

Hebrews Chapter 9 – John Karmelich

1. My overly convicting lesson title is "If Jesus has paid the complete price for my sins, why do I still feel guilty over things I have done wrong?" To say it another way, why I do still try to prove my worth to God by doing good deeds if Jesus has completely paid the price for every sin I have ever committed in my life, past present and yes, even in the future? My goal by the end of this lesson is to remove away any guilt we have based on this convicting title.
 - a) OK John, what does this title have to do with Hebrews Chapter 9? The writer of Hebrews is going to review specific rituals set up in the Old Testament that God designed. The purpose of those rituals is for people to have a way to relieve their conscious of guilt.
 - i) The effective question for those Jewish believers then becomes, "If this system was ordained by God, how can it be no longer necessary?"
 - ii) In other words, why would a New Testament be necessary since God Himself has already ordained a detailed system to help people deal with sins? To state it even another way, why was Jesus death necessary when God already laid out a detailed way for people to let go of guilt over issues in the Old Testament?
 - b) Then you might say, "But John I'm already a Christian and I already believe Jesus paid the price for my sins and I do believe the New Testament is the word of God". If I believe that is true, why should I read through this lesson? Another good question.
 - i) We as Christian believers can easily start thinking that we need to do more things in order to prove our value to God. We may think we need to work hard to prove to Him how worthy we are to spend eternity with Him. Or even worse, we might start thinking I know I have messed up "this way" in my past, and now I have to work hard for Jesus in order to make up for those past mistakes.
 - ii) The purpose of this lesson is not to make us feel guilty of our past mistakes. If anything, I want to relieve us of any guilt, by reminding us that God can't love us any more than He already does. We can't earn His favor by what we do in life.
 - iii) If that is true, what is the purpose of life? It is to make a difference for Him. I'm not against working hard for God. I want us to understand our motivation: It is not to prove ourselves worthy to Him. It is to remember that He has already paid the complete price for our sins. Since we as Christians accept that fact, we should want to live to make a difference for Him in this world.
2. At this point I need to switch topics a little, and talk about the subject of blood. Whenever I think of blood, I have to admit, I think of my oldest daughter, who cannot stand to even think about that word. I am convinced she will never go into the medical profession, simply because she can't stand the topic of blood. Yes that may change one day, but for now, she hates to bring it up.
 - a) And your point is? Despite her objections, we need to understand why the "shedding of blood" was such a necessary part of the Old Testament way of worshipping God. It was also necessary that Jesus' blood be shed as part of the method of the way He died. That topic is discussed within the verses of this chapter and is a key point to understand the purpose of both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
 - b) OK John, I'll bite. What is the purpose of blood? Blood is associated with life. Without blood flowing in our bodies, we will die. God uses blood to show us and remind us that we must "die" to living a life without Him. The point is our commitment to God begins with the idea of starting a new life serving Him. That is why blood is so commonly used as a symbol of new life. The problem with the Old Testament way of using blood is that it is all about our blood. When we symbolically give our blood (lives) to God, that act does not provide the power source in order to be obedient to Him. That is why God ordained the New Testament in order for God's own blood to be shed on our behalf.
 - c) With that strange introduction, completed, we are actually ready to start Verse 1.

3. Chapter 9, Verse 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.
- a) Before I say anything about this paragraph, notice the last line says, "But we cannot discuss these things in detail now." That should evoke one of two responses from me:
 - i) Either I don't comment any further on these verses as the writer says we can't discuss these things in detail now, or else I explain what they mean, and then explain why the writer can't discuss any more details about them.
 - ii) I thought about it and I figured it is best if I just explain why these verses are here, and then explain why more details about these are not given in this chapter.
 - b) What these verses focus upon is the first Jewish building ever built to worship God as ordained in Exodus (the second book of the bible). Roughly half of that book gives details of how to build and worship within this structure. The point being is if that much space is given in the bible to this structure, what do we now do with it? Do we now just believe Jesus died for our sins, and no longer worship as ordained God that way? The answer is the symbolism behind that structure does teach us how God wanted the Israelites to deal with the issue of sin. What these verses are leading up to is the key point of this chapter, which is "clearing our conscious of guilt". Let me explain:
 - i) Most of us Christians understand what we have to do in order for God to forgive us of our sins. That is, we confess our sins and turn from them. However, we still often feel guilty that we are not doing enough for God. It is the fear of "omission", which is the fear we are missing something. We can make up for this fear of not pleasing God by trying harder. In other words, we may work our tails off for God thinking that by our efforts, it will make up for whatever sin issue we have missed or dealt with in our lives. It is a wrong way of thinking that God somehow loves us more because of any and all efforts we are making for Him.
