

# Hebrews

## God's Remedy for Guilt

### Hebrews 9:1-14

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#### INTRODUCTION:

Our society has thrown out guilt as a bad carryover from our Puritan past. Movie stars and celebrities not only cast off their guilt, but also go on TV to boast about their shameful deeds. Even Christians who have fallen into sin explain how they have come to feel good about themselves in spite of their failures. They complain about self-righteous, judgmental Christians who will not accept their “shortcomings” and therefore feel they are much better.

The Bible declares that all of us are guilty before the bench of God’s holy justice. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That is the true compass for our lives. The Bible teaches that guilt is more than just a bad feeling. It is true moral reality that alienates us from God and brings us under His decreed penalty of eternal punishment in the lake of fire. But, thankfully, the Bible also declares that God has provided a remedy for our guilt. It is vital that we understand and apply this remedy personally.

The Hebrew Christians were tempted to leave the Christian faith and return to Judaism. The author is showing them why that would be spiritually fatal. The old covenant under Moses was inferior to the new covenant that Jesus initiated. The Levitical priests under the old covenant were sinful, mortal men, as contrasted with Jesus, our sinless priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. In our text, he shows that the old covenant sacrificial system was temporary and imperfect. It could not provide a clear conscience for the worshipers. God designed that old system to point ahead to the superior, final sacrifice of our high priest, Christ, who offered His own blood to obtain for us eternal redemption and a clear conscience. Thus his point is that...“God’s remedy for guilt is the blood of Christ”.

#### All Stand and Read Scripture

##### **Hebrews 9:1-14 (NASB95)**

9 Now even the first *covenant* had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. <sup>2</sup> For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which *were* the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. <sup>3</sup> Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, <sup>4</sup> having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; <sup>5</sup> and above it *were* the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

<sup>6</sup> Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, <sup>7</sup> but into the second, only the high priest

*enters* once a year, not without *taking* blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. <sup>8</sup> The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, <sup>9</sup> which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, <sup>10</sup> since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; <sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

We will examine the text under three points: the imperfection of the old sacrificial system; what Christ's sacrifice of Himself accomplished; and, the practical result, that we now can serve the living God.

## Prayer

### BODY:

#### I. The Old Sacrificial System Pointed Ahead to Christ.

The first ten verses of our text this morning falls into two sections:

##### **A. God Designed the Earthly Tabernacle as a Picture of Christ.**

The Bible only devotes two chapters to the story of creation, but it gives about 50 chapters concerning the tabernacle. It was the center of Jewish worship under the old covenant. The author mentions the tabernacle, which was portable and could be disassembled and reassembled as they wandered in the wilderness, rather than the temple because the tabernacle was introduced immediately after the old covenant was instituted. Also, the tabernacle was obviously more temporary than the temple, which fits the author's point here. As we saw in verse five, the design of the tabernacle and its worship was not left up to human ideas, but God revealed everything in great detail to Moses on the mountain. The whole thing was an Old Testament portrait of Jesus Christ.

The author omits any reference to the courtyard, which contained the bronze altar for sacrifices and the bronze laver or basin. His purpose centers on the tabernacle itself, because he wants to compare and contrast it with the true tabernacle in heaven, where Jesus entered into the very presence of God.

The tabernacle was divided into two sections. The outer section, called the holy place, was about 30 long, 15 feet wide, and 15 feet high. The inner section, the Holy of Holies, was a 15-foot cube. On the left in the holy place, as the priest entered, was a solid gold lampstand with seven branches filled with pure olive oil. Since there were no windows, this provided the only source of light. On the right was the table that held the 12 loaves of sacred bread. Farther in, and to the center just outside the veil that divided the holy place from the Holy of Holies, was the altar of incense.

Inside the Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant, measuring about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide and 27 inches high, which contained (in earliest times) a golden jar of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. The covering of the ark was called the mercy seat. It was overshadowed by two cherubim of glory, so called because it was there that the glory of God's presence was manifested. The high priest sprinkled the blood from the sacrifices on this mercy seat.

The author does not explain the symbolic meaning of any of these things, but hurries on to his point, that these things were temporary and looked ahead to Christ. But let me comment briefly. The lampstand pictures Christ as the one who illumines the things of God through the Holy Spirit (the oil) to those who draw near. The table of sacred bread pictures Christ as the sustenance of His chosen people and their communion with Him. The altar of incense shows Christ interceding for His people in God's presence.

