Chapter 14 – Inheritance requires a new Priestly Service - Hebrews 9

To a present day gentile reader this chapter may seem to get rather lost in tedious detail, but to Jewish believers, to have the meaning and significance of their rites illuminated by the work of Christ must have been riveting. The author shows that the tabernacle structure and its rites communicate their own inadequacy and point to the need for replacement. In Moses' tabernacle the promises of God are presented but remain unfulfilled. The enjoyment of God's presence and blessing are the very essence of the promised inheritance and yet the way is barred and guarded. In Christ, the sacrifice is sufficient and effective, the barriers are discarded and the New Covenant established. Through Him, "those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance."

This chapter invites us to consider the meaning and significance of the worship rites we use today and also touches on several major doctrines about which there is much controversy.

Prayer

Try using the *thanksgiving, remembrance, confidence* model of prayer as you think over what you have learnt from Hebrews chapter 8 and look forward to studying chapter 9.

Questions & Surprises

Let us start our study of chapter 9 by reading through and noting any questions or surprises. These are the things that strike me in chapter 9.

V2-5 What did these things symbolise?

V7 Was forgiveness only available for unintentional sins?

V14 What does it mean to have our conscience cleansed?

V15 Can only those "called" be saved?

V23 Why did heavenly things need purifying?

V26 What does "do away with sin" mean?

V28 What does it mean that Christ will "bring" salvation to us at His return?

We will try to address these issues as we examine the detail.

Background

Before proceeding we should familiarise ourselves with Ex 16:32ff (Manna kept in a jar), Ex 24 to 26 (blood of the covenant and the design of the tabernacle), Ex 30:10 (annual atonement), Lev 11 (food law), Lev 16 (cleansing with blood) see also Lev 17:11, Num 17 (Aaron's Rod), Num 18:2-6 (serving in the sanctuary), Num 19 (washings).

Structure

My medium-brush structure for this chapter was "We have a new superior sanctuary in heaven that replaces the temple."[1]

Chapter 9 extends the comparison of the Mosaic and heavenly tabernacle started in chapter 8.

My fine-brush structure is:

V1-5 Description of Moses tabernacle.

V6-10 Limitations of the Mosaic tabernacle service.

V11-15 Superiority of the heavenly sanctuary.

[1] See chapter 4

V16-22 The need for blood to be shed.

V23-28 The superiority of Christ's sacrifice of Himself.

Argument

In this chapter the author shows that the regulations for worship in Moses tabernacle demonstrate the limitations of the Law and indicate that something better would follow. The Covenant made with Abraham was for God to dwell with His people, yet there was a barrier in the tabernacle preventing access to God because the sins of the people were not adequately dealt with. But Jesus has come with His own blood to cleanse our consciences so that we can inherit all that was promised to Abraham.

So here is my summary of the argument in chapter 9:

Just as the scriptures speak of a New Covenant (Ch 8), so also the old tabernacle looks forward to a New Tabernacle where sin is completely dealt with and God's people gain full and free access to Him through the blood of Christ and inherit all that was promised to Abraham.

The Detail

We will now look more closely at the detail of chapter 9.

Heb 9:1-5

(1) Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. (2) A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. (3) Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, (4) which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded,

and the stone tablets of the covenant. (5) Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

The argument

The author is simply describing the principal objects of the tabernacle.

Regulations for worship

If you take the trouble to try and match all the author's descriptions of the regulations with the records in the Pentateuch you will notice a number of minor discrepancies. The author is not trying to be precise, but to present the general picture. As he says, "we cannot discuss these things in detail now". It is interesting to note that in all the author's discussion of the rites of worship he makes no reference to the Passover meal which Jesus established as the only worship rite of the New Covenant. This is probably because the author is not setting out to discuss worship rites in general, but to present the death of Christ as the fulfilment and replacement of the sacrificial system.

The regulations for Old Covenant worship were laid down by God and any deviation was likely to result in death.[2] One may be forgiven for thinking that God has laid down various regulations for church worship (a different set for each denomination), and that deviation form those rules is also likely to result in death!

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[2] "Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorised fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord." (Le 10:1-2)

The fixed ritual for worship in a single location was one of many limiting characteristic of the old Covenant. Before long God's people were performing the rituals, thinking they were fulfilling their obligations to God, but their hearts were not in it and their lives betrayed their faithlessness. Jesus joined the prophets in speaking against this.

> "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. [22] Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. [23] Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. [24] But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (Am 5:21-24)

> "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'" (Mk 7:6)

> "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone." (Lk 11:42)

It seems to me that perhaps the greatest weakness of religious law is that it provides a false means by which people can fulfil their religious obligations. The Jews kept up the daily sacrifices but cheated their fellows in the market place. The Pharisees paid their tithes but did not care for their parents. Sadly, many "good" Christians simply read their verse for the day, say a little prayer and attend church on Sunday, but fail to show the love and mercy of Christ to their families and colleagues. The "law" for a Christian is not to have a daily quiet time but to have a daily crucifixion.

> Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Lk 9:23)

This is a serious challenge for any Christian, but it is a noble challenge. Perhaps those who struggle with self discipline would count it a significant personal achievement to have a settled discipline of a daily quiet time, and I unreservedly commend such a goal. But Jesus never commanded that we should. He commanded that we love one another as He loved us. He commanded that we forgive one another as He has forgiven us. He commanded that we speak well *of* one another and truth *to* one another. He commanded us to honour one another. In the words of Jesus, let us "practise the latter without leaving the former undone."

A tabernacle was set up.

