

The Sacrifice Of Christ

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Introduction:

- I. How many of us think, “I’d like to hear another lesson on the death of Christ!” We know this subject is foundational, but perhaps we also fail to think of the subject as often as we should.
- II. The sacrifice of Christ overlaps with the priesthood covenant lectures: indeed, “in 8:1–10:18, the themes of covenant, priesthood, and sacrifice have been integrated” (Lane 271), and “priesthood and sacrifice are inseparable entities” (Bruce 31). But I will concentrate on those aspects of His sacrifice which do *as much* overlap with Johnny’s and Rick’s lectures. Kevin chose well the three doctrinal themes of Hebrews: the priesthood of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ, and the covenants. This is the second of those two motifs.
- III. **The Outline.** I have divided our subject into six aspects of His suffering which I will explore in three ways: 1) Old Testament basis; 2) New Testament fulfillment and/or teaching; 3) Exhortation.
 - A. **The Old Covenant.** Old Testament teachings and practices underlie every major theme of the book. Lane notes, “A detailed knowledge of the OT is indispensable for understanding what the writer of Hebrews is endeavoring to say. He assumes on the part of his audience a deep familiarity with their contents” (cxv).
 1. Perhaps in the midst of their suffering, the Hebrew Christians were beginning to doubt that God really would protect them, and this led them to doubt that He really had intervened in the person of Jesus Christ. How would they know the truth? The author appeals to the historical miracles (2:3-4) but ultimately to Scripture for proof of the superiority of Christ (cf. Lane cxxxviii). What an example to us!
 2. (Let me hasten to add that it is not necessary to teach someone the gospel “to begin by instructing him in ancient ideas of sacrifice” (Marshall 118). Rather, “the gospel must be preached in contemporary language, ” including using a translation into modern English and using illustrations familiar to our audience (*Ibid.*). However, the Christian needs the book of Hebrews, as it will certainly enrich his faith and spur him to faithfulness. And to understand Hebrews, the Christian will need considerable familiarity with the Old Testament, especially with regard to the priesthood and the sacrifices.)
 - B. **New Covenant fulfillment.** The author of Hebrews shows us the superiority of the new over the old. The Old Testament predicted the sacrificial death of Christ in Isaiah 53:10, “He would render Himself as a guilt offering.” Jesus more plainly announced, “The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Now, the author of Hebrews elaborates further on this great truth.
 - C. **Exhortation.** The author frequently exhorts his readers to make application of the truths upon which he expounds. I will try to keep these to a minimum, since Mark will deal specifically with application in his lecture.
- IV. **Subthemes.** I will mention some sub-themes but will not make them a main part of this study. For example, we will see the absolute necessity of the full humanity of Christ, but I don’t believe His humanity is the *main* thrust of any of the “sacrifice” passages, though it is a main motif of the context of the first passage we will study. For more on 2:9-18 and the humanity of Christ, see a more detailed study in the excursus at the end of this outline. It was necessary to leave out other issues, such as the structure of certain passages, the relationship of *diatheke* (covenant, but

translated “will” or “testament” in 9:16-17 in most translations but not the NASB) to Christ’s death, and the great suffering endured during Roman crucifixion (2:9; 12:2-3). These subjects are important and enlightening (and not necessarily peripheral) but take up too much time and space for this study.

- V. **The Importance of Sacrificial Death.** Throughout the Bible, the sanctity of blood is emphasized, especially that “life is in the blood” (e.g. Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:11, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23; Acts 15:20). Blood also often stands for death (e.g., Genesis 4:10; Leviticus 20:9; Numbers 35:33; 2 Kings 24:4; Psalm 72:14). Under the old covenant, the one offering an animal would lay his hand on the victim as if to transfer his sins to the beast before the blood was shed (e.g., Leviticus 1:4; 4:4, 15; 16:21). Under the new covenant, and in the book of Hebrews, Jesus’ blood is shed to give us life (9:14).
- A. I have chosen “Christ’s Sacrificial Death” in my title and outline because of the importance of the word “sacrifice” to our study and to Hebrews. This book “uses sacrificial language *both* as a suitable medium of communication with his readers *and* as a means of communicating a central element of Christian truth. The heart of the gospel, for Hebrews as for the rest of the NT, is the Christ-event, culminating in the death of Jesus, closely linked with his resurrection” (Ellingworth 70).
- VI. It is my prayer, that this study may, if only in a small way, encourage you to “eat at the altar” of the sacrifice of Christ (13:10), that is, share fully in the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice.

Body:

- I. **The Victory of Christ’s Sacrificial Death (2:9-15).** (On Jesus’ dying for everyone (2:9), see III below). The main thrust of this passage deals with Christ’s victory which led to His exaltation and the defeat of death and Satan on our behalf. In order to accomplish this, Jesus had to die – that is the focus of our study – and in order to die, Jesus had to become fully human. Because He became fully human even to the point of suffering and death, He is not only able to defeat Satan in our lives but is also able to aid us in temptation (2:18), and to help us (2:16) in mercy (2:17). For more details see Excursus at end of outline.
- A. **Old Covenant.**
1. **God gave dominion to man not angels.** The context still argues for the greatness of Christ and His superiority over angels. Jesus became a man and thus was made lower than the angels (2:7). How then could His covenant be greater than the Old Covenant delivered by angels? The author goes to Psalm 8 to show that power over earthly things was never promised or given to angels but to man (2:5-8). Therefore, they should not expect that the covenant delivered by angels would ultimately result in victory. Psalm 8 speaks of mankind, whom God intended to completely rule over creation, but we do not see all things subjected to man. But we do see Jesus . . .
 2. **God leads His children out of slavery into glory.** The idea of God leading His people (2:10) surely found resonance with the Hebrews to whom the Exodus and Conquest were seminal events. Chapter 3 further these Old Testament images as God leads His people to His rest.
- B. **New Covenant.**
1. **Jesus was crowned as greater than the angels through suffering.** In a sense, Jesus was made lower than the angels for a while (2:7), but now He has become much greater than the angels (2:9-10). How did a Man become greater than the angels? Jesus was “crowned with glory and honor” and perfected as the Author of human salvation “through suffering,” namely, “the suffering of death” (2:9-10). Not just