 - c) OK John, and what does any of this have to do with the first five verses of this chapter?
 - i) The point is these verses are describing the rituals that God set up in order to help people deal with their guilty conscious over sins they might have missed. The problem with this temple structure is that the rituals had to be repeated over and over again, because even after the rituals were done, people still felt guilt over any and all sins they might have missed in their lives.
 - d) At this point let me explain a few of the details of this structure and then I'll explain how it ties to our lives today.
 - i) The first Jewish worship structure (again, as described in Exodus) was actually a portable structure that can be disassembled. The writer of Hebrews only focuses on the covered building and ignores the fact that the structure also included an outdoor area that surrounds the covered building being described here.
 - ii) All of this leads me back to Verse 1. The text says, "first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary." John's loose translation: The second half of the book of Exodus teaches that God commanded the Israelites to build a place of worship exactly as described in that book of the bible. Here in Hebrews we are getting some of the details of that structure.
 - iii) Verses 2 through 5 explain everything located within this covered building.
 - iv) This building was divided into two rooms. The first room had a lamp stand, a table for bread. This room is translated here the "Holy Place". Only designated Jewish priests were ever allowed to enter this room. (This is all "Verse 2".)

- v) The second room is translated here "the Most Holy Place". Verse 3 describes what it in this room: the golden altar of incense and the most holy object of all, a gold-covered "ark of the covenant", which I'll explain in a moment.
 - a) First, let me talk about the golden altar of incense. If one reads about this altar back in Exodus, it was located in the first room. Yet here in Hebrews, it is described as being in the second room. I hold the view that the writer of Hebrews did not get mixed up. What he meant here was that this altar is used in effect for prayers going up to God. That is why it had the smell of incense, which is a visual picture of our prayers rising to God. Once a year, when the top priest entered the "Most Holy Place" (the second room), that priest took with him some of that incense into that second room in order to offer up prayers for the people.
 - b) Now let me describe the "ark of the covenant", the only thing permanently kept in this second room. It is a box roughly the size and shape of a coffin. This box was associated with the presence of God. Verse 4 explains what was inside the box. This box had a separate lid and two angel statues that were carved on top of the lid.
 - c) The first thing that was inside this box was the 10 commandments. This was the second copy made as Moses destroyed the first copy when the Israelites were collectively sinning. A point here is even if we destroy a copy of God's laws in effect those laws cannot be destroyed.
 - d) The second thing in the box (as mentioned in Verse 4) was a jar of "manna". To recall from the Book of Numbers Chapter 11, this is what the Israelites ate the forty years they wandered in the desert. It was food from heaven that rained down every day and the Israelites had to collect it to eat it. The idea is that God provides for us, even in our sinful state.
 - e) The final item in the box was "Aaron's rod". At that time, there were some Israelites who didn't like the fact that Moses was given all of the leadership power and that Moses' brother Aaron was the top priest. For God to prove that this is what He ordained, Aaron had a stick that "magically" produced fruit while the sticks of the other leaders did nothing. The point being that God ordains our leaders and calls specific people to serve Him.
- e) OK John, you are starting to bore me with this ancient history stuff. ☺ Why should I care? The idea is to about people seeking God's forgiveness of sins. Hebrews is making the point that prayers were offered up to the place where God was symbolically located in order to seek His forgiveness of sins. Remember that only the top priest entered this room once per year. If the priest studied his history, he would know that one enters this room seriously as people have died from rebelling against God. I sort of picture the priest entering this room with the incense in hand and saying, "Dear God, forgive us of our sins. See you next year." Then the priest runs out in fear of His life. ☺
 - i) The point for you and me as Christians is that God had set up this elaborate set of rituals to be followed for centuries in order for people to feel forgiven of their sins. However, the problem with this ritual is that the guilt was still there after it was over. If people didn't feel guilt anymore, the ritual would not have to be repeated every year. The ritual is actually a lot more elaborate, as I am summarizing much of the book of Exodus and Leviticus in a single page. All I want you to remember at this point is simply that this ritual had to be repeated every year.
