

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 9, Verses 1-12 (Revisited)
Notes From Class on January 19, 2010
Last Revised on (January 25, 2010)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin please make sure that you have everything you need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

If you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV") then you may also wish to have the handout we have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews.

Tonight there are three additional handouts.

One is a drawing of the tabernacle, the same one we used last week.

The second is the ESV text of Numbers 15:22-31 and Romans Chapter 7

The third and final handout is the ESV text of part of Chapter 10 and all of Chapter 16 of Leviticus.

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started.

Review

So far in this class we have finished reading the first **eight** chapters of Hebrews

and the first **12** verses of Chapter **Nine**.

As we have continually noted,

Hebrews is probably best thought of as the text of a **sermon**,

written around the end of the **First Century**, A.D,

to be delivered to a group of **Christians** we can not identify,

by a **preacher** whom we also cannot identify.

The preacher knew his audience and perceived some of them to be in danger of "**falling away**."

 The preacher is, among other things, encouraging his audience to "**hold fast**" to their confession of faith.

 In what we have studied so far (through verse 12 of Chapter 9) the preacher has...

 helped us to see **(1:1 - 3:6)** that Christ is greater than absolutely **everything** in all creation.

 and that to reject Christ would be the greatest **calamity** we can possibly imagine!

 To do that (i.e. reject Christ) would be even worse than repeating the sad history of **Israel**,

 which was chosen and favored specially by God but **continually** fell away **(3:7 - 4:13)**.

 This does not mean that **we** are better than Israel but, rather, that we have a better **priest!**

 The preacher introduces the figure of **Jesus as our great high priest. (4:14 - 5:10)**

 But of course Jesus is not **just** a "better priest."

 He is the son of God and God, of whom all the priests who ever were, were just dim **shadows**.

 He and only he is finally **able** to save us, therefore to reject Jesus is finally to reject **salvation. (5:11 - 6:20)**

 The preacher has explained how Christ **supersedes** and **replaces** the **priesthood** and the **law. (7:1 - 8:7)**

 and establishes a New **Covenant** which supersedes and replaces the **Old** Covenant. **(8:8-8:13)**

 That's a quick review to the end of Chapter **Eight**.

 The preacher next emphasizes how much **better** the New Covenant is than the Old Covenant.

 That is what was going on last week as we began reading **Chapter 9**.

 We covered the first **12** verses.

 Let's begin by rereading that.

Chapter 9, Verses 1-12

Would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 9, Verses 1-12, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

 Thank you. Now would someone please read those same verses in English (ESV)

1 Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.

2 For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place.

3 Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place,

4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.

5 Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

6 These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties,

7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing

9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,

10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)

12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Thank you.

The Old Covenant and all that it entailed was ordained by God Almighty,

and it was ordained to foreshadow Christ and prepare the way for his coming.

It was therefore certainly not the purpose of the author of Hebrews to denigrate the Old Covenant

but, rather, it was his purpose to exalt the New Covenant in Christ

and to make certain that nobody was so foolish and unfortunate as to turn away from the New Covenant, and back to the old one,

now that Christ has finally been revealed as the center of both!

In the first 5 verses of Chapter 9, the preacher calls to mind the earthly tabernacle which was the symbol of God's presence among the people under the Old Covenant.

One of the handout has a diagram of this. And you can read about the Tabernacle in great detail in the Old Testament. But in Hebrews the author is not interested in much of that detail, precisely because he is about the business of exalting Christ and the New Covenant, which has fully **replaced** the Old Covenant.

In verses 6 through 10 he reminds us --- in very general terms --- of what the priests formerly did in the Tabernacle.

More specifically he reminds us of the one time each year when the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies, and drew near to God, in order to atone for all of the sins of his people, including his own.

This was how God's chosen people, properly worshiped Him before Christ was revealed.

But when Christ came, as we are told in verses 11 and 12, and the following verses, all of that was set aside.

Through the shedding of his own blood on the cross, Jesus was able to enter heaven itself, and make effective atonement for the sins of all his people, and achieve eternal redemption for them.

