

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 9, Verses 13-22**  
**Notes From Class on January 26, 2010**  
**Last Revised on (January 28, 2010)**

Good evening everyone!

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

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Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

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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, Chapter 9.

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There is coffee and tea a the back.

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

### **Introduction**

In this class, as you know, we are studying the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

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As of **two** weeks ago, we had gotten to verse 12 of Chapter 9.

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**Last** week we did not read any further,

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because we continued to discuss an issue which had arisen in connection with **Verse 7** of Chapter 9

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Specifically in verse 7 of Chapter 9 (please look there) we are reminded of what the high priest did each year on the Day of Atonement,

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and 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.

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Some people wanted to understand better what is meant here by "**unintentional** sins?" Is the notion that the High Priest made atonement for **unintentional** sin consistent with what we read in the Old Testament.? And what lesson are we supposed to draw from this business about "unintentional sin"?

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We spent almost the whole time last week discussing these things.

### **Review of Last Week's Discussion**

First we took a look at **Numbers 15:22-31** in which the matter of unintentional sin is expressly examined.

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In that passage what is meant by "unintentional sin" is when an individual person or even the the whole nation makes a **mistake** and/or when they **forget** about a particular law and, therefore, sins **unknowingly**.

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Once the infraction comes to mind, it must be **atoned** for, but it can be atoned for fairly easily by making the appropriate animal sacrifices and other offerings set forth in that passage.

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This same passage, however, emphasizes that those who transgress the law "**with a high hand**" must be "**cut off from the people**" because such people despise the word of God.

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This certainly addresses the problem of moral hazard --- where a person who is shielded from risk might behave differently than he would were he exposed to the full consequences of his actions. (c.f. Rom. 6:1)

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A person reading Numbers 15:22-31 would be rightfully concerned that, were he to break God's laws **knowingly** and **intentionally**, that there may be no way back! That atonement might be impossible.

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Such a distinction **may** have been in the mind of the author of Hebrews as he wrote Chapter 9, verse 7.

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In other words he may have reckoned that when, on the Day of Atonement, the priest atoned for all sins of the people, this did **not** include sins committed "with a high hand" --- i.e. by those who had been or should have been "cut off from the people." for having knowingly and intentionally despised God's word.

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However if we read Leviticus 16, where the ceremonies for the Day of Atonement are set forth in detail, it does not say that such atonement is for unintentional sins. It says atonement is made for **all** sins (e.g. 16:16)

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Interestingly, and importantly I think, the extent to which the sins atoned for on the Day of Atonement may include sins that were committed intentionally has been a subject of **debate** among the rabbis for centuries.

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Thus we can understand the **uneasy consciences** that people must have had under the Old Covenant, not knowing whether or to what extent certain of their sins and the sins of their nation could ever be forgiven,

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because as we each examine our own conscience, what we discover is that most of the time we break the law knowingly and willingly and, therefore, to at least some extent, **intentionally**. **Don't** we?!

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I mean our sins cannot mostly be excused as mistakes arising from ignorance or forgetfulness. **Can** they?

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But as we examine our conscience, we also discover that laws which we break are good, and that we agree that these laws should not be broken, and that we love these laws and desire to keep them.

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In this sense, which Paul describes well in Romans 7, all or most of our sin are, to at least some extent, **unintentional**. Aren't they?

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There is a war raging within God's people between the spirit which loves the law and desires to keep it and the flesh which desires that which is earthly and opposite to the law.

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This is why, despite our own very best efforts and intentions, apart from Christ, we are **all** cut off from the holy God.

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And why no human priest, except for Christ, could ever draw near to God to make atonement for our sins.

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The only actual exception to man's total separation from God, is Christ, and those who belong to him.

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The whole ceremonial apparatus of the Old Covenant in general and the ceremonies for the Day of Atonement, in particular, teach us the necessity, on the one hand, of having a priest who can draw near to God to make atonement for the sins of the people and, on the other hand, the extreme danger and difficulty and, ultimately, impossibility of anyone actually doing this.

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The story we read last week, in Leviticus 10, about the two sons of Aaron who died while serving before the Lord, graphically illustrates this problem

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And this was the very problem which caused God to limit the extent to which men even tried to draw near to him, until the time of Christ.

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Only one person could do this --- the High Priest

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He could do it only on once certain day each year: the Day of Atonement

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And the manner in which he could do this was wrapped up in an intricate ceremony.

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All of this pointed toward the need for a new covenant, a better covenant

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such as the one that Jeremiah foresaw, and Christ finally inaugurated.