death, but “the suffering of death.” Some die without suffering, but not Jesus! Remember His sacrifice was not an easy death physically or emotionally. But how can a human who dies be greater than the angels? Angels apparently do not die, but Jesus, by dying, did something no angel could ever do – reconciled man and God. Contrary to the assumption of the Jews, Jesus’ death on the cross did not make Him unworthy to be the Messiah. To the contrary, it was necessary for our salvation. And, instead of demoting Jesus, His death promoted Him to King of Kings crowned with glory and honor above all!

2. **Jesus’ sacrificial death was a fitting way to secure human salvation.** If the story of Jesus was new to us, it would surely seem bizarre. But it was fitting for God to secure our salvation in this way (2:10). The cross is consistent with God’s mercy, grace, and love, at the same time harmonizing with His justice. How are we to know what is fitting for God to do? Only as He tells us. F. F. Bruce rightly warns that when we speak of what *we believe* is the right thing for God to do or not do, we are only revealing our own character and not God’s (79). How we ought to bless God when we read in His “word of reconciliation” how He works “in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19), and thus “bringing many sons to glory” (2:10). Many things are difficult to understand, and yet there is much we can make sense of in God’s plan of salvation. We can understand how He wants to bring us to glory but cannot condone or fellowship sin. So, it is fitting for Him to accept a sacrifice and wash away our sins in the blood of that sacrifice. But not just any sacrifice is fitting, but only the blood of a Man who lived in perfect harmony with His will (10:5-10).
3. **Thus, the man Jesus became our Champion and Liberator from death.** Lane makes a convincing case that the best synonym for *archegos* is “champion” (57). (For further ideas, see Excursus at end of outline). A “champion” would remind the Hebrews of God Himself: Isaiah 42:13; 49:24-26; 59:15-20. This figure was based on the ancient practice of each opposing side in a battle choosing a champion to decide the victor (Lane 62, cf. David and Goliath). Christ invoked this imagery of Himself in Luke 11:21-22. In what sphere is Jesus the Great Champion? Obedient living? Certainly. Resisting temptation? Definitely. But the main victory He won was over death (2:14-15) through His resurrection (though mentioned explicitly only in 13:20 it is implicit in all the exaltation passages starting with 1:3). Through His death, Jesus freed man from the slavery which came from the fear of death (2:15). Only through Christ’s sacrifice are there a people – Christians – who do not or need not fear death. Since Satan was our master, Christ had to strip him of his power. Satan’s power is through death. Jesus robbed him of this weapon which Satan wields through sin by taking away our sins, so that death was no longer a threat. Here is a summary of MacArthur’s insightful conclusions: Satan had a powerful weapon – death. But God had a more powerful weapon – eternal life. Since men die as a result of sin, the only way for them to have this more powerful weapon is through resurrection. But sinful men could not get it for themselves, so Christ, the sinless Man, had to get it for them. But He could not obtain resurrection for them without first dying. But in dying and being raised, Jesus destroyed Satan’s power (70).
4. **Jesus, the Victor over the devil.** Jesus died to render the devil powerless in the matter of death (2:14). Physical death remains but no longer has the power to “sting” believers: 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. Satan still wreaks havoc in this world, but he cannot take eternal life from anyone. In taking death from Satan, Jesus rendered him powerless. As Bruce says, “until [Christ’s] conquest of death, death seemed to have the last word” (86).

C. Exhortation.

1. **Jesus' Victory is Ours!** Jesus tasted death for everyone (2:9). Why? To lead us to salvation, to bring many sons to glory (2:10). So, His victory over Satan and death is ours. Let us say, "I am victorious through Christ Jesus, my Lord!"
2. **We can live in peace in this life.** Because our Champion conquered the only real fear of life – fear of death (2:15). We do not fear the ultimate outcome of death for it is gain (Philippians 1:21). This confidence comes through the blood of Christ: 10:19-20. This is not merely a future blessing, for the reek of death surrounds us even now in the form of "depression, fear, boredom, despair, waste, limitation, and defeat" (Stedman 44). Indeed, "the mind set on the flesh is death" (Rom. 8:6) of every type. Men are desperate to find escape, but escape is only in Christ. True contentment eludes those outside Jesus. Unbelievers can only see death as the final crushing blow of life. God did not intend for us to experience that despair (2:6-8), but it is a necessary consequence of sin. Saints have been freed from that bondage, so that now we look forward to an eternal abode when this house collapses into the dust: 2 Corinthians 5:1. "The fear of death" was real to these Hebrews. But they did not need to fear even the death sentences of Imperial Rome, because Jesus has set them free from the paralyzing fear of death. To be free from the fear of death is to be free to die honorably rather than flee death at any cost (see Bruce, 86; Revelation 2:10). Who is more fit to die honorably than the Christian, for "[death] can no longer be held over [our] heads by the devil or any other malign power as a means of intimidation" (*Ibid.*, 87). The death of Jesus assures the disciple even in the face of his own death.
3. **Remember that God desires your salvation!** God's goal in all His magnificent work in Christ is to bring us to glory! It is about God's desire to bring YOU to glory! Do not neglect to praise God for His great love for you.