 - ii) The problem with any believer in God is they can still felt that they or we have to do more in order to please God. Even with this elaborate ritual, one can have the sense that God is not pleased with us. It is like thinking, "I know there are sins I have forgotten to confess, and let me make up for my guilt by doing things."

- f) It just occurred to me that while Verse 5 said, "I can't speak in detail about this stuff now" I just spent two pages explaining the details. I figure in order to explain why it is this ritual is no longer necessary, it is first important to understand why these details are given in the first place. It is to show that first, the writer of Hebrews was familiar with the Old Testament system of worship. Second it is leading up to the main point of this chapter that because Jesus blood was shed, these rituals are no longer needed.
- i) At this point, it is best if I go to the next section of the text and that will help to explain where I am going with this whole discussion.
4. Verse 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 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 worshiper.¹⁰ They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order.
- a) Just so you know, this is going to be a bible study where I am going to list the text in big chunks of verses as opposed to studying them one at a time.
- b) Much of what I have already discussed on the last few pages, is restated here in these verses. The first point to note about these verses is that again, only the top priest went into this room ("The Most Holy Place") once a year as a ritual not only for Jewish people to ask forgiveness of their sins, but also to ask forgiveness of anything they might have committed in ignorance. We are back to the issue that people feel guilty not only of things we know we did wrong, but also that we might have missed something. In order to cover the guilt of things we might have missed, this whole elaborate ritual was set up.
- i) The problem with this whole system is in effect it didn't work. People still felt a sense of guilt about some sin in their lives. Even today, the hardest aspect for us as Christians to deal with is the guilt we feel over some secret sin or some aspect of our lives where we are convinced God is not happy about how we act.
- ii) A reason this chapter gives us 10 verses so far to describe some of the details of how God designed this whole system to show how our sins are forgiven. It is to clear our conscious of guilt. The problem is, as we'll discover it's not enough.
- iii) Also notice that verse 10 even mentions "various ceremonial washings". The point is the Jewish people also had an elaborate set of regulations about how they were supposed to live in order to be pleasing to God.
- c) Before I go on, notice the term "Holy Spirit" is mentioned in Verse 8. Most religious Jews believe that "God's Spirit" is just part of God Himself. They don't see Him as a separate entity as takes up residence within the lives of all Christian believers. I like to describe the Holy Spirit as a conscious within us that guides us to do what God the Father wants us to do at any given moment. Often we ignore doing the right thing, which in effect means we are ignoring the Spirit of God within us. What God the Father desires is that every aspect of our life is turned over to Him. The function of the Holy Spirit is to guide us as to how to live at any given moment.
- i) OK John, and what is the point of that speech? That we can feel this sense of guilt as Christians that we have to be doing more in order please God. It is the false idea that in order to "earn points for heaven", or in order for God to forgive us of all the sins we have not realized we have committed, we have to work hard.
- ii) All of this leads to the simple point that the way for Christian to enter this "Most Holy Place" (that second room) could not come from this whole elaborate system to relieve any guilt we feel for what we have done in our lives. It takes the blood of Christ and not anything else in order for us to be fully forgiven of our sins.

- d) Let's say we have been Christians for a good while now. If that is true, we all know that we are forgiven by the shed blood of Christ and nothing else. So why bore us to death with all of these details about Old Testament rituals about forgiveness of the sin? ☺
- i) What I am leading up to is the idea of not trying to please God with our efforts. It is an easy thing for any Christian and even many nonbelievers to do. It is easy to start thinking, "God must be proud of me now. Look at what I am doing." Or worse, we might think, I am not doing enough for God, I have to do more.
 - ii) This is all about the reminder that we can't earn God's love more by doing whatever we consider to be good works. Personally, I can't get more love by God from writing more bible studies. You can't get more love from God by doing whatever you believe He has called you to do in your life.
 - iii) In other words, it is not about working hard for God in order to earn His respect. We are called to make a difference for Him, not to earn points, but simply out of gratitude for what He has already done for us. Should Christians work hard in order to make a difference for Jesus? Yes. Should they do it in order to earn God's respect and favor? No.
 - iv) This comes back to something I touched upon in previous lessons in Hebrews: The main difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is the words "necessity versus gratitude". God does want us to make a difference for Him, but solely out of gratitude for completely paying the price for sins, including those sins we still feel guilty about, including the ones we still struggle with and also including the ones we may not be aware of at this time.
