

## Hebrews 9:16-28

### Judgment or Salvation

In our study of the book of Hebrews we've seen the great difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. The old covenant was an agreement between two parties: God and people. God revealed His law and promised to bless His people if they obeyed it. And the people promised to fully obey God's Word. But the old covenant was broken many times, not by God but by people who disobeyed God's will.

So you might ask, "Why did God institute the old covenant if He knew it would fail and that one day Jesus Christ would inaugurate the new covenant? Surely God knows that on our own we are unable to fully obey His holy law. So why did He give the law and the old covenant?"

The answer is that the law established our great need for God's mercy and grace. We all have a tendency, and you know this as well as I do, we all have a tendency toward self-righteousness. Our attitude is, "I'm a good person. I've not done anything really wrong. In fact, I am perhaps better than most other folks." But when we are measured not against other people but against a supremely holy God and His law we all stand guilt of sin.<sup>1</sup>

Knowing we can never achieve full and true righteousness by our works, we are pushed to turn away from ourselves and to seek God's mercy and grace. And we find this mercy and grace in abundance in the new covenant. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ his righteousness is put to our account.<sup>2</sup> And our inheritance of everlasting life in the coming kingdom of God is secured—forever.<sup>3</sup>

Now, it is this idea of an inheritance (Hebrews 9:15) that leads the author of Hebrews to write about a testament, as in a last will and testament. There was an old testament or covenant and there is a new testament. And both were put into effect by a death and the shedding of blood.

For where there *is* a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. <sup>17</sup> For a

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:19, 20. Also Galatians 3:23-25 reveals that the law was a guardian or tutor for God's people until the time of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31

<sup>3</sup> John 10:27, 28

testament *is* in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. <sup>18</sup> Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. <sup>19</sup> For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, <sup>20</sup> saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." <sup>21</sup> Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. <sup>22</sup> And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.  
(Hebrews 9:16-22)

The main theme of these verses can be summed up in the words of verse 18, "not...without blood." The shedding of blood is a witness to death. And the wages of sin is death.<sup>4</sup> God warned Adam and Eve that sin would lead to death, immediate death and permanent, everlasting death. Justice must be carried out. Sin and its penalty which is death cannot simply be swept under the rug even by a loving God. God is righteous and just and holy as well as loving.

But God was merciful to Adam and Eve and they did not immediately die. A substitute died on their behalf. When God made them clothes from animal skins a substitute and sacrifice died in their place. The same was true for all those who sinned under the old covenant. People in the old covenant did not die immediately upon sinning. A substitute, a lamb or bull or goat was sacrificed on behalf of the sinners.

All of this was a merciful and gracious reprieve. People were saved on credit, an i.o.u. so-to-speak, until the true substitute, Jesus Christ should come. In both cases, the old covenant or testament and the new testament were inaugurated by death and the shedding of blood. At the last supper, when Jesus inaugurated the new covenant we read,

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

<sup>27</sup> Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup> For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23

for the remission of sins.  
(Matthew 26:26-28)

Without the shedding of blood there is no remission or cleansing of sin. So the man, Jesus Christ, who fully loved God and was tempted as we are yet without sin, died on our behalf.

We tend to minimize the horror of our sin. We want to forget our sins. We want to suppress the memory of our failures. We put our sins in a deep box under our heart and we sit on it. But the box is not air tight and the foul smell of boxed up sins leaks out. We can't hide from God. But God so loves the world that He gave His only begotten Son, to die for our sins and then to be raised up from the dead, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore *it* was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup> For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; <sup>25</sup> not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— <sup>26</sup> He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.  
(Hebrews 9:23-26)

Under the old covenant the High Priest offered a sacrifice for sins every year on the Day of Atonement. But God's Word to us insists, over and over again, that Christ's sacrifice was made once for all time. All of the sins committed under the old covenant forgiven on the credit of an animal sacrifice are now fully paid for in the sacrifice of Christ. All of our sins past, present and future are mercifully forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. With the sacrifice of Christ the prophecy of Isaiah 53 has been fulfilled.

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.  
<sup>4</sup> Surely He has borne our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,

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<sup>5</sup> John 3:16, 17

Smitten by God, and afflicted.  
<sup>5</sup> But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
And by His stripes we are healed.  
<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.  
(Isaiah 53:3-6)

By faith in Jesus Christ my sins and your sins, all of them, are forgiven forever. Hebrews 9 now ends with a solemn, sobering warning and also a promise full of hope.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.  
(Hebrews 9:27, 28)

These two verses are rich in mercy and grace to us. There is truth revealed here that God wants all of us to take to heart. Number one is that all of us have an appointment with death. Scriptures declares, "it is appointed for men to die." Well, who made that appointment? I would never make that kind of an appointment! I don't even like making an appointment for the doctor or dentist. I'm certainly not going to make one for the mortician?

The answer is that God made the appointment. God warned Adam and Eve that sin would lead to death. Therefore death is not a natural process. It is not simply a part of life. Death is a penalty for sin. So every human being has a beginning and an end. And God knows every day in between. Psalm 139:16 states,

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.  
And in Your book they all were written,  
The days fashioned for me,  
When *as yet there were none* of them.

This truth should have a profound effect on all of us. It should cause us to pray as Moses did, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."<sup>6</sup> Most people think very little about their life and death. They think very little about the important reality that we will all face. This is why I said these

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 90:12

verses are full of mercy and grace. They cause us to stop and think about what really matters in life.

It is appointed for men to die. Then the phrase of great seriousness: “after this the judgment.” Apart from Christ people die and then face judgment for their sins with the result being the second death from which there is no release.<sup>7</sup> And there is no second chance.

To refuse the cross of Christ as a means to your salvation is to choose it as the means of your judgment. If loving God is not a joy for you now, why would it be a joy for you in eternity? This is why God's Word urgently encourages us to believe the good news now saying, “Behold, now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.”<sup>8</sup> Accept God's offer of life in Jesus Christ now, today!

But an interesting and good question comes in at this point. If Jesus bore the punishment for our sins why do believers still die? The answer is that God wills that death remain in this world, even among His own children, as an abiding witness to the extreme horror of sin. Death will remain until the return of Jesus Christ. But this brings us to the second great truth. Death has lost its punishing sting for believers.<sup>9</sup> We do not and will not ever come into judgment for sin. Jesus proclaimed,

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word  
and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life,  
and shall not come into judgment, but has passed  
from death into life.  
(John 5:24)

Being saved by God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ we shall not ever come into judgment for sin, because we have passed from death into life. Nothing will ever change this—ever.

so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.  
To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a  
second time, apart from sin, for salvation.  
(Hebrews 9:28)

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<sup>7</sup> Revelation 21:8. In the second death people are not tortured forever, they simply die (John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Philippians 3:19), they perish and their corpses are burned up.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:2

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

When Christ returns it will not be to deal with our sins. This he did once for all at the cross. But he will appear to grant us our full salvation which is everlasting life and glory in the kingdom of God.

Do you eagerly wait for Jesus Christ to appear? It is good to think about Christ's return as often as you can. It is this sure and certain hope of Christ's return that will energize your faith and undergird your love. The early Christians often proclaimed:

Christ has died.  
Christ has risen.  
Christ will come again.

Christ has died for our sins, once for all. Christ is risen and interceded for us at the right hand of God. Christ will come again to reward those who trust him now. Trust him now and always.