This of course was not something that could have been accomplished with the blood of animals

and it was not something that could ever be repeated.

It occurred once, for all.

The crucifixion of the Son of God was and is an eternal sacrifice --- of which they were formerly unaware under the Old Covenant but of which we have now been made aware under the New Covenant.

Many of these points will be revisited and reemphasized as we read on.

But that is a rough review of what we covered last week, in Chapter 9, verses 1-12.

I think we already begin to understand, at least in a general way, that the tabernacle and the priests and the priestly duties set forth under the Old Covenant were all earthly symbols of the heavenly reality that would be revealed more fully when Christ came.

Their great importance, but their only importance, is what they communicated, to Israel and to us, about Christ.

Two Issues

Now during last week's lesson, two issues were raised which I could not respond to properly, so I promised to investigate these further and report back to you on this week.

The first concerns Verse 7 of Chapter 9,

where we are reminded of what the high priest did annually on the Day of Atonement.

We are told (by the author of Hebrews) that the High Priest entered the Holiest Place, taking with him the blood of animals, which he offers for himself and for the **unintentional sins** of the people.

What is meant here by "unintentional sins?" Is this consistent with what we read in the Old Testament? And what lesson are we supposed to draw from this business about "unintentional sin"?

That was the first issue I promised to look into.

The second issue came from verse 9 of Chapter 9,

where it says that, under the Old Covenant, gifts and sacrifices were offered that could not **perfect** the conscience of the worshipper.

"**Perfect**" is here used as a verb which, of course, means to make something **perfect**,

in this case, the **conscience** of the worshiper.

The implication here, I think, that while the gifts and sacrifices of the Old Covenant could **NOT** make perfect the consciences of the worshipers,

but that perfect consciences somehow **WILL** be found in worshipers under the New Covenant.

So, what does it mean for a worshiper to have a **perfect conscience**?

That was the second issue from last week.

I have, as promised, studied these two issues, the best I could in the time available to me.

Now I will report back to you what I have discovered.

I am probably going to use all of the class this evening to do this.

I hope that is OK with everyone.

OK, then, let's turn to the first issue:

What is Meant by "Unintentional Sin" in Hebrews 9:7

In Chapter 9, verse 7, the author of Hebrews says that the High Priest offered the blood for himself and for the "unintentional" sins of the people.

The term translated "unintentional (inadvertent) sin" is relatively rare in the Bible.

But the distinction between between inadvertent and deliberate sins is found in at least one place in the Old Testament and at several places in the Apocrypha.

The one Biblical citation is from the 15th Chapter of the Old Testament book of Numbers.

Will somebody please read Numbers 15, verses 22 through 31 in English (ESV)

Numbers 15: 22-31

22 "But if you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments that the LORD has spoken to Moses,

23 all that the LORD has commanded you by Moses, from the day that the LORD gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations,

24 then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the rule, and one male goat for a sin offering.

25 And the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the people of Israel, and they shall be forgiven, because it was a mistake, and they have brought their offering, a food offering to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD for their mistake.

26 And all the congregation of the people of Israel shall be forgiven, and the stranger who sojourns among them, because the whole population was involved in the mistake.

27 "If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering.

28 And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

29 You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them.

30 But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people.

31 Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him."

The first part of what we have just read, Numbers 15:22-26, provides for the possibility that the nation may accidentally forget to observe some of the commandments that God has given through Moses.

The next part, Numbers 15:27-29, provides for the unintentional sins of individual persons, including strangers who may be visiting among them.

In either case the point seems clear: innocent mistakes can be forgiven if, once they are recognized, they are atoned for in the proper way.

Conversely things which are done "with a high hand" (that is willful premeditated sins) cannot be set aside so easily, under the Old Covenant anyway.

Numbers 15:30-31 (once again) reads as follows: "But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him."

I find this passage to be a consistent teaching of the whole Bible.

Certainly we understand that God's character is gracious and long suffering and that he looks to the heart.