II. Perfection and Obedience in Christ's Sacrificial Death (5:7-9). Cf. 2:18; 10:5-9, 14.

A. Old Covenant.

1. **Psalms.** Besides the Melchizedek quote (5:10) from Psalm 110:4 (Johnny's lecture), there is Psalm 2:7 quoted in 5:5 and applied in 5:7-9. 5:7-9 also parallels Psalm 116.

Hebrews 5:7-9	Psalm 116
"prayers and supplications," v.7	"my supplications . . . I shall call upon Him," vv. 1-2
"loud crying and tears," v. 7	"distress and sorrow," v. 3
"to the One who is able to save Him from death," v. 7	"Then I called upon the name of the Lord: 'O Lord, I beseech You, save my life!'" v 4
"He was heard," v. 7	"He hears my voice," v. 1
"although He was a Son," v. 8	"I am Your servant, I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid," v. 16
"He learned obedience," v. 8	"I shall pay my vows to the Lord," vv. 14, 18
"He suffered," v. 8	"The cords of death encompassed me And the terrors of Sheol came upon me," v. 3 (also vv. 10, 15)
"to all those who obey Him," v. 9	"I shall pay my vows to the Lord," vv. 14, 18
"the source of eternal salvation," v. 9	"He saved me," v. 6 (also vv. 8, 13)

2. **Animal sacrifices did not make worshipers perfect.** Animal sacrifices did not "suffer death" in the sense Jesus did. Such sacrifices could not "make perfect" or "decisively purge" the Old Testament worshipers (10:1, Lane 255).

B. **New Covenant.** Christ's sacrifice made Him perfect (5:9) and His people perfect (12:2).

1. **The perfecting of Christ.**

- a. **For several roles.** How was Jesus "perfected" by suffering (2:10)? Not morally, but as our Sanctifier (2:11), Conqueror (2:14), Atonement (2:17), and Sympathizer (2:16, 18, see (d) below).
- b. **As a man.** From 1:3, 8, 11, 12, we learn that Jesus is perfect God, but to open the way of salvation for us, He also had to become perfect Man. Suffering did not cause Him to turn from His Father but to learn continued obedience in the midst of suffering. We may suppose that for the most part Jesus delighted to do the Father's will, but Jesus learned to obey even when it was not His preference. Especially from Gethsemane to the cross, it was very painful to do the Father's will, but Jesus learned to obey through all the pain, and thus He fulfilled all the requirements necessary (particularly – in the context – complete obedience) to become the complete sacrifice for our sins. Nowhere was His humanity more evident than in Gethsemane (cf. 5:7). Lane denies that "the one who was able to save from death" refers to "the content of Jesus' prayers," but rather is a phrase that simply describes "the character of God" (120), but I see no reason it cannot imply both in view of the context of "loud crying and tears" which accompanied His prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42-44).
- c. **As the source of eternal salvation.** The word "offered" in 5:7 is ordinarily used for sacrifices, perhaps implying that part of His sacrifice was in the "loud crying and tears" He experienced as a man. God accepted His offering ("He was heard," 5:7), because of His perfect obedience: 5:7b-9. Jesus "suffered" (5:8; 2:9) in His drawn out and painful death, and no doubt suffered during the much time He had to think about it (cf. Luke 9:51, etc.); this magnifies His willing obedience to the Father which perfected Him as "the source of eternal salvation" (5:7). "Jesus learned experientially what obedience entails through his passion in order to achieve salvation and to become fully qualified for his office as eternal high priest (2:10; 5:9-10)" (Lane 121).
- d. **As our sympathizer.** Along with suffering came temptation. This testing enables Him to come to the aid of His saints, His brethren, when they are tempted and tried and oft made to wonder why it should be thus. There is clearly a connection between Jesus' temptations in suffering and the help He can render to us when we are tempted: Jesus suffering and death "equipped him, as nothing else could have done, to help ordinary, sinful, suffering men and women" (Williamson as quoted in Lane 66).

2. **The perfecting of new covenant worshipers.** That Jesus is the "perfecter of faith" (12:2) "means not merely that He Himself is the example of a perfect faith but also that He perfects the faith of His followers" (Marshall 99). Since it was Jesus' obedience that made Him perfect, He demands obedience as part of the process of perfecting us (5:8-9, see "Exhortation" below).

C. **Exhortation.**

1. **Obey God.** The application is explicit: Jesus' obedience qualified Him to become "to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (5:9). We must obey even when we must suffer for our loyalty to Jesus! May Jesus' obedience through suffering (5:8) inspire us to the obedience which leads us to the Source of salvation.

2. **Turn to Jesus for help and inspiration.** The Hebrew Christians faced the temptation of disloyalty to Jesus because of persecution and even death. To bolster their faith, the author points out that Jesus was also tempted and suffered for His commitment to the Father. He could have avoided the suffering by, for example, accepting the offer of the devil in Matthew 4:5-7. But He resisted the temptation and remained faithful to His mission. So should the Hebrews. So should we! What a blessing to know that when we turn to Jesus for comfort, we are turning to God *and* to One who lived as a man and who knows what it is like to suffer and be tempted yet without sin! We really can pray to Jesus, “Lord, you know what it is like . . . Help me!” Since Jesus was faithful in suffering, He empowers us to be faithful when we suffer, and indeed He demands that we be faithful even when suffering: 10:32-39; 12:1-2; 13:12-13.