Throughout this letter, the author speaks of the earthly tabernacle as passing away and that its system of barriers communicate the weakness of the Old Covenant. He insists that the new tabernacle is in heaven, not on earth. I wonder what the author would make of our earthly tabernacles? What do they communicate about our access to God, the finished work of Christ and the end of the earthly priesthood? Some churches meet under trees, some in cafés or pubs, some in school or community halls, some in converted warehouses or old cinemas and some in purpose built sanctuaries. This is not the place for an in depth discussion of the pros and cons of churches owning facilities nor of the architectural, aesthetic or religious considerations of church facility design. But church meeting places communicate something to the worshippers, whether intentionally or not. This ranges from "We have no abiding place, we simply use any convenient place of shelter" to "This is a holy place sanctified by thousands of years of worshippers."

Many churches with their own premises attempt to create some kind of "sanctuary" feel to their main worship area and many dress their leaders in special clothes, whether robes or smartly pressed suits. Many have some kind of communion table, perhaps with a rail in front of it. What image is presented by these things? Do they communicate the radical new access Christ won for us?

A big old church or cathedral may be an impressive and beautiful structure, but what is communicated by an altar table with candles, a bible and a cross, that no one but the "priest" who is dressed in special priestly robes dare approach? What is communicated by the steps and screens and rails that can hardly be seen from where the congregation sits? What does a choir sitting in robes and guarding the approach to the holy table say to a distressed sinner who hardly even dares to enter the formidable building with walls 3 metres thick and 20 metres tall accessed through mighty oak doors with great iron locks and latches?

I appreciate that such awesome structures, to be found throughout many parts of the world, have something valid to say about the majesty and transcendence of God and the great height of the roofs perhaps lift our thoughts to heaven and the unseen realms. I have learnt to appreciate some of this. But I truly wonder what Jesus or Paul or the author of the letter to the Hebrews would say about them. Surely our earthly sanctuaries, wherever they are, should communicate the end of the old system of barriers and special priests and special rites and celebrate the liberating wonder of Christ's once-for-all and completely sufficient sacrifice of Himself, attested to by His glorious resurrection and ascension. Our worship, religious rites and traditions should be thoroughly New Covenant, avoiding as much as possible any confusion with the Old Covenant, its Law or its religious rites.

The second curtain…

This description of the tabernacle indicates the restricted access to God created first by its very existence and then by the presence of the two curtains (one on entering the Holy Place, the other barring entry to the Most Holy Place). It was this second curtain that was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died.[3] It is curious that the author makes no mention of this event in his arguments about the redundancy of the *first covenant.*[4]

…the golden altar of incense…

The golden sensor was outside the Most Holy Place according to Moses. But on the Day of Atonement incense from the golden sensor was brought into the Most Holy Place to conceal the presence of God from the high Priest. "He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die." (Lev 16:12-13)

Heb 9:6-10

(6) When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.
(7) But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only

[3] "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." (Matt 27:51)

[4] Though it seems likely that in referring to Christ's broken body as the curtain in 10:20 the author has this event in mind.

once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. (8) The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. (9) This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper. (10) They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

The argument

The inadequacy of the Day of Atonement and the barriers inherent in the tabernacle are proof of incomplete disclosure of the true means of access to God.

Limitations of the Mosaic tabernacle service

The emphasis here is on the limitations of the Mosaic tabernacle service. It set up barriers between worshippers and God. The very presence of the tabernacle (and later temple) with its requirements for a priesthood and sacrifices proclaimed that access to God was hindered by sin and could only be achieved through an intermediary along with blood sacrifices, and then access was limited to one man, one day a year through a screen of smoke. The daily ministry provided no access to the Most Holy Place at all.

…the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The sacrifices were really designed to deal with unintentional sin. This is quite explicit in Leviticus chapters 4, 5 and 15.

"If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, he is guilty… In

this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven" (Le 4:27,31)

Those who sinned intentionally, in a moment of temptation, had to make immediate restitution adding one-fifth of the value of the offence:

"If anyone … commits any such sin that people may do… he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering. And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the Lord, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the Lord, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty." (Lev 6:2-7)

Those who sinned in a high-handed way, deliberately flouting the Law without repentance were to be cut off from God's people: "But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the Lord's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him." (Nu 15:30-31)

…the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed…

God had revealed to Abraham and Moses that His desire and design was for fellowship between God and His people. The presence of the tabernacle demonstrated that something better was coming.

Before she was married, my mother kept goats. At night the goats were shut into a small brick-built shed. When she married my father they had no money and nowhere to live so they killed the goats to give them meat to eat, made rugs out of

their skins and cleaned up the goat shed. This became their home – and subsequently the home of my two sisters. Meanwhile, my father worked lots of overtime and managed to secure a loan and started to build a brand new bungalow. Shortly before I was born they moved out of the goat shed and into the bungalow. The goat shed was a temporary home with considerable limitations, but living there made it possible, in time, to afford a new home and the goat shed could finally be abandoned. This is what the tabernacle was like. It was so obviously limited that it pointed to a much more wonderful future.

…not able to clear the conscience…

Although unintentional sin could be atoned for by sacrifices, there was no remedy for defiant sin.

> "But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people." (Num 15:30)

Those who said, "I can't be bothered to keep this command" or "I want this thing too much to obey God" had no way back to God. They were supposed to be cut off. There was no way the Law could cleanse the conscience of the thousands of people who knew they had defiled themselves with countless intentional sins. Atonement offered annual cleansing for the sins the people had committed in ignorance – but what of all those high-handed sins? The Law could not cleanse their conscience.

Heb 9:11-15

> [11] When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this

creation. [12] He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. [13] The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. [14] How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! [15] For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

The argument

Through His death on the cross, Jesus offered Himself as a Holy sacrifice on our behalf in God's presence and so obtained our eternal redemption. His death has obtained for us complete forgiveness and deep-cleaned our conscience so that we can worship God with freedom of access and come into all the promises God made to Abraham.

…the good things that are already here…

Some translations have "of the good things to come." It is literally, "the good things becoming." The meaning is "things that we are now beginning to experience." These good things have started to arrive and there is more to come.

