

The Blood of the New Covenant Part I

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 9:11-17

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. 16 For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17 For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

Last week we majored primarily on the negative. We talked about what cannot save us. Excellent morality cannot put away sin and make you acceptable to God. I said goodness cannot put away sin. This is really a highly controversial statement in today's religious climate. Many mainline denominations have been afflicted with an infectious disease called pluralism. Pluralism in its simplest form means there are many ways to God. Christ is not the only way. He is just the way Christians have chosen. The Buddhists have chosen Buddha and the Moslems have chosen Mohammad. According to a growing segment among Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism are basically all promoting the same values and are destined for the same eternity. If you are advocating a system of morality and striving for peace and justice, then you are a child of God. Therefore, when people like you or I come along and say good works and religion saves no one, we rain on their parade.

Listen to what the World Council of Churches, one of the world's largest ecumenical organizations, with 342 different denominations and sects as members, says about religious pluralism.

Testimony to the experience of God's grace, love, and saving power is not unique to Christians.

The Muslim texts attest not only the human experience of being touched by God's grace, but the divine intention to seek out the soul that inclines in the slightest towards God. The Passover Haggadah attests to the experience of every generation of Jews of having been brought "from slavery to freedom", "from bondage to redemption."

We stand at the historic moment when the Christian theological tradition must take full account of the experiences of those who have been living for centuries in religiously plural societies, as well as of the convictions of those who are newly stimulated by the broadening religious plurality of their surroundings. Our experience in dialogue suggests strongly that many “classical” Christian theological presuppositions and convictions need to be informed and challenged afresh by the realities of our times.

The World Council of Churches is preaching a gospel that contradicts the unique claims of Jesus Christ that He is the only way to eternal life. They believe God has saved many others outside of the confines of the proclamation of the Gospel. The Muslim is saved by grace as God responds to the slightest movement in the Muslim’s heart towards his idea or concept of God. The Jew is safe within the harbor of God’s salvation by virtue of being born a Jew. In short, the pluralism of today is not suggesting that orthodox Christianity become more tolerant, but rather pluralists are plotting the demise of it. Orthodox Christianity, has as its cornerstone doctrine, salvation by grace in Jesus Christ only. For Christianity to abandon this and allow for the salvation of any person without faith in Christ is the death of orthodoxy.

The argument of the pluralists against our understanding of salvation is that it does not make sense to the understanding of fairness. Truly it doesn’t seem fair to say to a good man, “you can’t go to Heaven because you do not accept Christ.” It doesn’t seem right to say goodness is not good enough. We have come to understand justice as rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior. In our system of justice when one has been bad but reforms, we begin to lessen the severity of punishment if not remove it altogether. We parole inmates when good behavior replaces bad. We give students good marks of conduct. People are rewarded with good citizen badges and medals. Somehow in our concept of justice we believe good work make up for the bad we have done. It acts like an eraser that erases the evil we are guilty of.

But good behavior cannot erase, cancel, nor eradicate bad behavior. Let’s say for example that an individual who has lived a life of crime decides he is going to turn over a new leaf. He has murdered, stolen and lived a very lawless life. In his attempt to right the past by changing his behavior, he comes to you and confesses he killed a friend of yours whom you had thought died accidentally. Would the fact that he never again broke the law satisfy the debt he owed to society? Of course not! If you lived from this moment on without committing another sin or injustice, there would still be the matter of what you owed God’s justice for the wrong in your past. Therefore, good behavior and respectable morality cannot forgive or change the past. Neither can it make you acceptable to God.