That innocent mistakes would be easily atoned for is consistent with this gracious aspect of his character.

But open rebellion against God is finally and irrevocably put down --- whether we are talking about the Old or the New Testament.

So there is nothing very surprising here in what we just read in Numbers, is there?

The one thing I would point out, however, is that this passage from Numbers deals with the clear endpoints on what is a sort of continuum of intentionality, or so it seems to me.

Purely innocent mistakes grounded in ignorance on the one hand, and willful rebellion against God on the other.

I think that most sins are rather in the middle of these two extremes and not nearly so clear cut.

But in any case, it may be that the author of Hebrews had this passage, or at least the principle set forth in this passage, in mind as he wrote Hebrews, Chapter 9, verse 7.

In other words he may reckon that when, on the Day of Atonement, the priest atoned for all sins of the people of Israel, this did **not** include those who had been or should be "cut off from the people" under Numbers 15 for having deliberately despised the word of the LORD,

Now clearly the ceremony being discussed in Hebrews 9:7 is Yom Kippur, the annual Day of Atonement, which is described in Chapter 16 of the Old Testament Book of Leviticus.

As we shall read in a moment, Leviticus 16 actually does **not** state that the blood is for unintentional sins only. It says, rather, **all** of the sins of the people.

It may however interest you to know that the rabbis have been arguing for centuries about whether Yom Kippur atones for unintentional sins only or for willful sins as well.

The rabbis were arguing about this in Jesus' day and in the day of the author of Hebrews.

Some have suggested that our author embraced that interpretation which best fit his overall argument, which is the superiority of the New Covenant.

In other words, we know that the blood of Christ **is** strong enough to atone for willful sin, once the heart of the sinner has turned back to God and is truly repentant.

If the Old Covenant were actually less flexible than that, less gracious, less forgiving of intentional sin, then perhaps that is one more proof of the superiority of the New Covenant.

But I am not convinced of this.

For one thing I do not think our inspired author is picking his arguments based on what is rhetorically convenient rather than on what is actually true.

For another thing, I rather strongly believe that the God of the Old and New Testaments is one God whose character is eternal and unchanging.

So I really don't think that God's orientation toward intentionality could have shifted.

However the lack of clarity on this point under the old covenant --- whether intentional sins could ever be forgiven --- is itself one aspect of the insecurity God's people must have felt under the Old Covenant!

By comparison we are now so much more secure, knowing as we do, that God forgives all who truly repent and flee to Christ for forgiveness.

But I am not certain we have yet put our finger on the point which our inspired author is making.

As has been said, the ceremony described in Hebrews, Chapter 9, verse 7, almost certainly is the same ceremony described in the Old Testament Book of **Leviticus, Chapter 16**.

And Chapter 16 of Leviticus begins by making specific reference to certain events described in Leviticus, **Chapter 10**.

Will someone please read Leviticus Chapter 10, verses 1-11, in English. (ESV)

(Leviticus 10: 1-11)

1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them.

2 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said, 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

4 And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp."

5 So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said.

6 And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled.

7 And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

8 And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying,

9 "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.

10 You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean,

11 and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses."

Thank you.

Remember we are pursuing the Biblical question of how to understand "unintentional sin" in Hebrews 9:7.

We have just read the important story of how Aaron's two eldest sons died because they had offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. (Verses 1-2)

Would you call what Nadab and Abihu did an intentional sin? Or an unintentional sin? And what, for that matter, was their sin?

Were they simply ignorant of what God had commanded?

Did God punish them for an innocent mistake?

Is that consistent with God's character, which seems generally to be so gracious and forbearing?

And doesn't God Himself say, in Numbers 15, that innocent mistakes may be atoned for and forgiven?

Aaron may have had similar questions. In verse 3 Moses explains to him what God had said.

God had said "Among those who are near me, I will be sanctified, and before all people I will be glorified."

So evidently what Aaron's boys had done had seriously dishonored God in some way and, I think, both Moses and Aaron had a pretty good idea of what God was talking about, even if we don't.