The author tells us that Christ is the high priest of these wonderful things that we are beginning to experience as present realities. This is the author's great passion in this book. God made promises to Abraham which Israel never entered into. We have now inherited these promises through the finished work of Christ, and now Jesus is interceding for us in

heaven as our Great High Priest so that we might fully receive and enjoy the benefits of those promises. Christ came as high priest of the good things now coming. That is why he urges us throughout the letter to press in and draw near and have faith and run the race.

The old frustrations and limitations and failures have gone. The final and only sufficient sacrifice has been made. The New Covenant has been sealed by the blood of Christ. A new people have been called and washed and filled with God's life and presence. What a wonderful saviour.

…he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle…

Verses 11 and 12 of this chapter have produced a huge amount of discussion amongst scholars. The Greek requires particularly careful translation and this cannot be done without first interpreting its meaning. Comparison of different translations bear witness to this.

> The NIV and NASB say that Christ "*went through*" the "more perfect tabernacle" and "entered the Most Holy Place"… "*having obtained* eternal redemption."
>
> The NKJV has "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, *with* the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, *having obtained* eternal redemption."
>
> The NRSV has "But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then *through* the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place… *thus obtaining* eternal redemption."

One issue of debate concerns the reference to both the "tabernacle that is not man-made" and the "Most Holy Place".

Did Jesus pass *through* a heavenly *tabernacle* to get to the *Holy Place* as implied by the NIV? Is there an outer and inner sanctuary like the earthly one? Or is the "tabernacle that is not man-made" a reference to the human nature of Christ, or His resurrected body, or the church, or the Bread and Wine or merely the lower levels of Heaven? All these and more have been suggested.

A second issue concerns the timing of Christ's obtaining "eternal redemption". The NIV translates v11 as Christ *having obtained* redemption, whereas the NRSV translates it *thus obtaining* redemption. The NIV has redemption obtained on the cross whereas the NRSV implies redemption being obtained (or consummated as some commentators suggest) after the resurrection in heaven.

The Authors use of symbolic language

These questions arise from a too literal reading of the text. The author is simply using a variety of symbolic terms to speak of a single heavenly reality, each term stressing a different aspect. He does this throughout the letter.[5] A brief examination of a few texts will illustrate this. In 8:2 he equates "sanctuary" and "tabernacle"; the author uses these terms synonymously. In 9:23-25 he makes no distinction between "the heavenly things", "heaven itself", "God's presence" and the "Most Holy Place" (implied by contrast with the "manmade sanctuary"). Indeed, whereas he is precise in his description of the earthly tabernacle he is vague in his description of the heavenly tabernacle, often speaking simply of the heavenly *things*.

[5] See "The author's world view" in chapter 4.

Thus we are not to interpret v11 as Christ literally passing through one part into another part of the heavenly tabernacle. The tabernacle symbolises two essential truths.

1. The tension between God's unapproachable glory and His loving presence. Thus Jesus "*entered* the Most Holy Place once for all" emphasises the new access between God and man. Jesus has restored our fellowship with God.
2. The tension between God's perfect rule and the obstacle of our sin. Thus Jesus "obtained eternal redemption" and by His blood He cleanses our conscience so that we now "serve the living God"(v14). Jesus has restored the rule of God in our lives.

These two truths are illustrated by employing the symbolic language of *entering* and *offering.* In this symbolic picture Jesus is presented as both the High Priest who enters God's presence and also the offering which is made there.

Symbolism is also used in describing the sacrifice itself. In Heb10:10 the author says "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The author is clear that the sacrifice took place only once and that it consisted of the body of Jesus Christ on the cross, on earth. Yet in Heb 9:12 and 10:12 he pictures Jesus making His once-for-all offering in heaven: "he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood …" "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." He sees the brutal reality of the cross at Golgotha, but at the same time he sees a heavenly reality to the earthly drama, so he talks of Christ offering Himself in the heavenly tabernacle. The two are not different events, one following the other, but one and the same event acted out in both the earthly and heavenly realm. Thus it was on the cross that Jesus became our High Priest, offering

Himself once for all in the presence of God. And it is because of the cross that we can "enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body." (Heb 10:19-20)

When we substitute the symbolic language for their meanings we see a striking parallelism in Hebrews 9:11-12.

When Christ came to bring us the realities of God's promises
He did so through a better means of bringing men to God
Not man-made or natural
Not by the death of animals
But by means of His own death, once for all
He thereby brought men into fellowship with God by obtaining eternal redemption.

God's goal throughout history has been to fulfil His promises to Abraham: to dwell with His people and to bless them and make them a blessing in all the earth. This He has accomplished through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ.

…by his own blood

Blood, in Hebrew thought, is a synonym for death.[6] Although the blood of the sacrificed animal was sprinkled in the ceremonies, the offering was the animal itself, not just its blood.

> "The guilt offering is to be slaughtered in the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered, and its blood is to be sprinkled against the altar on all sides." (Lev 7:2)

[6] "The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." (Ge 4:10)

It was the *death* of the animal, signified by its blood, that was crucial to the effectiveness of the offering. We should never separate in our minds the blood of Jesus from His death. The idea that we are washed in Jesus' blood is not something that the New Testament writers intended. This idea has arisen from two verses in Revelation:

> "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood," (Re 1:5 AV)

Here, the word translated by the AV as washed is literally "loosed" and is rightly rendered by most translations as "freed". The only other place where the words *wash* and *blood* are associated is also found in Revelation:

> "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Re 7:14)

Here the literal meaning is "they plunge their robes and whiten them in the blood of the lamb." The language is highly symbolic, but note that it does not say they plunged the robes *in* blood, but that they plunged their robes *and* made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The symbols are deeply rooted in the Mosaic sacrificial system where the priests had to wash their robes *in water* to clean them and then they were ritually purified by *sprinkling* with the blood of the sacrifice.[7] Robes were never washed in blood. The saints have washed their robes, probably through their righteous deeds and faithfulness

[7] "Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood from the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments and his sons and their garments." (Le 8:30)

to God through the great tribulation, [8] and they have been made pure white by the sacrificial death of Christ.