III. **The Sufficiency of Christ’s Sacrificial Death (7:27; 10:5-10).** The other five points of this outline can be subsumed in this one, for Jesus’ blood is sufficient to gain complete spiritual victory (2:14), perfect saints for worship (10:14), fully cleanse (9:14), open up total access to God (9:7), and wholly sanctify (10:10).

A. Old Covenant.

1. **Continual sacrifices.** On the Day of Atonement, the Lord provided for an annual sacrifice to remove the sins of the people and restore their relationship to God. But the sacrifice had to be repeated every year. And Israel offered many more sacrifices: even daily sacrifices: 7:27; 10:11. Coleman calculates 1, 273 “official public sacrifices prescribed by law” every year from Numbers 28:1-29:39, adding up to “almost 2, 000, 000 from Moses to Christ, apart from the countless millions of unnumbered individual offerings and additional public sacrifices” (36). Yet all of them added together were ineffective: 10:1-4.
2. **Lack of obedience.** (See II. above.) In 10:5-10, the author quotes Psalm 40:6-8 which spoke of the inefficiency of the animal sacrifices and predicted something better. This passage is one of many that shows that what God really wants is not a lot of sacrifices to take away sins but obedience (see B. 1. below). Yet, under the Mosaic code, there was continual sacrifice, and even the priests had first to atone for their own sins. But were not those animals sacrifices God’s will? God’s primary will was for obedience (10:5-8), and in the absence of obedience, His will made provision for sacrificial atonement. But it was never God’s will for the system of animal sacrifice to continue indefinitely (10:9).
3. **Continual reminder of sins.** I do not think that 10:1-4 teaches that the sins of the Jews were “rolled forward” every year. Rather, the point is that in order to have sins forgiven, they had to offer continual sacrifices, so that there was no end to sacrifices; and since each sacrifice reminded them of their sins, there was a continual reminder of their sins. God repeatedly promised to forgive their sins (e.g., Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35; Numbers 15:25-28) and affirmed that He did (e.g., 2 Samuel 12:13; Isaiah 6:7). How then does the author say, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin” (10:4)? I have always thought, based on 9:15 that God accepted the animals sacrifices as He looked forward to the blood Christ would shed. Even today, we might say that it is not possible for H²O to take away sins. It is God who washes me clean with Christ’s blood *when* I am baptized in H²O. Also concerning 10:4, note that the author is contrasting the Day of Atonement sacrifices (“year by year,” 10:3) with Christ’s sacrifice. A main problem with the Levitical sacrifices was that they were not accompanied by (perfect) obedience. Christ’s sacrifice was acceptable because it was not only a voluntary, sinless sacrifice, but it was also offered by a sinless high priest. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins apart from

the obedience of the people who offered the sacrifices. Thus, this is another slap at those who trusted merely in the external rites of the Law of Moses. The blood of bulls and goats never took away sins by themselves. They only sufficed until Christ, *and* they only sufficed for those whose hearts were humble and penitent. Further, the implication in 10:2 that under Christ there is no more “consciousness of sins” is clearly not to be taken absolutely (see IV. B. 3. a. below) but as a contrast. Is 10:4 then to be taken absolutely, or as a contrast? At any rate, would it not be better to replace “sins rolled forward” with the Biblical phrase “remembrance of sins” (KJV) or “reminder of sins” (NASB-u)? And what a reminder, for then the high priest was required to “confess all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins” (Leviticus 16:21)!

B. New Covenant.

1. **Jesus’ sacrifice is a sinless, obedient sacrifice.** (See II. above.) He does not need to offer a sacrifice for His sins, because He was perfectly obedient (7:27-28). What God has always demanded and man has always failed to offer to God is complete obedience. How often God announced that Old Testament sacrifices were unacceptable because they were not accompanied by obedience! (In addition to Psalm 40:6 quoted in 10:5-6, consider 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 50:8-10; 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:10-13; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-27, etc.). Complete obedience *is* the sacrifice God desires. Jesus’ earthly mission and even His very sustenance was doing the Father’s will (e.g., John 4:34) even when it was not His own and even to the point of death (Mark 14:36; Philippians 2:8). Jesus alone fully obeyed God, and where there is full obedience there is no need for further sacrifice. As the sacrifices of the old covenant were to be “without [physical] defect” (Numbers 6:14, etc.), Jesus’ sacrifice was “without [moral or spiritual] blemish” (9:14). Since Christ lived sinlessly (4:15) thus securing His own right standing with the Father, God accepts His blood as the sacrifice to end all bloody sacrifices. The burnt offerings and sin offerings (10:6) of sinful men could never eternally satisfy God’s justice. Because He was perfectly obedient, even to the point of death on the cross, God could accept that very death as an offering for the sins of those who were and are far less than perfectly obedient.
2. **Jesus offered a one time sacrifice.** Christ replaced the inefficiency of the continual sacrifices of the Old Law with a once for all offering of Himself (7:27; 9:12, 25; 10:10). The priests did all their work standing and their work was never done, but Jesus finished His work of sacrifice and sat down (10:11-12). Notice the emphasis on the one time offering of Christ: “one sacrifice . . . for all time . . . sat down” (10:12, 14). Jesus’ exaltation and settling down in the heavenly tabernacle “once for all” (9:12) proves that His sacrifice needs no repetition. Not even the Second Coming will add anything to the sufficiency of the cross to take away sin (9:28).
3. **Jesus offered Himself.** 10:5-10 shows from Psalm 40:6-8 that “God would accord superior status to a human body as the instrument for accomplishing the divine will over the sacrificial offerings prescribed in the law” (Lane cxxxiii). This was the human body of Jesus (implied throughout 10:5-9 but not made explicit until 10:10). Jesus’ voluntary, sinless, perfectly obedient body was a sacrifice of a higher quality than the involuntary sacrifice of amoral animals, 10:5-10.
4. **Jesus purchased eternal redemption.** Undoubtedly there was redemption under Moses, but not the “eternal redemption” purchased by Christ’s sacrifice (9:12).

