over, year after year, and never finally took away sin. What does the endless repetition of the old sacrifices reveal about their limits, and why does it matter so much that Christ offered Himself only once?

Personal Reflection: The writer says the blood of Christ can purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Is there a guilt or shame on your conscience that you have never let the blood of Christ fully cleanse? What would it mean to bring it to Him now?

Read Hebrews 9:1–28

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 through 10 the writer describes the old tabernacle and its rituals, then says these regulations dealt only with outward matters and could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper. What does this teach about the purpose and the limits of the old sacrificial system?
2. The writer says the old sacrifices could cleanse the body outwardly but could not perfect the conscience. Where in your life are you settling for outward, surface-level religion when Christ is offering to cleanse you at the level of your conscience and heart?
3. Verses 11 and 12 say that Christ entered once for all into the holy places, not by the blood of goats and calves but by His own blood, securing an eternal redemption. What does this teach about the nature and the result of Christ's sacrifice compared to the old sacrifices?
4. Verse 14 asks how much more the blood of Christ will purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. What are the dead works that weigh on your conscience, and what would it look like to be freed from them to serve God with a clean heart?
5. Verses 15 through 22 explain that Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, and that His death redeems people from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. What does this teach about why the death of Christ was necessary to establish the new covenant?
6. The chapter stresses that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, and that Christ shed His own blood for you. How does meditating on the costliness of your forgiveness change the way you treat the sin in your life and the grace you have received?
7. Verses 24 through 26 say that Christ entered heaven itself to appear in the presence of God on our behalf, and that He has appeared once for all to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. What does it mean that Christ is now appearing before God for you, and that He put away sin by a single sacrifice?
8. Verse 28 says Christ will appear a second time to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. What would it look like for you to live this week as someone who is eagerly waiting for the return of Christ?
9. Verses 25 through 28 emphasize that Christ does not offer Himself repeatedly, but appeared once for all to put away sin by a single sacrifice, never to be repeated. Some teach that Christ's sacrifice is re-presented or offered again in an ongoing way. Using this passage, how would you show that Christ's sacrifice was offered once for all and is complete, and what that means for how we approach God and remember His death?
10. Look back across the whole chapter. The writer wants you to rest in the finished, once-for-all sacrifice of Christ that opened the way into God's presence. Name one specific way the completeness of Christ's sacrifice gives you confidence and freedom this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Leviticus 16:1–34, the Day of Atonement and the high priest entering the Most Holy Place; Romans 3:23–26, God presenting Christ as the sacrifice that satisfies His justice; 1 Peter 1:18–19, redeemed not with perishable things but with the precious blood of Christ; Hebrews 10:11–14, the contrast between the standing priests and the seated Christ; 1 John 1:7–9, the blood of Jesus cleansing us from all sin.