The incongruity of plunging robes into blood to make them white is not intended and the imagery should not be seen in this way. It is foreign to Jewish purification rites.

The following scriptures speak of the accomplishment of Christ's blood:

> "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." (Ro 3:25)
>
> "In him we have redemption through his blood" (Eph 1:7)
>
> "you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers …with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1Pe 1:18-19)
>
> "You are worthy … because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Re 5:9)

Each time the blood is symbolic of His sacrificial death. There is no suggestion that there was something special about the blood of Jesus *apart* from His death. His blood was not collected for any special purpose, nor would His blood have meant anything apart from His death. I have laboured this somewhat because I fear that *the blood of Jesus* has become like a magic charm or potion to many Christians and has acquired a special significance, detached from His death and not supported by scripture.

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[8] "Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" (Re 19:8). The context of Rev 7 is those who come out of the great tribulation.

…eternal redemption

For a Gentile reader, the word redemption would conjure images of the slave market, and that is probably what Paul had in mind when he preached about redemption in Christ to his Gentile audiences. But for the Jewish readers of this letter, redemption was a deeply religious concept.

The idea of redemption was deeply rooted on the Mosaic Law. God redeemed the children of Israel from slavery to the Egyptians following the angel's destruction of every firstborn male in the land. The Israelites daubed the blood of the Passover lamb on their door posts and where the angel saw the blood he spared the firstborn. Every year the Passover was celebrated and as a further reminder to every family in every generation the first-born male of every womb was dedicated to the Lord. Those of the clean animals had to be sacrificed but the firstborn of every Israelite family had to be redeemed: "The first offspring of every womb, both man and animal, that is offered to the Lord is yours. But you must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals"(Nu 18:15).

Eternal redemption, therefore, has connotations of complete deliverance from God's judgement and total dedication to Him. The religious symbolism of redemption is much richer than the legal one. A redeemed slave is free to do what he wishes, but a redeemed person in Judaism is wholly dedicated to God.

…cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death

See "Repentance from acts that lead to death" in chapter 10 for a discussion of the meaning of the phrase. My conclusion is that *acts that lead to death* (literally *dead works*) are all those things that people do to try and make themselves acceptable to God, whether they be continuing with the Tabernacle sacrifices or doing the *right* Christian things. For some, being a decent

citizen is a *dead work* by which they hope to make themselves acceptable to God and for others it may be fasting and praying and denying themselves a host of small pleasures that comprises a *dead work*. The reality is that many unsaved people seem to have no conscience of their need for repentance whereas many Christians suffer from a guilty conscience needlessly. I suspect a bit of devilish interference here.

We cannot (or perhaps, more accurately, *will not*) draw near to God if we have a guilty conscience, and I suspect this is the biggest barrier to many Christians' fellowship with God. They would give thanks more, pray more, worship more, read their bible more and share their faith more if they did not live with a constant niggling sense of failure, personal disappointment, unidentified sin and general unworthiness. If we were to take a census of guilty conscience amongst Christians I think we would have to conclude that the death of Christ has been *unable* to cleanse our consciences! This should not be so.

There is a fight of faith to stand against the accusations of Satan and boldly proclaim our confidence in the finished work of Christ on the cross. He has purified and redeemed us so that we can freely and joyously fellowship with God our Father. Our sin and failure remains part of our nature for a while longer, but the pollution of these things has been seen to. Forgiveness is constant and full and free so that we can draw near to God and find His help to overcome our faults and to bless those around us.

…so that we may serve the living God

The word translated "serve" in the NIV means worship. It is literally temple service. Worship (in the Hebrew sense of the means and expression of fellowship between God and men) is the context of the whole section from chapters 7 to 10. The author is discussing the way that worship is transformed by

Christ. Worship under the old system involved barriers and sacrifices but Christ has brought freedom of access and a cleansed conscience so that we can enjoy fellowship with God without hindrance. Service to the world flows from this, but it starts and is envisioned and empowered by fellowship with God.

We are not called to serve God in the way that an earthly king has servants. In Psalm 50:12 God says, "If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (MK 10:45). Our *service* to God is firstly one of sharing fellowship with Him so that He might share His passion for the world with us, and secondly to trust Him with all our hearts as we live out the passion for others which He has shared with us.

Any suggestion that God *needs* our praises is absurd. Any notion in our worship of a *duty* to show our *gratitude* by *praising* Him is insulting to God's self-sufficient glory. God *is* glorious. He doesn't need us to tell Him so! God's ego is not undermined if we fail to give Him sufficient thanks and praise. These ideas are to be found in Greek mythology where the gods have to be appeased and their egos bolstered. There is not a hint of this in God Almighty. He laughs when men do not give Him his due respect and honour; He holds them in derision.[9] Worship should not be thought of as a time where we give anything to God:

> "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things." (Ac 17:25 NKJV)

[9] Ps 2:1-4.

Worship as drawing near to God

On the other hand, God delights in our fellowship and our expression of trust in Him just as we delight in God and all that He has done for us. That is the nature of love. Spontaneous heart-felt thanks and praise and delight is what makes worship genuine rather than in vain.[10] But worship is often not completely spontaneous. We plan and prepare for it because it is good for us. As we behold His glory we are changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another.[11] In worship we seek to let God do surgery on our hearts. We draw near to Him so that He can cleanse our consciences, restore our faith, revive our dreams, reinvigorate our passions and strengthen our resolve to live and work to His praise and glory. From that place we go out to do His works and share our faith.