C. Exhortation.

1. **Be holy.** The application in 10:10 is that we have been sanctified (see VI.) below.

2. **Do not reject Christ, for He is God's final word.** That Jesus' sacrifice is an all-sufficient, one-time sacrifice for all men means that what God has said through His Son is the final word (1:1-3). Let us never spurn Christ's last and perfect sacrifice by deliberate disobedience (cf. Numbers 15:22-31), for there is nothing else to offer (10:26-31). The condemnation of the defiantly disobedient is inescapable (cf. Isaiah 26:11; Numbers 16:35; 26:10), because no other sacrifice for sin will ever be accepted (10:26; cf. 10:10, 12, 14). Punishment for disobedience was severe under the old covenant (10:28-29; Deuteronomy 13:8; 17:2-7), but is more so under the new where the apostate has spurned the blood of the very Son of God Himself (10:26-31). Without that blood there is no covenant, that is to say, a person can have no fellowship with God (10:29). None of the blessings of Christ's sacrifice extend to the apostate, and without these benefits, the apostate finds himself in worse shape than those under Moses' Law (10:29). As Christ did the will of God by obeying even to the cross, let us do "the will of God" even if it means tremendous and sustained suffering (10:36).

IV. **The Cleansing Power of Christ's Sacrificial Death (2:17; 9:11-28).** Cf. 10:12, 18, 22, 26.

A. **Old Covenant.**

1. **The Day of Atonement.** *Hilaschomai* is used only in 2:17 and in Luke 18:13 where it is translated "be merciful." The author uses "atonement" (NIV; or "propitiation," ASV, NASB-u) to evoke thoughts of the Day of Atonement. (The KJV rendering "reconciliation" is poor since some form of *katallaso* is usually translated "reconcile." Further, it results in an awkward phrase.) Certainly the yearly sacrifice of 10:1 refers to the Day of Atonement sacrifices. The Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:27-32), five days before the Feast of Booths, was a sabbath day (Leviticus 16:29), on which the Jews were to humble themselves (Leviticus 23:27; Numbers 29:7, which they interpreted as fasting). On this day, there was confession of sins (Leviticus 16:20-22) which meant the sacrifices only reminded the Israelites of their sins and thus of their inability to fully approach God (10:3). Atonement does not seem to be significantly different from cleansing (see especially Leviticus 16:16, 19, 30). Sin defiled the people and even the temple sanctuary, and only blood could cleanse such impurity (Leviticus 16:16). But the blood of bulls and goats could not fully take away sins or else they would not need to be offered so often (10:1-4). Jesus suffering outside the gate (13:12) again invokes the Day of Atonement in which the bull and goat, the blood of which were used to make atonement, were burned outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27).
2. **The pouring out of blood.** There was a lot of sacrificial blood shed under the Old Covenant, and they accomplished a measure of sanctification (9:13). For example, an Israelite who became defiled from contact with a dead body could be cleansed when the ashes of a heifer mixed with water were sprinkled upon him (Numbers 19). Although this was called "purification from sin" (Numbers 19:9, 17), it is clearly an outward "cleansing of the flesh" (9:13) that has little to do with the heart or conscience. Certain purification rites were carried on outside the city limits (13:11). It could almost be said that everything that was cleansed under Moses was cleansed by sacrificial blood (9:22). The Greek word *haimatekchusia* ("shedding of blood," NASB) is a compound word literally meaning "blood poured out." This evokes the pouring out of blood for Old Testament sin offerings: Exodus 29:15; Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34, etc.). This verse might be better rendered "without the application of blood there is no forgiveness" (Lane 229 translates "without the application of blood there is no definitive purgation"). How important was blood? See 9:7, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25; 10:4, 19, 29; 11:28; 12:4, 24; 13:11, 12, 20. Isaiah predicted

someone would “bear the sins of many” ([Isaiah 53:12](#)). Therefore, “the leading motif of 9:11-28 is blood as the medium of lifegiving power. The total argument centers on the potency of blood” (Lane 252).