Aaron, who knew the boys well, seems to have been satisfied by this explanation. He held his peace.

Moses who had a general tendency to intercede for the people, not only held his peace, but even forbid Aaron and his other sons to mourn the boys or to leave the tent to attend to their bodies.

At least that is how I read Verses 4 - 7.

In view of God's words recorded in verses 8 and 9, it seems possible that whatever the boys had done may have involved being intoxicated while in service before the Lord.

But the concern here does not seem to be limited to drunkenness. The Lord urges Aaron to listen carefully to all that Moses has spoken and to teach the same to the people of Israel and to be careful to distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean. (Verses 10 and 11)

Whatever the boys did, it seems to have been not an innocent mistake but something fundamentally disrespectful and impure. In other words this appears to have been a sin of the heart.

My interpretation of this passage involves a bit of speculation, but this much is certain: insofar as they were human beings, there was never a time when Aaron's sons, drunk or sober, were free from sinful thoughts and deeds. Nor are any of us!

No man, save Christ alone, has ever been able to hold himself free from sin, however much he may have understood and **intended** to obey God's laws..

Not even the Apostle Paul, for example, and not even following his conversion.

Please turn to Romans, Chapter 7, at verse 13, and let's read from verse 13 to the end of that chapter.

Romans 7: 1 3-25

13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Surely here and elsewhere Paul describes the struggle that we all face, between our desire to obey the law and our inability to do so and, therefore, our total dependence on Christ --- both to atone for our sins and finally to transform us into beings that are capable of setting sin aside.

Here I think Paul is describing a place in between the two endpoints of intentionality that we saw defined in Numbers 15.

He does not have in mind either innocent mistakes or willful spite directed toward God.

Rather he speaks of the battle that rages in this life, even and especially in God's people, between the Spirit and the Flesh.

So far only one man, Christ, has been completely filled with the Spirit and in charge of the Flesh.

This is why only Christ has ever been fit to serve as a Great High Priest in the presence of God.

All of this helps to explain what we read next.

n.b. We did not have time to read all of Leviticus 16 in class on January 19. This was assigned as homework. However most of the discussion of this passage which follows (below) was covered in class on January 19. --- GGR

Would someone please now read Leviticus 16 in English (ESV)

(Leviticus 16)

1 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died,

2 and the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

3 But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

4 He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on.

5 And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

6 "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house.

7 Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

8 And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.

9 And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering,

10 but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

11 "Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself.

12 And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil

13 and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.

14 And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

16 Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

17 No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel.

18 Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around.

19 And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

20 "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat.

21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.

22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

23 "Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there.

24 And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people.

25 And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar.

26 And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

27 And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire.

28 And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

29 "And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you.

30 For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins.

31 It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever.

32 And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments.

33 He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.

34 And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins." And Moses did as the LORD commanded him.

Thank you.

As you can see, it was the death of Nadab and Abihu, of which we read in Leviticus 10, which prompted the speech of the Lord to Moses which comprises Leviticus 16.

Note that all of Leviticus 16, after the first five words of verse 2, is an uninterrupted speech of **God**.

And despite that large number of words spoken by him, notice some of the things that God does **not** say.

He does not say anything about what Nadab and Abihu **did**.

Indeed He does not say **anything** about Nadab and Abihu **at all**.

He does not say that Aaron should do a better job of **raising** his sons for the priesthood.

Neither does he chastise Moses or Aaron for having failed in their **training** or **supervision** of priests.

He begins by telling Moses to tell Aaron (and thereby all who succeed him as High Priest) simply to stay **away** from the Ark and **out** of the holy of holies, otherwise they will die!

This may seem a little shocking, but we have seen this before when God met with Moses on the mountain top and everyone else backed away from the mountain for their own protection.

And we see it lots of places in the Bible when sinful men come into closer than usual contact with God or his messengers.

There is fear and danger in these situations, but I think we often fail to understand what the danger is.