Well, that was last week’s bad news. Today, I want to share the good news. There is something that can cleanse our record of sins against God. There is something that can make us acceptable to God . . . the saving, sin cleansing, sanctifying blood of Jesus. Let me make sure you heard me. Let me repeat myself for those who thought they could not believe their ears. Are you shocked that I should say this? I know you believe that anyone with intelligence believes my statement to be archaic. For your benefit, I say only one fountain can wash away sin, nothing but the blood

of Jesus. Dear liberal, hear me, I said “nothing can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” You pluralists, you who believe all are going to make it to heaven, let me say for your hearing, for our “pardon this I see, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” For you who hope in religion, “For my cleansing I have only one plea, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Mr. Moralist for you I say, “Nothing can for sin atone, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” For every do-gooder I say, “Not of good I have done, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Everyone listen, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

The text today says that Christ came “as High Priest of good things to come.” Thus indicating that through Christ there is something better than what the Old Covenant had to offer. Last week we determined that the Old Covenant with its laws and regulations concerning morality and worship was insufficient to reconcile us to God for three reasons.

The first reason is it affected only outward appearance. The law and its sacrifices could do nothing but make you ceremonially clean; it allowed you to enter into the tabernacle of God. Good works may make you look good on the outside, but they can’t change the wicked heart on the inside. The second reason is it could not reconcile to God because it can’t cleanse the conscience. Good works and changes in your behavior will not ease the conscience that now bothers you, for the first time you do one thing wrong, you are reminded of all of your sins. They just can’t do it. And the third reason is it is not the prescribed way to God. God didn’t say by rules and regulations you could come to Him. He has prescribed a better way, and the better way is Christ.

The writer of Hebrews is attempting to persuade these Jewish believers beyond any doubt that the persecution that they were receiving for their belief in Christianity is worth it and more. For Christ is far superior to the old system of works. His blood has brought good things to you and me, ah, good things, brother, and better things. What better things? Good things to come have been purchased by His blood. Today we are going to look at four things, and next Sunday we will look at two.

I want us to look at four things that the blood of Jesus has purchased that can make us right with God. First, in verse twelve he says eternal redemption.

ETERNAL REDEMPTION

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [for us] (Hebrews 9:12).

With His blood, Jesus has eternally redeemed us. Salvation is in the blood of Christ. It is an eternal, everlasting redemption. Under the Old Covenant forgiveness was only good until the next time you sinned. The sacrifice that was made in the tabernacle and temple only brought the guilty party back into right relationship as far as worship was concerned, but it could not remove the sin. It could only cover it. The sin was still there, and every time you made sacrifice you

remembered again all the guilt of the past, because the blood of bulls and goats could not take it away. Their blood could only cover it temporarily. But under the New Covenant the sinner is eternally forgiven. Not forgiven until the next time you sin, but you are justified, past, present, and forever. This is the heart of the good news today. Jesus by His blood has released us from the guilt and death of sin. We are guilty before God, and the penalty of our guilt is eternal death. Ah, dear friend, understand God is not unfair, nor is He unjust in exacting from the sinner eternal damnation. Forever and ever to be condemned by God is not over punishment, it is exactly commensurate with the crime committed. Our sin is infinite in its ramifications. Just one sin, if unchecked, will destroy all that God has ever created. You are living that fact out today. All of the sin and misery of this world is the result of the one sin in the garden. Sin can't be checked and reined by human ability. It is like Pandora's box, open the lid and whatever escapes can't be put back in. Sin has eternal ramifications, and if God left it alone, it would be the undoing of His Kingdom. Forever and ever do its consequences spin out in a million different directions.

Secondly, sin is also eternal in its offence. Offence, oh, we have sinned against an eternal God! The Lord Almighty is the one we have sinned against. David, in his prayer of repentance for his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba said, "I have sinned against thee and thee only." God is the ultimate party who has been offended, and since He is an eternal God, eternal punishment must be demanded. Jesus by His blood has purchased the sin debt that I owed. As a result I am now and forever eternally right with God.