B. New Covenant.

1. Atonement.

a. **The teaching.** It is “by the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone” ([2:9](#)). Grace sent Jesus to die on the cross. “Taste” idiomatically means “that Jesus died so that we need not taste the bitterness of death” (Marshall 94). This clause explains why the Lord became human – so He could die. He died to remove the sting of death for every person. According to [Ezekiel 18:4](#); [Romans 6:23](#), sin inevitably brings death. Therefore, every man could only contemplate death in his future. Except that God gave us a substitute by His grace. I do not see Jesus as our substitute in that He took our punishment, but in that He made atonement for our sins ([2:17](#)). The Father accepted Jesus’ blood as a sacrifice for our sins.

b. **What is the meaning of the atonement?** Leon Morris enumerates several theories “under six major headings: (1) The subjective view or moral influence theory. Christ’s death moves us to respond to the love of Christ. (2) The victory theory, also called the devil ransom theory, the classical theory, or the fishhook theory of the atonement. God offered Jesus as a ransom to free man. Satan agreed, but could not hold Christ in death. (3) The satisfaction theory. Sin was such an insult to the dignity of God that God must act to rectify it. Yet man did the sin, so man must pay for it. Hence, Jesus, being both God and man, was needed. (4) The penal substitution theory. Jesus took the sinners’ place bearing the penalty of sin which we should have borne. (5) The sacrifice theory. Jesus died as a sacrifice for man’s sin. (6) The government theory. As head of all government God passed a law that the soul that sins shall die. God did not want sinful man to die. Thus he accepted the death of Christ instead, while demonstrating the depth of sin and the lengths to which God would go to uphold the moral order of the universe” (as quoted in Girdwood and Verkruyse 100). I have difficulty with the popular #4 (cf. Stedman 65) that God would unjustly treat Jesus as if He committed all the sins of the world. I think there is some truth in #1 and #3, but I find them inadequate as a complete explanation for Jesus’ death. Certainly there was victory over Satan in Jesus’ death ([2:14](#)), but some of theory #2 seems fanciful and untenable. I favor #5 with #6 as a sub point. The “sacrifice” interpretation is what [Hebrews](#) is all about, and [10:10, 14, 18](#) emphasizes the flesh and blood suffering of the sacrificial death of Christ. Indeed, “the primary concern of the high priestly office” was “making propitiation for sins” in order to secure “the reconciliation of the people to God” (Lane 66). Another question of definition: since redemption ([9:12](#)) is a “buying back,” to whom was the purchase price of Jesus’ blood paid? To say that it was paid to either Satan or to God raises difficult questions. Perhaps it is best to say with Marshall that since “the New Testament does not ask to whom the price of redemption was paid, to suggest that there was a recipient is to push the metaphor beyond its limits” (80). This much is certain, no sinner can approach God without atoning blood, and no blood is sufficient to atone or redeem but the blood of Christ.

2. **Forgiveness.** Even unbelieving or apostate Judaizers would agree that “without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness” ([9:22](#)). A blood “offering” was necessary: but whereas the Levitical high priest offered animal blood for his own sins and the

sins of the people (9:7), Jesus offered Himself (9:14, 25), thus putting away sin (9:26) in one sacrifice (10:12) thus succeeding where thousands of animal sacrifices failed. Then the knockout blow: animal blood cannot by itself take away sin (10:4). Only Jesus' blood can cleanse us from sin, and where there is a sacrifice that can effectively take away sin, there is no need for further sacrifices (10:18). The salvation Jesus procured with His cleansing blood is an "eternal redemption" (9:12). Thus, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53:12 by "bearing the sins of many" (9:28).

3. **Inward cleansing.** Hebrews first speaks of cleansing in 1:3 where Jesus' death is not mentioned but implied. Sin makes a person impure, unclean, dirty, stained, defiled. God cannot accept the worship of a defiled person.
 - a. **A purging of the conscience.** The phrase "sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh" (9:13) adds to the affirmation that the Mosaic sacrifices could not "make the worshiper perfect in conscience" but were only an outward type of a greater cleansing (9:9). The blood of Jesus purges even the conscience: 9:14; 10:22. But how are we to define "conscience" in 9:9, 14; 10:2, 22? Perhaps in usual sense, that is, the part of us that makes us feel good or bad if we think we have done good or evil. Or perhaps in Hebrews it "embraces the whole person in his relation to God . . . the 'uneasy conscience' with its internal witness that defilement extends to the heart and mind . . . [which] is not engaged in moral decision making but in remembering . . . (10:3-4) . . . the point at which a person confronts God's holiness" but cannot stand before Him as long as there is cognizance of personal impurity (Lane 225, 240). But surely we still have a "consciousness of sins" (10:2), for certainly "a strong meditation on Christ will not only excite compassion for his sufferings, but a detestation of our sins and selves as the cause of them" for "a look upon Christ pierced . . . pierceth the soul" (Charnock 38). The implication of 10:2 then cannot be taken in an absolute sense. Yes, we think of our sins when we think of the cross, but remembering Christ's sacrifice is more a reminder of the removal of our sins whereas the continuous old covenant sacrifices were more a reminder of the sins themselves and how they kept even God's covenant people from close fellowship with Him. It is "not that there is no more . . . sense of sin, but no more accusations and charges of sin before God or despairing servile thoughts for sin in their own consciences" (*Ibid.* 161).
 - b. **A cleansing that makes acceptable worship possible.** The cleansing of the conscience by the blood of Christ (when we repent, 6:1) removes our "dead works" so we can properly serve God (9:14). This reminds us of John 4:24. The efficacious cleansing of Jesus' blood makes a new spirit of worship possible under a law written on the mind and heart (10:16). Jesus' blood sprinkles our hearts and cleanses them from an evil conscience when our bodies were washed in baptism, giving us the assurance that we can indeed draw near to God (10:22). The sprinkling of 10:22 refers to the blood of Christ, invoking the imagery of all the sprinkling of blood done to consecrate priests and objects of worship under the Mosaic system (cf. Leviticus 8). 10:22-23 reverses the order of conversion: God sprinkled us with Jesus' blood when we were baptized based on the confession of our hope (cf. 1 Peter 3:21 as a possible explanation of 10:22).