In such cases God is not being a bully. Nor is God being sensitive. His feelings are not easily hurt. He is not threatening to punish the people if they come near him. On the contrary, he is **protecting** them. Because he knows that if they come near him, sinners that they are, they will die. That is the nature of things.

This if I understand it correctly is a matter of the impossibility of any sin or impurity to exist in proximity to God, and the inability of fallen, unregenerate man to remain sinless.

An ice cube that approaches the sun will be vaporized. This does not mean that the sun is punishing the ice cube or that the ice cube has offended the sun. The ice cube, being what it is, simply cannot exist in close proximity to the sun. That is the nature of things.

I think our relation to God in his holiness is sort of like that. Before we can approach God safely, we must become sinless, and that may be a fair summary of what the whole Bible is about! God is and always has been in the process of making us sinless.

This is not on a handout, but would somebody please open up your Bible and read Ephesians, Chapter 1, verses 3 - 10

Ephesians 1:3-10

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

All of this is what Christ finally accomplishes. He atones for our sin and then causes his spirit to dwell in us, gradually transforming us, without killing us, until, finally and forevermore we shall be like him --- free to do only the will of God, and safe in God's presence.

We have Christ and we know it.

Under the Old Covenant, Israel had Christ, but didn't know it.

What they knew was the Law, which helped them to understand what sin is,

and they had rituals for atoning for sin.

Day in and day out, week in and week out, routinely and under particular circumstances, and on various special days throughout the year, the priests had all kinds of things they could do to atone for the sins of the people and for their own sins. All of these are sort of referred to in Hebrews 9:6

As part of that, or in addition to that, there were also various judicial actions (such as we read about in Numbers 15 whereby certain people (idolaters, blasphemers, murders, adulterers, fornicators, and etc.) were "cut off from the People" during the course of the year, often stoned to death.

In this way also the nation was purified under the Old Covenant.

But despite all of these laws and ceremonies and judicial actions, the **nation** was still so unclean that there was only one day during the whole year when the people were considered clean before the Lord from all their sins. (Verse 30)

And this was on the tenth day of the seventh month each year (**Verse 29**), the Day of Atonement.

On this day, briefly, the Nation of Israel, under the Old Covenant, was given a small and imperfect foretaste of what we, as Christians, under the New Covenant enjoy perfectly and eternally.

Q. And what, I ask you, was different on that one day of the year in Israel, that made them clean before the Lord, as they were not clean on any other day of the year?

A. The answer, of course, is that this was the only day during the whole year where a representative of the people was able to draw near to the LORD to make atonement for all of the sins of the people, including those sins which would inevitably happen, most of them inadvertently, unintentionally, even in the process of making atonement, because the people and their priest remained sinful.

This representative, the High Priest, could do this because of the elaborate provisions of Leviticus 16, in which the blood of animals and other provisions set forth therein were deemed sufficient and effective for this purpose.

These were the means of God's grace whereby a sinful man was permitted to draw near to the holy God and return alive from behind the veil, and make effective atonement for all of the sins of the people.

Surely those who had committed innocent mistakes were included. Surely those who remained willfully opposed to God were excluded. But that leaves most sin, such as Paul talked about in Romans 7, which we do not exactly do willfully but which is far from innocent and proceeds from our sinful flesh.

I reckon it is this latter category of sin that the author of Hebrews has mostly in mind here, in Hebrew's 9:7, which is the category of sin we saw in the behavior of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10, and the kind of sin that keeps **us** out of the holy places, until the work of Christ has been completed in us.

All of this, we were told in Hebrews 9:8-9 was a parable (symbolic for the present age) whereby the Holy Spirit taught that the way into heaven was not yet open, until Christ and the New Covenant should come.

That is about as much as I could do with the first issue raised last week.

I realize it is rather inconclusive, but I hope it is valuable somehow.

Now for the second issue.

n.b. We had no time at all on January 19 to discuss the second issue (i.e. regarding the notion of perfect conscience in Hebrews 9:9) -- GGR