Justice is a peculiar thing. It is a hard thing to get a grasp on. American justice is not perfect, because human justice is not perfect. Only God's justice is perfect. The justice of God must keep us under sin until that justice is satisfied. Now this is not new truth, but I am saying it in a way that might be new to you, hoping that you can grasp it. God's perfect justice, which is an attribute of God, demands penalty for all sin. It demands that you remain a sinner condemned until the payment has been paid. Justice must be satisfied, and that is why it is said that justice cannot save you. God's justice cannot say, "I will pardon you, reprieve your sentence, on good behavior." Justice can never release or acquit. It can only do this one thing—exact its payment till the payment is made in full.

Therefore, if we were left to God's justice only, we would be forever branded a sinner. Justice must keep you guilty until the payment has been made. Justice must brand one as guilty until the full satisfaction of the penalty has been paid. We are guilty and are labeled as criminal until our sentence or punishment is fulfilled. What is the penalty for our sins? Eternal death. So, according to the justice of God, you will never be changed from your standing as guilty forever before God. There is no salvation in God's justice. Let me give you an illustration. If you could pay your sin debt in full, then you could have a hope of a new beginning, a clean slate. But how many of you can do that? None of us. Oh, but Satan, the liar, will make you think that by simply changing your behavior you can start over. But there is only eternal redemption—in the blood of Christ. In the famous tinker's dream, Pilgrim's Progress, Faithful spoke to Hopeful who was under conviction. Hopeful wanted to know what he could do to be saved. Faithful in a witness of the gospel said, "Here is the only way, get the righteousness of a perfect man and claim it for your own." Oh, this is the advice of the Gospel. There is only one who has satisfied the justice of God; it is Christ.

Let us say that you were arrested for recklessly driving your vehicle. They placed you in jail, and the judge said that with the payment of a fine you would have your freedom and your debt to society would be paid. So you paid the fine and they set you free. You are now considered by society paid up in full; there is nothing against your record that is yet to be demanded.

As long as God's justice has not been satisfied, you and I are forever branded guilty. But through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for sin, our sins have been forgiven, pardoned, removed for all eternity to come. Jesus paid my sin debt. I don't know any other way to explain this, but there are only two ways to get your sin debt paid. One will not fully pay it and the other will. Jesus paid the sin debt fully and completely satisfied justice. The other way is for you to die and go to Hell. But even so, that will never completely pay the sin debt. Forever you will suffer without end. Eternity without end and justice never fully satisfied. I tell you the best option, the premium plan, is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. I don't know how He did it, but I can tell you He did do it. We can say that supernaturally in those moments on that cross He drank all that was against us. He drank all of God's justice and He paid it in full, so that you could be eternally forgiven. Oh praise His name! God will never ever view the believer as guilty again. Never will the Father look at me and see me as a guilty sinner. Why? Because I have an eternal, non-ending, and lasting redemption. Justice has been satisfied.

The second thing the blood of Jesus Christ brings is cleansing of the conscience.

CLEANSING OF THE CONSCIENCE

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14)

He calls them dead works. In other words, these are works of death, works leading to death because sin is a venomous poison that kills all that it touches. But also they are dead works because there is no life in them. Dear friend, even if your best efforts today, such as coming to church, were to be examined under the microscope of God's purity and holiness, it is would be found blemished, having no life. It is these very works that our conscience is hounded by. The conscience will not relent, like a posse always on your heels, it will not stop its pursuit of you. The conscience does not rest but works to remind you of your guilt.

Dear friend, Jesus' blood alone can cleanse your conscience. Only it can take the sting out of all the memories of your past sins. Though you may never forget those sins, through the blood of Jesus Christ, the pain, the sting, and the feeling of condemnation has been removed by the cleansing of Christ. There is something about His sacrificial death that has an agency of cleansing that can even cleanse your conscience. And notice what the writer says, "cleanse from dead works to serve the living God." Did you know a guilty conscience will impede the Christian's progress and service? Try to serve God with a guilty conscience. The conscience becomes so obsessed with what we have done or what we have not done that we are literally handcuffed and cannot serve God as we ought. Isn't the devil sly here? Even we, who have been eternally redeemed and have

no sentence of guilt against us, can be discouraged by the simple suggestion of Satan. All he has to do is whisper in your ear and tell you how terrible you are. His wicked whisper stings, “Why, if you were really a sincere Christian you wouldn’t keep sinning and coming to God needing to be forgiven.” The conscience begins to beat, to probe, and to pain you.