I wonder how far we sometimes stray from the biblical view of worship. Are our band line-ups and song choices shaped by the longing for God to meet with us and mould us to His image and purposes, or are they shaped to produce a good-feeling sing-song? The best tunes are not necessarily accompanied by the best words, and singing is not the only way to worship God. Occasionally I find myself unable to join in with a song because the words are either meaningless to me (e.g. I don't understand what is being said. Perhaps it is poetry, but if so, I can't fathom its meaning), or untrue (e.g. "I will never stop dancing 'cos I love you so much" type of stuff), or foreign to my way of expression (e.g. "You are so beautiful I want to kiss

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[10] "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." (Mt 15:8-9)

[11] "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2Co 3:18 RSV)

you for ever" type of stuff), or theologically questionable. I know every Christian has their own idea of what worship should be (which is probably largely why there are so many denominations), but what I want is simply to gather with fellow believers to express our delight in God, draw near to Him and be deeply impacted by His love, His holiness and His passion for the world.

Worship as feasting

Having said this, there is another aspect of worship in which I think we often fall short. That is feasting and partying in His presence. If this is not part of your repertoire of worship, take a look at Deuteronomy 14:22-29 where the tithe is explained. For understandable reasons, those who teach tithing in their churches do not teach it from this portion of Holy Scripture. It tells us that every year the people were to exchange their tithed produce for money and save it up. Then once a year they were to take it to Jerusalem and…

> "you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household." (De 14:26 NKJV)

That must have been some party! What a shock to see that the whole annual tithe was to be blown on stuffing their face with whatever their heart desired and drinking all the alcohol they could lay their hands on! Check it out. This is God's holy word! Those who want to keep the old covenant tithe alive should be faithful to God's word and instruct their congregations to spend it on a huge annual party for the whole town. On the other hand, those who recognise that tithing is part of the old order which has passed away should also consider reviving this wonderful celebration of God's goodness to His people.

Of course we should give generously and sacrificially to God ordained ministries, but I am trying to show that feasting and partying were, and I suggest are, an important part of the witness of God's people to the world. Part of our *service*, our *worship*, is to show what a good party we can put because of the joy of our salvation, the security and delight we have in our relationships and the abundant blessings that God has given us.

When my twin boys were teenagers, they used to have parties in several of their friends homes with loud music and cans of drink and videos. But the place they all liked best for their parties was our home and their friends often invited us to join in! There is something really attractive about a good party in God's presence. I found the same when I was at university. By far the most popular parties were the Christian ones we put on. We didn't preach the gospel or put on Christian music, we just had fun. But many non-Christians were drawn by the quality of our fun compared to the shallowness of the non-Christian parties. We were celebrating life and friendships whereas they were usually trying to escape from their aching hollowness. Hospitality can be a powerful witness.

Old Covenant worship was never fully implemented[12] though it was given a massive push forward by David when he brought the tabernacle to Jerusalem. But Jesus has transformed worship. The blood of Christ has cleansed our consciences so that we may worship the living God in spirit and in truth.

…those who are called…

This is the second time the author describes believers as those who are *called*. Previously he referred to believers as those

[12] The annual feasts seem to have been kept, but the Sabbath rest for the land and freeing of Hebrew slaves was never observed nor is there a record of Israel ever observing the year of Jubilee. See Jer 34:8-14.

"who share in the heavenly calling."[13] In both places the call is seen as being effective. He does not envisage those who are called failing to receive the "promised eternal inheritance." This is entirely consistent with the whole of scripture which teaches that it is God who calls us and not we who seek after God. Furthermore, this is entirely *inconsistent* with the idea that some who are called may fall away and lose their salvation.[14]

The bible talks about the saints being *appointed*, *chosen* and *predestined* and describes them as the *elect*.

> "And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." (Mt 24:31)
>
> "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you..." (Joh 15:16)
>
> "… all who were appointed for eternal life believed." (Ac 13:48)
>
> "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Ro 8:29-30)
>
> "For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." (Ro 9:15-16)
>
> "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—

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[13] Heb 3:1

[14] As has been noted, Hebrews 6:4-6 has often been interpreted as showing that Christians may fall away and lose their salvation.

prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory…?" (Ro 9:22-24)

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—" (Eph 1:4-5)

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will," (Eph 1:11)

"from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth." (2Th 2:13)

"who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time," (2Tim 1:9)

These scriptures are compelling and clearly refer to the preparation of individuals before creation for salvation because of His will, not because of anything we would subsequently do. This is known as the doctrine of "election" or "predestination".

This doctrine has been argued over since Augustine started to apply his logical mind to the issue back in the fourth century. He reasoned that if God *irresistibly* calls us to salvation, then He must overrule our free-will which, he claimed, is so corrupted by sin that we would never freely chose salvation. However, such logic easily leads to the conclusion that men are but robots controlled by a sovereign God and there is therefore no place for moral responsibility and judgement for sin.

Put briefly, Augustine argued that if men are elected they must one day be saved and therefore cannot resist God's will. Nothing they do before or after coming to faith can thwart

God's election to salvation since God's sovereign will must be accomplished. This means that free will in the matter of saving and persevering faith must be curtailed.[15] Calvin developed the logical argument claiming that election also requires total depravity (no one can chose salvation unless God overrules their will, otherwise some who are not elect could put their faith in Christ). Furthermore, since only the elect are saved, he deduced that Christ paid for the sins of the elect only (known as limited atonement).