 - v) Ok, I am confused. Do I work hard for Jesus or not? The answer is yes, but the issue here is not to focus on what we do, but why we do those works. If we are doing them to clear a guilty conscious, we are in effect messing up. We should be doing good works strictly out of gratitude of what we believe God calls us to do.
 - a) So how do I tell if I am doing a good deed out of guilt or out of gratitude? Simple. Ask yourself what is one's motivation. The answer is usually more obvious than one thinks. Yes we are welcome to continue doing what God calls us to do, but remember why we are called to do such works, strictly out of gratitude for what Jesus has already done.
- e) I could go back to these verses and explain the historical significance in more detail, but I figure it is more important to explain why it is we are to do what it God calls us to do, which is why I spent the last page dealing with the issue of gratitude, and trusting in Jesus complete payment for any and all reasons we might feel guilt over something.
- i) It is interesting that God has laid on me the last few days an old issue of my life that I had to go over. I was feeling guilty that I committed some sin that I needed to confess. After racking my brain out about what to do, I finally just said in effect, "God this is Your problem. You work it out Your way on Your timing. As for me I will go back to focusing on making a difference for You out of gratitude and not out guilt of things I know I have done wrong in the past."
 - ii) With that confession out of my system, I'm ready for the next verse.
5. Verse 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!
- a) I warned you this is the "big paragraph" lesson, and that trend continues here.

- b) The main point to get out of this last set of verses is that the sacrifice that Jesus made is far greater and more significant than the entire sacrificial system set up in the Old Testament.
- c) If you recall from the last chapter, we talked about the fact that this tabernacle structure was a model of what is in heaven. I contemplated how literally we should take that model. Here in Chapter 9, the writer is saying that Jesus after He was resurrected entered the "heavenly copy" (for the lack of a better term) of the tabernacle structure. Jesus did not enter this heaven-based structure with the blood of an animal for the forgiveness of sins like it was done in the "Exodus structure", but with His own blood.
- d) It's time to talk a little about blood itself. Why does God make such a big deal about shed blood? The entire Old Testament system of sacrifice required animal's blood to be shed and we as Christians commonly speak of Jesus' blood being shed on our behalf. Have you ever stopped to wonder why would God set up this "bloody mess" for us to study?
 - i) Part of the answer is to realize that without blood flowing through our bodies we would die. Blood is a symbol of life itself. When animals were killed in the Old Testament system of sacrifice, it is a way of people saying to God, "I want to end my old life of not trusting in You. I want to give my life over to You. Since I can't physically kill myself and still serve You on earth, let me kill this innocent animal to symbolically show that I am now dedicated to serving You."
 - ii) Again, I should state here that religious Jewish people today no longer offer up animals for their sins, but simply confess their sins.
 - iii) I can also state the obvious for us Christians that this system is no longer needed. Jesus' blood was shed "once and for all", so that system is no longer needed.
- e) Here is the issue to consider for this chapter: If Jesus blood was shed for our sins once and for all, why do I still feel guilty about sin? If I am trusting in Jesus complete payment for my sins, why do I still feel this sense of "I am not doing enough", or "I still feel guilty over some past sin that I struggle with or have struggled with in my life?"
 - i) The sad answer is that we fail to trust in Jesus as our complete (key word there) payment of all sins, past present and future. We feel we must prove our worth to God by doing things. That is what this chapter is warning against. Yes it is a good thing to do good works out of gratitude to God, but that is a separate topic that I have been beating over our heads for the past few lessons. The main point of this whole lesson is about letting go of the guilt we all have of wanting to prove ourselves worthy to God. The point is that proof is not necessary, as the complete price for our sins has already been paid.
- f) Now let me come back to some of the historical details of this chapter. If nothing else, we know that whoever wrote Hebrews was very familiar with the Jewish system of how God was to be worshipped, at least at the time when Jesus was around.
 - i) I could give you a wonderful lecture about what each of those details mean. Then I thought, why is that necessary? My point is a believing Christian no longer has to observe that specific ritual. That ritual including washing oneself specific ways and even included using the ashes of a "red heifer" (a cow). Again, each of these items in that last paragraph have some wonderful historical significance, but I just don't see how they affect our relationship with Jesus other than the fact that each of these details in their own way do point to Him.