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But up until that inauguration--- i.e. until Christ came --- what Israel had were the laws and ceremonies of the Old Covenant, including those of the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest very, very carefully, drew near to God (symbolically), taking the blood of animals to atone for the sins of the people which even he, as the priest, would, certainly, however unintentionally, be committing constantly in God's presence.

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That is a brief summary of the issue we discussed last week.

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I hope it was helpful.

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Before we leave this topic, please let me leave you with these few additional thoughts.

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As he hung from the cross dying, Jesus prayed: "Father forgive them for they **know** not what they are doing."

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Following his resurrection Jesus appeared to Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, but three times said to Peter "Feed my sheep."

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After persecuting Christians to their imprisonment and death, Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, who then left everything to follow Jesus, becoming the incomparable Apostle Paul.

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These and other examples show us how willing God is to forgive even the worst sin imaginable --- i.e. denying, persecuting, and killing Christ and Christians!

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And in the three examples given the sins were certainly committed knowingly and willingly and intentionally.

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Yet all of these were forgiven.

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Herein lies our very great hope!

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If you are afraid that you have done something really bad, even that you have rejected Christ, don't worry.

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Turn back to him and he will surely forgive you!

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Yet for those who would persist in rejecting Jesus, there is something to fear.

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Because Jesus is the only one who can atone for sin, and we are all of us, without exception, sinners.

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Please let's don't any of us think we are unspoiled, innocent, or good in any way. None of us are.

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Only Jesus is without sin. Jesus is our only hope.

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Therefore those who despise **this** word of God, Jesus Christ, are in grave danger

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of being cut off from the people **eternally!**

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This is surely a part of the message that the author of Hebrews is preaching

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to this congregation which is, as we know, in danger of falling away from Christ.

**The Perfect Conscience in Hebrews 9:9**

Now, two weeks ago, there was another issue raised that we did not have to discuss last week.

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This issue had to do with verse 9 of Chapter 9 (look there)

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

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

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

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The implication here is that while the various gifts and sacrifices of the Old Covenant **never** could make perfect the consciences of the worshipers,

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that the consciences of worshipers under the New Covenant ultimately **will** become perfect.

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

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That was the second issue raised two weeks ago.

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I was prepared to discuss this last week, but we ran out of time.

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So let's touch on that quickly now.

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Under the old arrangement, we are told in Hebrews 9:9-10 "such gifts and sacrifices could not perfect the consciences of the worshiper, **but** deal(t) **only** with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation."

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Whereby we understand that food and drink and various washings and regulations for the body do **not**, in themselves, perfect **anything**. **Of course not!**

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And this is true under the New Covenant as well as under the Old Covenant.

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The Lord's Supper consists, in part, of food and drink (bread and wine).

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Baptism is a kind of washing.

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Neither of these ordinances, in itself, can perfect anything.

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It is Christ **himself**, of course, who perfects consciences, and not any of these earthly symbols, whether under the New Covenant or the Old, which only have power to the extent that they point to him.

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So how does **Christ** perfect consciences? And what **is** a perfect conscience?

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We talked about that a little bit two weeks ago; here is what I have come up with since then.

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From all that has gone before, it seems clear that what separates man from God is not something physical but something spiritual, something inward, something which fails to conform to the word of God.

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And the locus of this problem is something which is described here as our conscience.

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Which is the seat of our capacity to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.

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Or in other words between what is godly and what is opposite to God.

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And a perfect conscience would not only **know** perfectly and innately what is godly

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but, also, would value and desire and seek above all else to have and to **do** only that which is Godly.

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Surely Jesus Christ has a perfect conscience. Thus he is without sin.

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We on the other hand are born into sin. And have never known a single sinless moment.

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We neither perfectly know nor perfectly desire that which is Godly.

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Nor can we even do that which we agree is Godly and desirable.

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We are guilty and we know it. And we can't help it.

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This imperfection is not fixed by laws or by ceremonies or by punishments.

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The history of Israel and of the Christian Church has proven that over and over again.

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What is needed and what has been promised has already been foreseen by Jeremiah and quoted by the author of Hebrews in Chapter 8, verses 8-12.

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This is minds and hearts which have actually been changed into something godly, like the mind and heart of Christ.

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So that we actually want to do and are actually able to do only that which is pleasing to God.

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God will finally make us like Jesus, at which point our consciences will be absolutely perfect.

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And while this process remains the central mystery of all creation, into which angels long to peer, we begin to apprehend much of it through the word of God and the sanctifying inward operation of the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in all who have understood and believed and put their trust in the gospel of Christ.

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What the gospel tells us, is that we have **already** been forgiven of all of our sins: past, present, and future.