Calvin, and many since, claimed that if you believed in election you logically had to believe the other four deduced doctrines.[16] Yet, since the Synod of Dort in 1618 where the five tenets of Calvinism were adopted, there have been many who ascribe to some but not all of the points. Logical deduction from scripture does not make a conclusion biblical or true. The use and interpretation of the source texts may be faulty, the logic may be faulty and the conclusions may be faulty. Furthermore, all logical arguments work with a model of reality.[17] If the model is faulty the logical path will not correlate with reality. In the case of Calvinism the model is based on philosophical deductions made by Augustine (original sin and predestination) and Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas (penal

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[15] Calvin and many others have gone much further, e.g. Hodge, "The occurrence of all events is determined with unalterable certainty. Foreknowledge foreknows them as certain. Foreordination determines them, secures their certainty. Providence effects it. God effectually controls the acts of free agents. They are fixed from all eternity!" (Dr. Hodge Vol. II, p. 300).

[16] Remembered by the acronym "TULIP", Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and Perseverance of the saints. See Appendix 3 – "Eternal Security" for a fuller discussion.

[17] See for instance Packer's discussion of theological models in, "What did the cross achieve?"

substitution) among others. As good and as widely accepted as these models might be, they are not themselves directly biblical doctrines and the models are not universally accepted by godly orthodox saints and theologians.

Some who object to Calvin's denial of free will have sought alternative ways of interpreting election. On the basis of 1Pet 1:2 "…who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father…" some have tried to argue that God elected in *foreknowledge* of our response of faith. In other words, He chose us before creation when He saw that one day we would freely follow Christ. This is denied by 2 Tim 1:9 quoted above. Others argue that God predestined a people (the church) not the individuals who would comprise it (denied by Acts 13:48 and Rom 9:15). Still others argue, that God prepared the destiny for believers, not the believers themselves (denied by all the above).

Whatever trouble we may have in marrying the two doctrines of free will and election, we cannot escape the truth that both are vigorously taught in the New Testament.[18]

We should not accept a human logical conclusion that denies biblical assertions. We should accept that our powers of logical thought are limited and that God asks us to believe His word

[18] Throughout the bible men are exhorted to repent and threatened with judgement for rejecting God. Such exhortations have no meaning if man has no freedom to obey. Does not the very cross of Christ proclaim God's jealousy in guarding the freedom of men to choose good or evil. The cross is not so compelling as to override men's choice, but rather it preserves it. But a day is coming when every knee shall bow, a day when the heavens will flee away, when man's will is so overawed by indescribable power and glory that, effectively, free will is overruled. When 6-foot tall fallen man is openly presented with the majesty of God who plays with galaxies, his will is bound to submit! This is irresistible, but the cross is not.

rather than our "logical" conclusions. I accept moral free-will (aided by God's grace) and election to salvation. If I cannot understand how they co-exist I must live with that.

So how would I answer the question, "Can only those who are called be saved?" I would say, "Yes. That is what Jesus said 'No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day' (Jn 6:44). So if you are saved, give thanks to God for His gracious mercy in calling you. And if you are not saved then fall on your face and call out to God to have mercy on you and call you to salvation. For Jesus said, 'My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.' (Jn 6:40)"

…receive the promised eternal inheritance…

The promised eternal inheritance is the promises given to Abraham which the author has had in mind from the beginning of the letter. Jesus inherited them (1:4), we inherit them (1:14), the gospel proclaims them (2:3), our hope is in them (3:6,14). The promises remain valid for us (4:1,9), we must strive to live in them (4:11), Jesus helps us with them (4:16), and has pioneered our path (5:9). We must imitate those who have inherited already (6:12). Abraham's promises are set before us to steadfastly lay hold of (6:18,19) and Jesus has secured a better hope for us (7:19) with a better covenant (7:22) based on better promises (8:6) so that we who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance (9:15). As I have already argued extensively in earlier chapters, this eternal inheritance is not another word for heaven or life after death; it is the whole package of life in fellowship with God starting from the day we are saved. It is rooted in the promise God gave to Abraham to bless him and make him a blessing to the world. We do not receive this one day after we die; our inheritance starts now, but we inherit it by faith. That is the reason the author wrote

this letter; to prove the validity of the promises for believers and to exhort believers to take hold of them by faith.

Heb 9:16-22

(16) In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, (17) because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. (18) This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. (19) When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. (20) He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." (21) In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. (22) In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

The argument

Both the making of a covenant and the obtaining of forgiveness require a death.

In the case of a will…

It seems a little odd that the author should introduce an argument that has nothing to do with the Law of Moses, but his purpose is to show that Christ's death was essential. Obtaining forgiveness required His death as an offering, but so did the introduction of the New Covenant since a will (which he likens to a covenant) only takes effect after the death of the one who made it.

…This is the blood of the covenant

Moses words, "This is the blood of the covenant", quoted from Ex 24:8, were also quoted by Jesus at the last supper: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28).

…without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

The Law did in fact provide forgiveness without a blood sacrifice for those who could not afford it (Lev 5:11-13), but it was a concession, as a proxy for shed blood.[19] During the exile when no blood sacrifices at the temple were possible, forgiveness was understood to be granted through the "sacrifice" of a broken and contrite heart.

> "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." (Hos 6:6)

The prophets spoke often in these terms, but there was never a suggestion that blood sacrifice was old fashioned or primitive and no longer necessary. Rather, they looked forward to the day when God would once again provide for Himself an acceptable sacrifice as He did when He redeemed Isaac for Abraham.[20]

Substitutionary death

Over the centuries, and perhaps more especially recently, debate has raged over the reason why the shedding of blood

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[19] Lev 17:11 "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

[20] Eze 16:63 "Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign Lord."

should be necessary for forgiveness. Here, for instance is a quote from an internet question and answer site:

> "If there is some sort of principle for forgiveness which requires the shedding of blood that God must go by then it's as if God is unable to forgive them on His own. This makes God dependent on someone else which disputes the claim of God being God. So forgiving sins only after shedding blood seems somewhat absurd for God, when he must be capable of forgiving sins by His own, if he contains the power to do so."

Islam has the same objection to the cross. They view it as crude and obscene to suggest that the all-merciful God should need to punish Christ in order to forgive sin.