Ah, Satan is the accuser of the brethren; that is his business to come to the Christian and suggest evil words of doubt. He tries to make you think God’s promise of eternal redemption is not true. He whispers thoughts like “if God had really forgiven you, you would have power over this.” “If you were really clean with God and acceptable to Him, wouldn’t you do better than you do?” Don’t listen to his lies for, if you consider them, your ability to serve God by faith is crippled. Satan’s aim is to destroy your faith, for there is no other way to please God except by faith. When I base my relationship with God not on faith but upon a guilty conscience, then my performance and not the Lord’s becomes the focus. My eyes are not on Christ through faith, but they are upon me. So, dear friends, the blood of Jesus is an established, historical fact and the benefits I get from that historical fact are by faith, trusting and treasuring what Jesus did on that cross. But to trust my own performance and good works is an effort not of faith but of flesh. These are dead works that enliven the conscience. Oh, how it will make the heart throb and ache. A clean conscience before God is based upon faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the blood of Christ purchases the redemption of sins under the first covenant.

REDEMPTION OF SINS UNDER FIRST COVENANT

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions [that were] under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15).

In other words, the author of Hebrews is saying that one of the reasons Jesus died on the cross was to redeem the Old Testament saints. His death redeemed and made payment for the sins that were committed under the first covenant. This seems to be confusing to many Christians, but it shouldn’t be, it is really simple. So many people want to believe Old Testament saints like Abraham, Moses, and David, living under the dispensation of the law, were saved by works and obeying the law. No, friend, no, salvation has never been in any other than Jesus Christ and faith in His complete work. The Old Testament saints were saved by faith. Listen to Galatians chapter three and verse six,

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Galatians 3:6).

Right standing with God came to Abraham because he had faith. David said in Psalm thirty-two verse two, “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” These saints understood that their sacrifices and good works could not make them right, nor could they remove their sins. They could only trust in a promise, in a promise there would be a sacrifice that would take away all of their sins. By placing their confidence in

what God had said was true, they were made right with God. Isn't that the same way you are made right with God? They looked forward; we look backward. In this we see that the New Covenant brings hope. Old Testament saints had a hope birthed by faith. As we have a certain hope of Jesus' second coming, they had a certain hope of His first coming. It is the same. They believed God that there would be a sacrifice, and they looked forward with hope. Therefore they persevered.

The New Covenant in Jesus' blood restores hope to your life. I don't have to hope that there is coming a mediator to die for me. He has already done that, but I have hope today in the Lord's second return. I have a hope. That is the power of hope. My dear friends, many men have been able to endure the gravest of hardships because of the power of hope. Men have endured prison camps, have gone through the cruelest of torture and still maintained sanity. They were not broken because they had hope one day of returning home and seeing their loved ones. Hope will do amazing things in your life. But if your life is without hope, you have no power to survive the hardships of life. Some of you have come here today and you have absolutely no hope, no certainty about the future. Let me share with you the foundation of all hope, it is in the shed blood of Christ. He has never lied, and therefore, you can trust Him.

Fourthly, the blood of Christ guarantees and gives an eternal inheritance.

AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE

The author in the last part of verse fifteen explains why Jesus came as a mediator.

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions [that were] under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15).

We are beneficiaries of a will. Look at verse sixteen,

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (Hebrews 9:16).