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And we are already **being** transformed into the likeness of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

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And that all of creation, and we along with it, will be made new and **perfect** when Jesus returns.

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All of this is accomplished by God Himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and none of it by us.

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So none of these things can fail to happen!

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All that we need to do or ever can do is to accept this gift and yield ourselves completely to the Spirit.

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Until Christ returns, we are all a bit of a work in progress.

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**Being** perfected but not yet perfect --- except in the eternal eyes of God, where we are perfect already!

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The perfect conscience that we set out to explain, is what God already sees and purposes to accomplish,

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and has purposed to accomplish since before the beginning of the world!!

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Again, this man with the perfect conscience, it the man who desires only that which is pleasing to God and is free and wiling and able to do only that.

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And that man is like Jesus.

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That was the answer I was prepared to give last week to this second issue.

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I hope it is helpful for now.

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I think that the answers to both of these questions will be improved as we read on into Hebrews.

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Did anyone want to say anything further on those two issues before we read on?

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OK, then. Let's do press on.

### **Chapter 9, Verses 11-14**

Would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 9, Verses 11-14, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

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

**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.**

**13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh,**

**14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**

Thank you.

**(Verse 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)**

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"But" contrasts the good things that came with the appearance of Christ with the food and drink and washings and etc. under the Old Covenant as described in the previous verse 10.

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This is the difference between the earthly signs and symbols and the heavenly things which they pointed to and prefigured.

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All of the earthly elements of worship --- the tent and all of its contents, without exception --- were made with human hands.

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Such was the tent through which the earthly High Priests passed each year as they drew near to God to make atonement for the sins of the people.

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But the tent through which Christ passed, was not a tent really, or anything made with human hands.

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He passed beyond creation itself

**(Verse 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.**



Jesus entered into the actual holy places, where God is

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Of course nobody can enter such places --- transcend creation --- by means of earthly contrivances, such as the blood of goats and calves.

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Jesus entered into the presence of God by means of his own blood

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that is by embracing death on the cross in obedience to God in order to redeem the world.

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this redemption is called eternal

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which is explained by the fact that the work of Christ on the cross was performed once for all.

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Think of this: Jesus died once to redeem all of God's people who ever lived and ever would live.

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Every man and woman who has eternal life is redeemed by what Jesus did on the cross.

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There is no other way.

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Nor has there ever been.

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Nor can there ever be.

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He is the only way ... eternally.

### (Verse 13)

**For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh,**

What is in mind here mostly, in verse 13, are the ceremonies which were performed under the Old Covenant to cleanse a person who had become ritually impure, by touching a dead body, for example.

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By sprinkling such people with the blood and burnt flesh of animals and performing various other washings, the ritually impure were made ritually pure and restored to fellowship with the people.

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Please note: **ritual** sanctification is **actually** effective in removing **ritual** impurity.

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Such matters of ritual impurity would have been deeply meaningful, really real, for people who grew up under the Old Covenant, as we can see from the stories recorded in Acts and elsewhere in the NT, where even the Apostles argued amongst themselves about food laws and the like.

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But we all understand, whether Jew or Gentile, that the real and most important human impurity is an impurity of the heart.

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As we have already discussed, such inward impurity, imperfections of conscience, cannot be removed so easily by ceremonial means. We are always left with an uneasy conscience. Is the ceremony sufficient?!

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Even the elaborate ceremony of the Day of Atonement, leaves even the Rabbis wondering, whether all sins are truly removed, even for that one day, including those which were most intentional and egregious.

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So it is plain that something more is needed.

**(Verse 14)**

**how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**

The point here is that, if those ceremonies using the blood and burnt flesh of animals had the effect of purifying believers under the Old Covenant,

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then the blood of Christ would be infinitely better, in two ways.

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First of all the sacrifice is infinitely more worthy. Under the old covenant we are talking about the blood of animals and other created, earthly things.

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Under the new covenant, we are talking about the self sacrifice of the perfect and sinless Son of God!

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Secondly, under the Old Testament the blood of animals and the like was effective in correcting ritual impurity,

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but the blood of the Son of God is effective in purifying the inward conscience of the man from sin

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Here "dead works" means "sin" I think (not "works righteousness" or something like that)

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The effect of such purification is that we can serve the living God.

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I understand this to mean that we are purified in several respects.

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First our past sins are actually forgiven and we know that this is actually true.

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So that there is reconciliation between God and man --- from both directions, so to speak.

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Consequently and in addition the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us permanently.

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We begin to change, such that we increasingly prefer only that which is godly

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And we become increasingly able to do that which is Godly and unable to do that which is ungodly.