Some respected Christian leaders have questioned the logic and morality of God requiring the shedding of blood for forgiveness and some have rejected the doctrine of *penal substitution*. But the majority of Christians believe that Jesus' death was both *necessary* and *effective* in dealing with our sin. If you believe that the bible is the inspired word of God, given to instruct in the way of salvation, then this is bound to be your conclusion. However, the detail of why that death was necessary and precisely how it achieved our restoration has kept theologians busy for 2000 years. Many Christians today accept that Jesus took the penalty for their sin as a substitute "guilty" person. This view was first put forward by Calvin in the 1500's and gave rise to a number of consequential doctrines which many find extremely problematic.[21] But this is not the only understanding and has not always been the understanding of the church.

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[21] For example, if Jesus died for my specific sins, then He surely did not die for the specific sins of the unregenerate, since they will be judged for their sins. Thus Jesus could not have died for the sins of the whole world, but only for the sins of the elect. This doctrine, known as *limited atonement* is not taught in scripture but derived by logic from Calvin's attempt to understand the logic of salvation.

For the first 1000 years of the church the generally accepted idea was that the atonement was the resolution of the conflict between Satan and God, by way of an act of complete trust and obedience and by paying the ransom due to regain the kingdom lost in the fall.[22]

Then Saint Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury, developed his theory of the *substitutionary atonement*.[23] Anselm claimed that the debt of honour due to our sin creates an imbalance in the moral universe; it could not be satisfied by God's simply ignoring it. He argued that:

1. Satisfaction for man's sin is necessary on account of God's honour and justice.
2. The affront of sin on an infinite God is itself infinite and as such, only the infinite God can give satisfaction.
3. The merit of the voluntary death of Jesus, the God-man, is infinite, and so gives the necessary satisfaction.

Thus the perception of the atonement changed from the notion of conflict between Satan and Christ and turned it into a conflict between God's justice and His mercy. Christ is seen as God paying the *honour* due our behalf, without which we would have to suffer punishment.

200 years later, Thomas Aquinas developed Anselm's ideas, introducing the notion of *penalty substitution*. Christ did not simply restore God's honour, but actually paid the penalty of death that was the moral consequence of man's sin. Christ made a *voluntary* substitution of His suffering in exchange for

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[22] Gustav Aulen (transl. by A. G. Herber) *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Macmillan: New York, 1977)

[23] Anslem *Cur Deus homo,* D. Nutt (London, 1885)

the total suffering due to mankind. He stressed that Christ was not *punished* as our substitute, but voluntarily suffered to pay generously for our sin, arguing that punishment can only be meted out to the guilty, but payment may be given voluntarily.[24]

Then 300 years on, Calvin, a lawyer by training, developed the theory of *penal substitution* which Aquinas had specifically rejected. He taught that Jesus took the actual penalty for our specific sins. He answered Aquinas' objection that a penalty can only be paid by the guilty by claiming that in our union with Christ He became guilty in our place and paid the punishment due to us.

So whereas Anselm's and Aquinas' theories emphasise the price being paid *by* God, Calvin's theory emphasises the payment for sin being made *to* God.

A less well known contemporary of Calvin, Hugo Grotius, revived Aquinas' ideas on penalty substitution, which became known as the *governmental theory*. This emphasises the *propitiation* of God through the suffering of Christ as a substitute for our punishment. Jesus satisfies the wrath of God and conciliates Him so that He is no longer offended by our sin and demanding that we pay the penalty for it.

Each of these great minds worked out their theories within the framework of the human legal systems of their day. Today, in the age of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the idea of penal substitution has come under severe criticism. The punishment of the innocent and the acquittal of the guilty is regarded as the perfect example of injustice. However, in the case of Christ's atonement, this accusation is ungrounded,

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[24] Aquinas, Summa Theologica, "Whether anyone is punished for another's sin?"

since God, in Jesus, reconciled sinners to Himself by *His own* voluntary and loving act of offering *Himself* for our justification.

As far as I can see, every theory for the atonement that has been put forward has had its merits and its limitations. I think it better to take the helpful aspects of each theory but not to push the logic too far, recognising that they are all simply attempts of human minds to understand the infinite purposes of God. Packer is surely right when he says simply that "Jesus Christ our Lord, moved by a love that was determined to do everything necessary to save us, endured and exhausted the destructive divine judgement for which we were otherwise inescapably destined, and so won us forgiveness, adoption and glory"[25]

So why was the shedding of blood necessary? Scripture tells us that the penalty for sin is death and somehow God was able to substitute Christ's death for ours. The Law provided a way, through the sacrifices, for Israel to benefit from Christ's death before it actually took place. Because Christ's death was necessary, so also was the death of the symbolic animal. With this, I think we must be satisfied.

Heb 9:23-28

> (23) It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. (24) For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. (25) Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. (26) Then Christ would have

[25] Packer, "What did the cross achieve?" p88

had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. (27) Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, (28) so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The argument

In this section the author summarises the chapter. Christ's work was in heaven, not in an earthly copy. His offering achieved full and permanent cleansing not needing to be repeated every year and it comprised His own death not that of a symbolic substitute. His death has taken away the penalty for sin and brings eternal salvation. In everything Christ's work supersedes the tabernacle worship.

Cleansing the heavens

We have already discussed the symbolism involved in this letter. Some commentators have tried to make much of the statement that the *heavenly things* required *better sacrifices* to purify them, asking how heaven became contaminated and why *sacrifices* is in the plural.[26] I think such questions are out of place and that the symbolic language can not be pressed so far as to attach great significance to the detail. In any case, the

[26] The phrase translated *heavenly* is commonly used of God's presence, but it is also freely used to describe the wider heavenly realm, e.g. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Eph 3:10) and "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Php 2:10). But here, the phrase clearly refers to the place of God's presence.

reference is to the initial rites of sanctification when the tabernacle was commissioned. It does not necessarily imply previous impurity.[27] The point is that the heavenly tabernacle has been prepared for *us*. There would be no requirement for purification were it not for our sin.