The ark pictured the very presence of God. The golden jar of manna shows Christ as the daily bread of His people. Aaron's rod that budded shows Christ, the branch, chosen above others because He alone is life-giving. The tables of the covenant reveal God's holy standards. Neither the pot of manna nor Aaron's rod existed in Solomon's time, but the two stone tables were still there.

### **1 Kings 8:9 (NASB95)**

<sup>9</sup> There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

The ark itself apparently disappeared when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 B.C. The later temple only contained a stone slab in the Holy of Holies.

The author moves on to describe the familiar tabernacle ritual which was a picture of the work of Christ:

### **B. The Ministry of the Priests is a Picture of the Work of Christ.**

He summarizes the common activities of the priests in verse 6. They went into the outer tabernacle to trim the lamps and to put fresh incense on the altar. Once a week they would replace the sacred loaves of bread.

But verse 7 focuses on the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could go in there, once a year, on the Day of Atonement. He would first offer a **bull** for his own sins. He would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood of the bull on the mercy seat and in front of it. Then he would go back out and slaughter one of two goats as a sin offering for the people and take this blood into the mercy seat. He would go back out and lay his hands on the living goat, confessing over it the sins of the people. They would lead this goat out into the wilderness and let it go. This goat was referred to as a scapegoat.

The author calls attention to the fact that the old system provided a way for forgiveness "for the sins of the people committed in ignorance". The Law stipulated that there was no sacrifice for sins of defiance.

### **Numbers 15:30-31 (NASB95)**

<sup>30</sup> But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. <sup>31</sup> Because

he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *will be on him.*”

There is a sense, of course, in which virtually all of our sins stem from defiance toward God. But if our sin is deliberate and we have a blasphemous behavior toward God, that is a sign of apostasy, for which there is no sacrifice.

### **Hebrews 10:26-31 (NASB95)**

<sup>26</sup> For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses.* <sup>29</sup> How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” <sup>31</sup> It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The annual Day of Atonement ritual would have underscored to Israel a number of vital spiritual truths. It portrayed the absolute holiness of God and how our sin separates us from entering His presence. It showed the sin and defilement of all of the people, including the high priest. It showed that no one dared to enter God’s holy presence without the blood of an acceptable sacrifice. It showed that the people must approach God through the proper mediator, the high priest. It showed that if the proper sacrifice was offered, God would be propitiated or satisfied, so that He would not judge their sins. But, as glorious as all of this ritual was, it was inadequate, for two main reasons:

#### **1. The Old System Provided Limited Access to God.**

None of the people and not even all of the priests could enter the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could go there, and that only once a year, with blood. It was not a cozy place where he put his feet up on the hearth and had a warm conversation with God! He had to make sure that he had the ritual down perfectly, or it would be his last trip into that sacred sanctuary!

The author attributes the Old Testament account to the Holy Spirit.

### **Hebrews 9:8 (NASB95)**

<sup>8</sup> The Holy Spirit *is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the **outer tabernacle** is still standing,*

While the tabernacle still stood there was no way into God's Presence. There was no access. The people could not even get into the holy place, much less in the Holy of Holies. The whole thing was meant to prove that without a Redeemer, without a Messiah, without a Savior, there is no access to God. The Holy Spirit was teaching the impossibility of access to God without a perfect priest, a perfect sacrifice, and a perfect covenant. By allowing the people to go no farther than the outer court, He was illustrating that through Judaism there was no access to Him, only a **symbol** of access. Jesus **alone** can take us to God's presence in heaven. The way into the heavenly Holy Place could not be opened while the first tabernacle was standing. So long, then, as the holy place continued standing they had no hope of immediate access to God.

## **2. The Old System Provided Limited Forgiveness From the Sacrifices.**

The author's bottom line is that these gifts and sacrifices could not "make the worshiper perfect in conscience".