 - ii) OK John, if those details are not needed, why are they listed here for us to study? It is to remind Jewish Christians that as God ordained as that system was for the forgiveness of sins, it still doesn't take away the guilt one can feel for "not doing enough" to please God. By Jesus having His blood shed we can let go of our guilty conscious and say in effect, "Dear God, this issue (or sin) is Your problem. If there is something You want me to change, make it obvious. In the meantime, I will just go forward in my life and live to make a difference for You."

6. Verse 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.
- a) I need to cut down for the moment the number of verses I will cover at any one time. That is because it is important here to discuss the word "mediator". To explain, think of a mediator as a broker, agent or an attorney who puts a deal together. In effect it is the person who says to two other people (or groups), you do this and you (the other entity) do that, and then the two of you now have an agreement. Suppose you have a written contract to buy a product. That contract may say in effect, "I agree to pay you this amount of money and in exchange, you provide this service for the money". The mediator is the one who puts the contract together and gets the parties together to agree on that contract.
 - b) All right, enough business analogies. So what is Jesus the mediator of? It is a "new deal" between God the Father and people. The old deal was in effect, You (the Israelites) obey these rules and I will be happy with you as individuals and as a group. The problem with that deal is that history has shown that the Israelites could never collectively keep it for a long period of time. They could keep it for a while, just like our willpower can give us the ability to do things for a set period of time. Over the long run, they lacked the ability (in previous lessons I called this the "engine") to fulfill that Old Testament agreement.
 - c) Before I go any further, one must remember what a tough sell this is for Jewish people. This system was in place for roughly a millennium. This Old Testament system was and still is part of the Word of God. Now the writer of Hebrews is saying to them in effect, that system is no longer necessary. The important idea to get across is not that the Old Testament system is wrong, it just lacks the power to obey it over the long term. Yes the rituals of the Old Testament do point to Jesus, but that is a separate issue for the moment.
 - d) My point here is simply that the writer of Hebrews is not asking these Jewish people to abandon their God or their beliefs about His standards. What the writer is asking all of us in effect is to trust Jesus to be our power source in order to please God the Father. This is about not trying to be pleasing to God based on our will power. That is a key part of the message of the New Testament and the "contract" that Jesus is providing as our mediator.
 - e) I think one of the hardest things for people to accept about Christianity is the fact that it is so simple. All we have to do is trust in Jesus payment for our sins and nothing else. If we do that, how do we prove our worth to God? What about my guilty conscious over things we have done to mess up in the past? How do I prove I trust God unless I make the effort to do so in the first place? The point is we can't please Him on our own efforts, no matter how hard we try. That is why the New Testament was necessary in the first place.
 - i) The problem is most of us as Christians know that, but still find ourselves making efforts or in effect "patting ourselves on the back" for things that we do. The truth is we will never be good enough for God. The truth is we are all guilty of sin.
 - ii) So do we stop trying to please God if it is impossible to do so? Wrong attitude. The point is we rely upon His power (there is that engine analogy again) and not our own power. If one can grasp that concept, then one does understand exactly what God expects from us as believers: That is how one lives the Christian life: Not by ignoring Him, but by living to make a difference for Him by relying upon His power and doing it out of gratitude and not out of necessity.
 - iii) OK John, and what exactly should I be doing? Great topic. I like to ask people, if money were not an issue, what would you want to do all day? What would you like to accomplish in your life? Whatever is that answer to that set of questions, one should then use one's talents and gifts in order to make a difference for Him (again out of gratitude, not necessity). If one is not at that point yet, then one should work toward it. Ask God to make it obvious to you what He desires of us at any given moment. The answers will amaze us as we watch our lives unfold.

7. Verse 16: In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, ¹⁷because 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. 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.
- a) OK, it's time for another big paragraph of verses to cover. The reason I spent a long time discussing "mediator" in Verse 15 is because that subject continues here in the next verse. The "mediator" in this case, is the mediator of a will. Let me explain further.
- i) One of the subjects I have been discussed for the past few lessons is explaining the key difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. A few lessons back I explained that the word "testament" is used in the expression "last will and testament" in English. In other words, when people make out a will of what is to become of their possessions after they die they make a last will and testament.
- ii) The reason a will is called a "testament" is because the person who has now died did declare before he or she died that this is what they desire of their stuff.