…to appear for us in God's presence.

Heaven has become the "tent of meeting" between man and God. The earthly meeting place has been done away with and replaced by the specially purified heavenly meeting place. Jesus ministers there as our great High Priest on our behalf, but not as a *substitute* for us. Jesus is not before God *instead* of us. If it were merely that Moses tabernacle had been done away with and Jesus had gone to minister in heaven then where would we go to meet God? Jesus is not ministering in some invisible place in heaven *instead* of us having at least limited access through Moses tabernacle. Paul says,

> "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Col 3:1-3)

Our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. We are in Christ and He is in us in the unhindered presence of God. More of this in the next chapter.

Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again…

In some circles there is the idea that either through the breaking of bread or through Jesus' High Priestly ministry or in our own

[27] Despite Job 15:15 "If God places no trust in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes…" which is poetry about God's holiness, not a factual comment about heaven's dirtiness.

prayers, God needs to be reminded of or re-presented with the blood of Christ's sacrifice. Nowhere does the scripture suggest that Jesus pleads or re-presents His blood before the Father on our behalf or any other such thing. There was one sufficient sacrifice for our sin which has forever turned away God's wrath and brought His people into confident and free fellowship with Him. Nowhere does scripture suggest that either Jesus or we ourselves need ever remind God of this fact. The ongoing ministry of intercession (Heb 7:25) that Jesus performs on our behalf is made possible *because* of the blood Christ shed for us. His intercession concerns our inheritance, not reminding God of the finished work of Christ.

God is not naturally grumpy and fault finding; He is not inclined to remember our sin and forget Christ's sacrifice. On the contrary, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2Cor 5:19). God rejoices in what He Himself has accomplished on our behalf through offering Himself, in Christ, for our sin. He does not need to be reminded of or re-presented with Christ's sacrifice. Rather, "he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." We are the ones that need reminding! God has a message of good news that He wants to have proclaimed throughout the world.

Just as man is destined to die once…

The author emphasises again and again through this letter that Christ died only once. He does so four times in this summary – He did not offer himself again and again, He did not (implied) have to suffer many times, He has appeared once for all, Christ was sacrificed once.

The author has previously argued for the need and effectiveness of Christ's death on the basis of purification, the

forgiveness of sin and the establishment of a New Covenant. He now provides one final argument: that men die once and then face judgement. Jesus was a man and so He also died once and faced judgement. But He did so on our behalf and by the judgement meted out on Him He took away the judgement due to us. And in contrast to the earthly high priest who appears again year after year to bear sin, Jesus will appear again to bring the consummation of salvation to all who truly trust in Him.

…to do away with sin…

To say that Christ has appeared to do away with sin is a remarkable claim. We should note that this was by *the sacrifice of himself* and not simply by *example*. Christ did not come so that sin would be reduced through mankind following His example. God knows that good examples do not necessarily make good citizens. Certainly they help and they can inspire many people to good things. But Christ died, not to reduce sin, but to do away with sin. This gets to the radical heart of the gospel. The meaning is explained in the last verse of the chapter. He *takes away* our sins so that God grants us salvation instead of judgement. Many see Christianity as a religion whereby people have their sins forgiven and are then supposed to live a good honest life and not get into any more trouble. They see it as a *reduce sin* religion. But in fact it is a *remove sin* religion. Jesus takes our *guilt* away. Though we continue to sin from time to time, perhaps even from moment to moment, Christ died once to take away our sins and bring salvation.

Conclusion

For the original Jewish believers this chapter must have been riveting. Having the meaning and significance of their ancient rituals illuminated by the work of Christ must have been

exhilarating, just as it was for the two disciples when Jesus did this for them on the road to Emmaus. Symbolism is a powerful means of communication, but when the meaning of the symbols is unknown or forgotten, the symbols become mere ritual. This is as true today as it was then. Where we use symbolic objects, images, gestures or language in our worship we should take care that those participating understand the meaning and significance of those symbols and those symbols which have lost their usefulness should be set aside.

By taking the chapter a section at a time we have been able to make the argument clear and along the way we have discussed some very important ideas which this chapter has contributed to.

Let us try to summarise this chapter to place it in the context of the overall argument.

The Tabernacle had inherent weaknesses which testify to its own temporariness. In everything Christ's work supersedes the tabernacle worship, cleansing the conscience and bringing eternal salvation to believers.

Questions for discussion and application in Hebrews 9

V1-5 Does your church have a pattern of worship either in the physical environment or in the way a service is conducted?

Do you understand the reason for these things?

Do you understand any symbolism involved?

V6-10 Is your heart and mind usually engaged with God in your worship services or is your mind often distracted or your heart elsewhere?

Is there anything you can do to improve your own or other peoples engagement with God through the use of or setting aside of the worship patterns you have grown used to?

What sort of picture is presented to a visitor to your church? Does it present barriers or freedom of access? Is there anything you can do to present a strong image of the blessings of the New Covenant?

V11-15 Do you enjoy a clean conscience because of Jesus' death for you?

How do you deal with your feelings of guilt or failure when you sin?

Are there any ways in which you are tempted to try and win God's approval by your works?

Are there any things which hinder your worship?

What promises do you enjoy the benefit of?

What promises are you longing for?

V16-22 How would you answer the accusation that the requirement of blood for forgiveness is primitive, obnoxious and ridiculous?

V23-28 The scriptures often exhort us to wait for the Lord. What do you think this means? In what things do you need to wait for the Lord?

What aspects of your life demonstrate that you are waiting for Him?

Is there a verse you could memorise from this chapter that would encourage you?