He shifts in terminology to give us another perspective of the New Covenant; he calls it a "testament," a last will and testament. In a covenant you have two parties who come together and make certain agreements and live by certain stipulations in that covenant. But a will or a last testament is not usually considered a contract between two parties. It is a unilateral commitment of one party at his death to relinquish his goods to another. All the writer wants us to see here, by shifting words and calling it a testament rather than a covenant, is see that the covenant is unilateral. This is God's promise and it is not based upon man's works. Salvation is not based upon who "willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Romans 9:16). So he calls it a testament, and the only way a testament is enforced is when a man dies. When the "testator" dies, his goods are given to his inheritors, but death has to take place for that will to become effective. But who has died to make the will of God to go into effect? I tell you this is

God's covenant. Therefore, God died that we might become inheritors. "Oh, God died? Pastor, now you have moved from the realm of orthodoxy to heresy." No I haven't. There is no way in which I can separate the deity of Christ from His humanity, nor can any theologian. It can't be done. There is such a union between the two natures of Christ in the one man. No, God did not stop existing, God didn't stop breathing, God did not die in His essence, but friends, Jesus is God and Jesus died. That was sufficient to put the will into force. Our Lord, after picking up the cup said, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." The testament is now in force. I am an inheritor of all that is in Christ. All the worlds He made and everything that is in them is ours. It is all ours because of this New Covenant. Some might object and say, "But don't we have to do something to inherit the promise? Doesn't the Scripture say that faith and patience must be exercised in order for us to get the inheritance? Isn't faith and patience a work that we must perform?" In Hebrews chapter six, verse twelve, we studied this months ago. The writer of Hebrews is admonishing this congregation to not be slothful, not to be sluggish.

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12).

No doubt there is an exercising, a performing, of faith and patience on the part of the saint. I am to exercise faith and patience, which is a work. Hebrews chapter six, verse fifteen illustrates this using Abraham's life, saying after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. In order to receive the inheritance that Christ has for us, faith and patience are required. Clearly this is what verse twelve states. "That through faith and patience you inherit the promise."

But, dear friends, faith and patience to obtain the promises are not works. They are not works for two reasons. First, faith and patience are both gifts from God. God gives faith and He gives patience; they both come from God. I am to exercise them, but because I exercise them does not cancel their being a gift, nor does it make them works that inherit salvation. My father gave me a bicycle and by virtue of exercising my legs pumping the pedals, I rode the bike my father gave me. Did riding the bike make it no longer a gift? Do I now earn the bicycle by riding it? No! It is still a gift; exercising it does not change its status as a gift. Exercising faith and patience does not change their status as a gift. The second reason why faith and patience can't be works is because they are proofs or evidences of our being inheritors. They are our claim ticket. They are not something you do to achieve the inheritance; they are simply proof of your identity that you are the rightful inheritor of your Father.

When Karen and I boarded the magnificent ship, that you made it possible for us to board, we approached the ticket counter. We had our tickets that declared the cruise was ours. But the ticket master required something of us before we could board the ship. He required photo identification that proved we were who we said we were. We presented our driver's licenses. Once he saw our photos, we were allowed to receive all that ship had to offer us. Dear friends, faith and patience are nothing more than the identification of who you say you are. If you are a child of God, God has given you faith and the hope to cause patience to endure.

All who are regenerated have faith because it is in their spiritual DNA. There are many today who claim to be of Christ, but they don't have faith or patience. They don't have the identification that they are offspring of God. They don't have the spiritual DNA to cause them to persevere, but if you have Jesus, you have it. You have that which belongs to Him and all those who have been birthed by the Holy Spirit—faith and patience.

The inheritance is not temporary. The writer of Hebrews calls it an “eternal inheritance.” Through the blood of Jesus Christ I have eternal forgiveness, never again considered guilty by God. I will always have a clear conscience as long as I appropriate through faith the truth of the shed blood of Christ.

So I conclude by saying that these can be yours as well, when you receive Christ. When Christ becomes your passionate joy, your deepest satisfaction, and the love of your heart, you get this and much, much more.

*Oh! Precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow.
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*