- b) OK, that is interesting. What does it have to do with these verses? The author is making the point here that a will never goes into affect until it is proven that someone has died. Let's face it: No one cannot distribute the items as stated in their will until all the parties who are to receive those items agree that the person who made the will actually died.
- i) This leads me back to the word "mediator" from the previous verse. In that verse it states in effect that Jesus is the person who "made the agreement" that His death would be sufficient for all of our sins. Yes He is the one who paid the price, but in effect, He is also the one who enforces the contract. What that means is that Jesus payment for our sins is "the deal" being offered to us for our forgiveness.
- ii) OK John, I sort of know that. ☺ Again, what does it have to do with these verses? The point being made here is that this deal cannot go into affect until after Jesus blood has been shed for our sins. That's the point of these two verses. This deal that we are forgiven did not begin until after Jesus actually was killed for our sins.
- c) To explain these verses further, I need to come back to the issue of blood and why blood was such a big part of the Old Testament agreement between God and His people.
- i) Visualize a church service where a priest or a pastor walks a small animal up on the stage. The leader of the service says how cute the animal is, and maybe even has people pet the animal. Then, the leader pulls out a knife and kills the animal. Then the pastor or priest literally makes a bloody mess by carving up the animal and putting some of that blood on everything on stage and yes, even putting some on the people of the audience. Wouldn't that gross everyone out?
- a) Yes, it would, and that is the visual picture that these two verses give and that is a key point of the Old Testament. That the agreement between God and the Israelites were "ratified" in blood.
- ii) OK, thank you for giving us that horrible picture. Why? It is to understand and accept that idea that death was necessary in order for the Old Testament to take effect in the first place. Since God cannot die by definition, who dies besides the animals being sacrificed? In effect, it is people associated with that animal. Since we can't kill ourselves in order to start this new agreement, the blood of animals were scattered everywhere to visually demonstrate that we are committing our own "death" in order to show our trust in God to guide our lives.
- a) The point being that God the Father takes sin so seriously, He says in effect we have to die to our old life and trust Him to guide our lives. Therefore, in effect, the people who die in the Old Testament by those animals being killed and the blood of animals being put everywhere.

- iii) So what does any of this have to do with Hebrews and the chapter topic of dealing with our guilt over sins we have committed? The point is the Old Testament was set up with "our death" (symbolically) to forgive our sins. However this ritual had to be done over and over again, as we still deal with guilt over sins we commit.
 - iv) To say it another way, the reason the Old Testament was not good enough is simply that people did not have the "power source" to be obedient to God the Father. That is why those Old Testament rituals of shed blood have to be repeated over and over again. It is to remind those Israelites how seriously God takes sin to begin with. It is also a reminder that people by themselves don't have the power source to be obedient to God the Father. That is why it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to literally enter us (as stated in Verse 8) to be obedient to God.
 - d) At this point, let me share with you an encounter I had a few years back with a few clients who were very devout religious Jewish folks. We discovered we had a lot in common. If you ever spend time with religious Jews, you will discover that most of them are very conservative and hold the same values that most Christians hold. Most of the topics that we discussed, we discovered that we agreed upon. The only significant area where we disagreed (other than of course, believing in Jesus) was the concept of the Spirit of God guiding our lives. I could tell that was the one area where I struck a nerve.
 - i) To say it another way, they believed they had to trust God to guide their lives, but they believed it was up to them to perform. They didn't believe in the idea of God Himself (Holy Spirit) being within them as a power source to guide them.
 - ii) Ok John, good for you. What does it have to do with these verses? The point of these verses is simply that blood was necessary in order for the Old Testament to be enforced. Those rituals used animal blood was in effect the blood of people to make that commitment. That blood used in those rituals was taken from innocent animals as a substitute of the blood of people willing to make that commitment.
 - iii) The point being in effect that the blood of people was insufficient in that people on our own don't have the power source (again think "engine") to be obedient to God the Father. Therefore, it requires a new "will and testimony" where God Himself had to be the one giving His own blood in order to forgive our sins.
 - e) Let me try this one more way and then I'll promise to move on.
 - i) Why was it necessary for Jesus to die the way He did? Why couldn't He say, hang Himself so he died? Why was it necessary that His blood be shed as part of the methodology of Him dying for our sins? Why was it necessary that His blood "be spilled" as part of God's method to start the New Testament?