C. Exhortation.

1. **Serve God acceptably.** 9:14 implies that we should serve God acceptably, that is, according to His instructions. Having a better sacrifice should motivate us to show our gratitude by offering God our reverent and awe-inspired service (12:28). The

proper service of one cleansed by the blood of Christ is praise to God and helping our neighbors (13:15-16); that is, serving Him in word and deed (1 John 3:18). While Jesus' one time sacrifice contrasts with the old sacrifices (10:11-12, etc.), our sacrifices of praise to God and service to mankind are to be as continuous as the Old Testament sacrifices (13:15; Numbers 28:10-29).

2. **Do not backslide or trust in any other.** The blood of Christ forbids backsliding (6:6). His blood is perfectly efficacious to wash away all sins, but it will not cleanse those who reject it. Thus, no amount of pleading from the politically correct can convince us that all religions are equal. If the God-given Law of Moses was inferior and now unacceptable, how much more every modern manmade system?
3. **Remember forgiveness.** Perhaps we could make the contrast that whereas the animal sacrifices of the Old Law only reminded the worshipers of the barrier of their sins, the Lord's Supper of the New Law reminds us of the forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

V. **Access to God Through Christ's Sacrificial Death (10:19-22).** This point is linked to the last since only those who have been cleansed can have access to God (10:22).

A. **Old Covenant.**

1. **Limited to a representative.** The mercy seat on the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the Temple represented the presence of God (Exodus 30:6), but access was extremely limited. Israelites only had access to God through representatives: only the priests – a small percentage of the Israelites – could come into the temple at all; and only the high priest could ever enter the Most Holy Place (9:7).
2. **Cautious access.** When the high priest did enter the sanctuary, he had to follow closely a strict ritual in which he would first sprinkle atoning blood for his own sins before he sprinkled atoning blood for all the people (9:7; Leviticus 16:3-24).
3. **Limited to once a year.** The high priest himself could only enter the Most Holy Place and thus come into God's presence once a year (9:7; Leviticus 16:2, 32-34).

B. **New Covenant.** Even our access to God is "by the blood of Jesus" (10:19).

1. **Personal access of all believers.** Christ's offering made possible an access to God for everyone in covenant relationship with Him – an access not possible even for the high priest under the former arrangement (10:19-22).
2. **Confident access.** We should enter with the boldness of one washed completely clean, inside and out (10:22), with Jesus' blood (10:19), enabling us to serve God in a way that pleases Him (9:14). Christ inaugurated a new way through the offering of Himself as a perfect human being (flesh, 10:20). To open the way to the Father, the veil had to be removed (10:20). It was removed through the sacrifice of Jesus ("that is, His flesh," 10:20 probably refers to how Jesus inaugurated or opened the new way which leads to life and is not equating Jesus' flesh with the veil, cf. Amplified Bible: GNT). The rending of the temple veil (cf. Matthew 27:51) signifies that the way into God's presence is now open to us. Christ, through His sacrificial death, not only entered the heavenly Most Holy Place, where God lives, but He tore down the curtain that kept us from coming to God.
3. **Unlimited and eternal access.** Our representative, Jesus Christ, has not only entered God's presence on our behalf, but has even made it his permanent residence. Indeed, He sits on a throne there. Therefore, we can enter any time, for nothing bars our

access when Jesus' blood has washed our sins away. Jesus' sacrifice assures us that our current access will one day become an eternal dwelling in God's presence (9:15).

4. **Exhortation:**

- a. **Be steadfast.** The application of 10:19-22 is made in the following verses: 1) hold on tightly to the hope we say we have (10:23), 2) not failing to assemble to give and receive encouragement (10:24-25). We may either worship together as God's covenant people (10:22-25) or fall away into apostasy (10:26-31). (For an interesting comparison of 10:22-25 with the peace offerings of the Old Testament, see Lane 310.)

VI. **The Sanctification of Christ's Sacrificial Death (13:12).** Cf. 10:10, 14, 29. This point is also linked with the last point, because an unholy person cannot approach the Holy God.

A. **Old Covenant.**

1. **God, the Sanctifier.** "He who sanctifies His people" is God in the Old Testament: Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 20:8; 21:15; 22:9, 16, 32; Ezekiel 20:12; 37:28.
2. **God demanded sanctification (holiness).** As Coleman observes, "We never rise above our God" (40). The God of Scriptures is a holy God who demands holiness from His people (Leviticus 20:26).
3. **Sanctification limited.** Israel was God's chosen people and holy (sanctified) nation. The blood sacrifices under Moses sanctified to some extent: 9:13. Part of sanctification is to be dedicated to the Lord's service. But what was there in the continual animal sacrifices to motivate a person to serve God? Instead they reminded people how sinful and unworthy they were to be servants of God: 10:3. After the rituals in the temple on the Day of Atonement were completed, the parts of the sacrificed animals that remained were taken outside the camp and burned (Leviticus 16:27) to keep them from being eaten as common food and profaned (Leviticus 6:30).

B. **New Covenant.** "Had Christ only purchased remission without sanctification, it had not been for the honour of God's holiness, now would our condition have been elevated" (Charnock 33).