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There is in summary and in short an actual, internal, spiritual, purification accomplished by Christ which is analogous to the external ritual purification that was once accomplished under the Old Covenant with animal blood and etc.

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Question to here?

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OK, then. Let's read on.

### **Chapter 9, Verses 15-22**

Would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 9, Verses 15-22, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

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

**15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.**

**16 For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.**

**17 For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.**

**18 Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.**

**19 For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,**

**20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you."**

**21 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.**

**22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**

Thank you.

**(Verse 15)**

**Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.**

Jesus has already been declared as the mediator of a new and better covenant (see esp. 8: 6).

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Now we see more clearly how and in what sense he is become the mediator of this new covenant.

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It is because of his **death**, which is so much more effective than that of goats and bulls, as has just been said in the previous verse 14

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Only **his** death could finally redeem the people from all the sins committed under the first covenant,

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and therefore enable them to receive the promised eternal inheritance.

### **(Verse 16)**

**For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.**

Here the preacher becomes rather playful.

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The Greek word, *diatheke*, has the general sense of "settlement."

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Elsewhere in Hebrews and in the Bible generally the word is normally used to describe a kind of solemn agreement established by God with his people, equivalent to the Hebrew word *berith* which is usually translated in English as "covenant."

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But the word *diatheke* is sometimes also used to describe another kind of settlement which we would translate into English as testament or will --- i.e. an instrument setting forth the wishes of a man regarding what is to be done (e.g. with his property and so forth) following his death.

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At this point the author of Hebrews is evidently using the word *diatheke* in the latter sense.

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We must therefore translate it here using a different English word.

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Verse 16 would clearly not make any sense, were we to translate *diatheke* as covenant, since quite clearly most covenants are not established by the death of the one who made them, and certainly not when the one who made them is God!

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So here the preacher is making a play on the secondary meaning of the Greek word *diatheke* and referring to the fact that Christ's death was necessary for God's people to receive their eternal inheritance.

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In this regard you might prefer to think of Christ as the testator---i.e. the one who dies, thus activating and effectively fixing the terms of the will which provides for the eternal inheritance of the beneficiaries

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But Christ is also the mediator or executor of this eternal will, and it is his death that assures this. It is by his death that he enters into the holy places, sits down at the right hand of God, and becomes mediator.

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He may also be the judge and some other things besides, but you get the point. We are dealing here with inspired poetic imagery that seeks to capture the glory of Christ and the New Covenant he brings,

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and to make it clear that his death was absolutely necessary in order for him to bring this eternal covenant into existence and to become the eternal executor (mediator) of it.

### **(Verse 17)**

**For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.**

Thus, again, we see how important the death of Christ was to ... everything. God's eternal plan requires it. Were he to have turned aside from this death, as he most certainly had the power to do, then our eternal life would not have been possible.

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As difficult as we may sometimes find it to understand or to explain the necessity of the death of Christ, we can rest assured that it was and is and ever shall be the most necessary thing in this universe. Without the death of Christ everything would be laid waste!

### **(Verse 18)**

**Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.**

Perhaps the congregation to which this preacher is speaking found the death of Christ surprising or even scandalous.

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Yet their awareness of the things of the Old Covenant, which was nothing but a precursor for the New, should have prepared them for this.

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Even the Old Covenant was inaugurated with blood, he reminds them.

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He goes on to illustrate what he means by this, with examples from the Old Testament scriptures

### **(Verse 19)**

**For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,**

**(Verse 20)**

**saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you."**

This corresponds generally with what we can read for ourselves in the Old Testament.

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As we have noticed before, our author is not trying to recapitulate the Old Testament stories completely or with great precision.

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His interest is more in pointing out how the things of the Old Covenant prefigure and illuminate the New.

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He next moves from the inauguration of the Old Covenant to the building of the Tabernacle.

**(Verse 21)**

**And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.**

Finally he comes to the more general point,

**(Verse 22)**

**Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**

The Old Covenant was one in which a great deal of animal blood was spilt to purify and sanctify and atone for all kinds of impurity and defilement and sin.

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It occurs to me, also, that a fair bit of human blood was spilt to punish capital crime.

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All of these things were ordained by God, and none of them without purpose or effect.

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But all of that blood was not enough to redeem the world.

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And this is clearly one of the things we were being taught.

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Better blood --- a greater sacrifice --- would finally be needed to atone for the sins of man.

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This is one of the ways to understand what Christ accomplished.

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He came to offer and to be a sacrifice great enough to atone for sin.

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So the we could inherit the promises of God,

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and he could go the right hand of God to intercede for us.

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and cause his Spirit to dwell in us.

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So the we can finally be with him where he is and therefore like him!

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Praise Jesus forever!

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Amen!