 - ii) Yes, this gory method of death does prove that Jesus really did die. It also comes back to the idea that in order for a will to be executed, we need to know for sure that the one, who has died, really did die. Blood is a symbol of life, because if the blood stops flowing in our bodies, we will die.
 - iii) To sum it up, for us to have that power source that gives us the ability to obey God the way He desires we obey Him, we have to know for sure that the will is in play. How better a way to know for sure, then to read of this bloody mess of the way Jesus actually dying the way He did. Therefore, this new will and testament that we call the New Testament is in enforced because Jesus blood was shed.
8. Verse 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.
- a) John's loose translation: It was necessary when the first tabernacle was built that blood be scattered everywhere in order to show that death was necessary in order to prove that the "Old Testament" is now in place. But in order for the New Testament to begin, God also had to show the world that blood was spilled to begin this new deal (testament).
 - i) This may become a little clearer as we go through the next few verses.

9. Verse 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 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.
- a) Time for more of my very loose translation: In the original tabernacle as described in the first few books of the Old Testament, the top priest had to go into that second room on a regular basis and bring with him blood that was not his own. That second room is what this English translation calls "The Most Holy Place". If you recall, this structure had two rooms. The top priest only entered that second room once per year. When that priest entered that room, he brought with him the blood of an animal to forgive the sins of all people who trusted in that ritual.
 - b) The point being is that this ritual had to be performed regularly, because even after the ritual was completed, people still felt guilt over sins they committed and sins they might have missed. Those Jewish people still worked hard in order to try to prove their worth to God the Father by doing good works over and above these rituals.
 - i) Again I am back to the idea of "necessity versus gratitude". In other words, the biggest difference I saw when I met with that nice group of Orthodox Jewish clients is that they didn't get (or didn't want to accept the idea) that they don't have to work hard in order to prove their worth to God the Father.
 - c) To say it one more time, I am not condemning hard work for God. I am discussing the reason for that hard work. Are we doing it out of "necessity or gratitude"? As I stated earlier, I discovered I had a lot in common with these clients of mine. We both believed in working hard to make a difference for God. We both believed that following His laws is the best way for people to live. We both trusted in the same God to guide our lives. The biggest and key difference is why we serve Him:
 - i) The religious Jew serves God out of necessity in order to prove one's value to Him. The Christian should serve God the Father strictly out of gratitude for what He has already done for us. That difference is the key difference between the Old and New Testament and a key point of this chapter.
 - d) OK John, but why do I still feel guilt over sins? Why do I still feel the need to work hard in order to prove my value to God? That is when we are starting to slip back into an Old Testament way of thinking. That is why it is necessary to regularly remind us why Jesus payment of our sins was necessary. That is one reason why we should spend time with other believers to remind ourselves that we don't have to work hard to prove our worth to God. The complete price for our sins, past present and future has already been paid.
 - i) Does this mean I am free to sin all I want? To quote a pastor I studied under many years ago, "I am free to sin all I want. The issue is, how much do I want to?" Let me say it another way, if I am grateful for what God has done in my life, then why would I want to displease Him by living a way that is displeasing to Him?
 - ii) To describe it even another way, if God hates sin so much, and the Old Testament makes a "bloody mess" to show how much He hates sin, why would we want to sin in the first place, if that sin is the reason for the bloody mess in the first place?
 - e) Let me wrap up this thought by coming back to the verses themselves. The main point being made here in these verses is that since Jesus is God, it was only necessary for Him to have His blood shed once for sin and not "over and over again" like it was done for many centuries through those rituals of shedding animals for sins. Jesus shed blood is sufficient simply because with His blood being shed, that act in effect becomes our "power source" in order to be obedient to God the Father and do His will for our lives.
 - f) On that happy thought, I can take on the last two verses of this chapter.

10. Verse 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.
- a) These last two verses in effect ask, "If Jesus already paid the price for sins, then what is the purpose of Jesus coming back?" I believe that the writer of Hebrews was aware of Jesus' promise that He would return after was resurrected as stated for example in Acts 1:11.
 - b) Verse 27 is the reminder that all people must die once and face the judgment. At this point, many people who know their bible will say, "Well what about those who were raised from the dead? Didn't they die more than once?" Yes they did and they were exceptions designed to make a point that Jesus Himself is in charge of our lives.