1. **Jesus, the Sanctifier.** In 2:11, Jesus is the Sanctifier, and more specifically His blood: 9:13-14; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12. Although, Jesus suffered on the ignominious cross, being excommunicated from Jerusalem, and treated as a blasphemer by being executed outside the camp (Leviticus 24:13-16; cf. Mark 14:63-64) it was there, on Calvary, that He sanctified His people "outside the gate" (13:12).
2. **Jesus, the obedient Example.** "'By that will, ' that is, by the concurrence of Christ's will with God's, correctly spelled out in TEV as 'because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, ' 'we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (10:10)" (Ellingworth 70). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a process that continues throughout life (e.g., Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3), but in 10:10, 14 it refers to a past event, our baptism into Christ when God set us apart as His special servants. The blood sacrifice of Christ reminds us of our sinfulness and our unworthiness to approach God on our own merits, just as the Levitical sacrifices did. However, Jesus' sacrifice does "much more" by inspiring us to serve the Lord who gave Himself for us. This, animal sacrifices could never do!

C. **Exhortation.**

1. **Jesus sanctified us so we could serve God.** That we have been made fit for service to God is implicit in [10:10](#). In [2:11](#), we learn that He who sanctified us became our brother and is not ashamed to call us His brethren. [2:12](#) speaks of the assembly of God's people, so might we not be inspired in our assemblies by our Sanctifier? The path to glory ([2:10](#)), is to submit to the sanctification of Christ ([2:11](#)). Here it is evidently used as something more than the cleansing of sins of [2:10](#). So, the suffering of Christ not only atoned, but it sanctified us, making us fit to be His brothers. Jesus' blood qualifies us to sit in the same congregation with Christ praising God and having fellowship with the Father and the Son ([2:11-12](#)). Jesus' example in suffering as a man without sinning, sanctifies us by showing us the way we must live. "As he hath snatched us from punishment by expiating our sins, so he can bring us to communication with God, by razing evil habits out of our hearts; without this latter, we are not capable of enjoying a complete benefit of the former" (Charnock 33-34). In one sense, sanctification takes place once at our baptism ([10:10, 14](#)), but in the sense of [9:14](#), it is a lifetime process of "being sanctified" ([2:11](#), present participle, NIV, NASB-u footnote; also [9:14](#) employs the future tense – as we trust in Him in the future, His blood will cleanse us.). As Jesus proclaimed God's name to us, we proclaim it to one another. As He sang praises to God, we sing. As He put His full trust in God, so must we!
2. **We should stand with Jesus!** Since He is not only our Savior and Lord, but even our Brother, should we not more willingly stand with Him no matter the cost ([13:12-13](#))? Christ did not suffer so God might place us on His shelf as purified, static ornaments! We were not made special *merely* for our own benefit or so that we could sit back and *merely* soak up God's blessings. No, we have been set apart to serve some purpose in this world, namely, to glorify God by serving Him in obedience. What an amazing truth that God – both the Son ([2:11](#)) and the Father ([11:16](#)) – are not ashamed of their people! This should remind us that Jesus will not be ashamed of those who are not ashamed of Him, but will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him: [Luke 9:26](#). Would the Hebrews once again endure suffering ([10:32](#)) with Jesus who had endured the greater suffering of the cross ([12:2](#))? What about us? The call to Christianity is a call to share the reproach of Christ: [11:26; 13:13; 12:3](#). Let us not fear being cast out of the world's favor, for if we find ourselves "outside the camp," there we will also find Christ ([13:13](#)). Indeed it is "an attractive proposal . . . that the play on the phrase 'outside the camp' in 13:11-13 was designed to call to mind the occasion when God manifested his presence outside the wilderness encampment [[Exodus 33:7-8](#)]. The humiliation of Jesus and his death as an outcast show that God has again been rejected by his people. His presence can be enjoyed only 'outside the camp,' where Jesus was treated with contempt. Anyone who seeks to draw near to God must go 'outside the camp' and approach him through Jesus" (Lane 544). The true disciple must be willing to leave everything in this world behind, take up his cross, and follow Jesus: [Matthew 16:24; Luke 14:26](#).

Conclusion:

- I. Hebrews emphasizes the contrast between the repetitive, ineffective, animal sacrifices of the Old Law, and the once-for-all, all-sufficient, sinless sacrifice of Christ. The Levitical sacrifices could not ultimately solve man's problem with sin, for the conscience remained stained and the barrier of sin between man and God was never sufficiently removed. But "now once at the consummation of the ages Christ has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" ([9:26](#)).

- II. We need to appreciate our blessings: we have come “to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel” (12:24). Not only are continual animal sacrifices unnecessary, there are no sacrifices that can be offered for atonement if one rejects Christ; the only thing that awaits an unbeliever is God’s wrath and condemnation (10:26-31). I hope Jesus’ blood does indeed speak to you (12:24). If we appreciate it, we will “show gratitude” by offering service to God “with reverence and awe” (12:28). In view of Jesus’ sacrifice, we must hold fast our faith and encourage our fellow Christians to do the same (10:23-25).
- III. All this we will do if while running the race, we “look away from the immediate surroundings” (cf. Lane 399-400) and “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who” despising the joy He could have had in avoiding the cross (cf. Lane 399) but looking forward to “the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). This is a fitting encouragement based on what Hebrews says about the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus’ death is not only an atonement for our sins but sets the standard for our conduct. When we are tempted to “grow weary and lose heart,” or to avoid suffering even at the cost of compromising our faith, we are to “consider Him who endured such hostility by sinners against Himself” (12:3) and know that He does not call us to suffer nearly to the extent He suffered.
- IV. Therefore, may “the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (13:20-21).

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Note: I found Lane's two commentaries particularly useful. He is so thorough on each passage that he is often repetitive, but he deals with the text fairly and well. I highly recommend Robert Coleman's book, not for Hebrews but for an excellent study of blood in the Bible.