### **Hebrews 9:9 (NASB95)**

<sup>9</sup> which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience,

The word "symbol" refers to setting side by side for the purpose of comparison. The old is being set beside the new and the two are compared. From the Greek word we get "parable". The old was only a parable, or an object lesson, for Israel. The old sacrifices were never meant to cleanse from sin, but only to symbolize such cleansing. The inability of the sacrifices to make the worshiper "perfect in conscience" did not mean that no Old Testament saint ever had a clear conscience, but he did not obtain it by the sacrifices because the guilt itself was never removed. The cleansing was entirely external. Consequently, he could never have a clear conscience or a deep abiding sense of forgiveness.

The author offers two reasons for this statement.

### **Hebrews 9:10 (NASB95)**

<sup>10</sup> since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

First, they were external regulations for the body. The implication is that they could not deal adequately with the conscience.

Second, they were temporary, "imposed until a time of reformation," which refers to the time of Christ. The fact that the sacrifices had to be repeated annually showed the incomplete nature of the forgiveness. It put off guilt for each year, but it had to be done again and again.

Up to this point, the author is arguing that the Old Testament sacrificial system was not God's complete and final provision for the guilt of our sins. It all pointed ahead to Christ.

## **II. The Blood of Christ Obtained Eternal Redemption and a Clean Conscience for Us.**

Whereas the old system provided only limited access and limited impact, Christ provides complete access and impact:

### **A. Christ's Blood Provides Complete Access into the Heavenly Holy of Holies.**

#### **Hebrews 9:11 (NASB95)**

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

Christ did not just go into an earthly Holy of Holies. He went into heaven itself, of which the earthly tabernacle was only a picture.

#### **Hebrews 9:12 (NASB95)**

<sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Furthermore, Christ did not take the blood of goats and calves to sprinkle on the altar. Rather, He went there “**through His own blood.**” He secured our redemption on the **cross**. In contrast to going back every year, Christ “**entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.**” The author is showing the complete supremacy and finality of the blood of Christ over the old system. Through His death, our guilt is atoned for once and for all, for all eternity! The penalty has been paid. There is nothing that we can add to what Christ did. Through Him we have direct access to God!

## **B. Christ’s Blood Provides Complete Ability to Cleanse Our Consciences.**

### **Hebrews 9:13-14 (NASB95)**

<sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

If those rituals could cleanse the flesh, “**how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**” Jesus Christ is the only one who could atone for man’s sin, because He alone was a man without blemish in all that He did. Thus His blood can act as the substitute for the penalty that we deserve. Through Christ’s blood, we can have a clean conscience.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The Bible teaches that the conscience alone is not an infallible guide. Through repeated sin, the conscience can be defiled.

### **Titus 1:15 (NASB95)**

<sup>15</sup> To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

## **ILLUSTRATION:**

For example, I read that Cambodian dictator Pol Pot murdered between two and seven million of his fellow people. He ordered the murder of everyone who wore eyeglasses, among many other senseless killings. Historians say that his evil deeds were even greater than those of Hitler and Stalin, if possible. Yet just before he died in 1998, he told a reporter that he had a clear conscience! It was not clear; it was defiled!

So our consciences need to be informed and trained through Scripture. As we learn who God is and what His holy standards are, our consciences accuse us of how sinful we are. God’s commandments, applied as Jesus did to the heart level, convict and condemn us all! None of us come close to loving God with our entire being, or to loving our fellow human beings as we love ourselves. Part of God’s work in regeneration is to bring His holy Law to bear on our hearts, so that we no longer try to justify ourselves. We stand truly guilty

Some Christians serve God in an attempt to pacify a guilty conscience. They erroneously think, “If I do enough good and moral things for Him, maybe He will forgive me.” That is a

wrong motive! Others mistakenly think that God forgives them so that they can feel good. Their focus is on themselves, not on God and others. Again, that is a wrong focus. The proper order is, "God has forgiven me by His grace through the precious blood of His Son. Now I am free to serve Him!"

Once we are born again by God's grace, we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices.

### **Romans 12:1-2 (NASB95)**

12 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.* <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

If we are a living sacrifice our mind will focus entirely on God. Everything that we do will be for the purpose of glorifying God.

### **1 Corinthians 10:31 (NASB95)**

<sup>31</sup> Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Our daily lives become an act of worship and praise to the living God out of gratitude for all that He has done for us. Primarily the sending of His Son to die on the cross and spill His blood for us to pay for the extreme penalty of all of our sins for eternity. It is through the blood of Christ that we have a remedy for guilt and a clear conscience.

### **Go Tell it on the Mountain**