 - c) At this point it might be good to share the story of Don Piper. There was a popular book that came out not too long ago written by and about him. After a bad car wreck this man was literally pronounced dead by a number of trained paramedics. Those paramedics placed his body in a body bag. Despite that fact, a pastor who was driving by the accident and didn't even know him personally felt the need to pray for Mr. Piper. That pastor then went up to those paramedics and asked for permission to go within the scene of the car wreck to start praying over him. That pastor reported later that he has never had that urge to pray like that before, nor since then. At the scene of the accident, that pastor started singing a hymn next to the body of Don Piper, and within a few moments, the dead man (again, Don Piper) started singing with the pastor.
 - i) I recently heard Don Piper speak at a local church. He talked about how he spent "90 Minutes in Heaven" which was the title of his book. He talked about the years of very painful surgical procedures he had to go through in order to make a full and miraculous recovery from the time he was legally pronounced dead.
 - ii) The point of this story is that there are exceptions to the rule of "man is destined to die once", but those are the exceptions for God's purpose. Don Piper will die again one day, just as those people that Jesus raised from the dead did die again. The point is that all people must face judgment. The question for each of us is, when we look back at our lives, are we using our time to make a difference for God.
 - d) I recently have been talking with my daughter (the one who is too scared to even bring up topic of blood) about what is the most valuable thing she owns. After she rambled off a few of her possessions, I told her that the most valuable thing she owns is her time. None of us know how much time we have to live. I told her we don't have a guarantee that we will live to any specific age in life. My point being is that God wants us to use the most valuable thing we have, our time for His glory. In effect, God wants us to give Him our time for His glory. That is why Verse 27 says that people are appointed to die once and then the judgment.
 - i) This leads me back to the issue of guilt over sin and why we should work hard for God. He does want us to work hard in order to make a difference for Him. That is because the most valuable thing He gives us is our time. A key point of this lesson is about understanding our motivation in order to do that hard work. It should always be out of gratitude and not out of necessity. It should never be get our "pats on the back" for God to notice what we are doing. We should be motivated to make a difference for God based on what He has already done for us and not for any rewards or efforts.
 - ii) I know I fail at this as much as anyone and I too need the constant reminder that Jesus already paid the full price for all of my sins. My motivation to serve Him should only be out of gratitude and not out of any sort of necessity. If one gets that concept, then one does get the purpose of this lesson.

- e) OK then, John, if all of that is true, what is the purpose of Jesus Second Coming? As Verse 28 states, it is to bring salvation to those who are waiting for His return? Does that mean we somehow sleep until He returns? How exactly do we wait for Him anyway? I hold the view that we are stuck in "time" on earth. Think about it this way, if God created all things, then He must have created time, as we know it. Therefore, He must exist outside of time, as we know it. I believe when we get resurrected we enter a world where time doesn't exist. That is how He brings salvation at our death.
- i) There is a lot to say about the purpose of Jesus' return. Verse 28 is focusing here on His purpose in terms of our lives as Christians. The point here is we, as Christians don't have to fear being judged by Him for our sins. Yes, there is a judgment for believers, but that judgment is in effect to determine our rewards in heaven based on how we have used our lives in order to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) To state it another way, we don't have to worry about whatever guilt we carry over sins we have committed in the past, or over sins we may not be aware of. The blood of Jesus covers all of those sins and we can let go of any guilt we have.
 - iii) At the same time, Jesus still calls us to work hard, not out of guilt for what we have done wrong, but in order to make a difference for Him in this world.
 - iv) As I taught my daughter, the most valuable thing God has given you and me, is time. The question is how are we using that time? The question comes down to, are we using our time to make a difference for ourselves, or using it to make a difference for God? That is how Jesus will judge us as believers.
 - a) Therefore, know that Jesus will return a second time not to make any more payments for sin, but to judge believers (as well as nonbelievers) based on how we have used the most valuable thing God has given us (our time) in order to make a difference for Him in this world.
11. Now that I have filled all of us with guilt, let me end this lesson with something more positive, as the purpose of this lesson is to get us to let go of our guilt before God and simply focus on living to make a difference for Him.
- a) As I have stated in the introduction, this lesson is about reminding us that we don't have to prove our worth to God, as the price for our sins has been completely paid. All of this discussion about blood, time, coming back from the dead and even my references to my daughter is all about reminding us God wants us to use the most valuable asset we have, which is our time, to make a difference for Him. We need to let go of any guilt we have for things we have done wrong and figure, "If God has forgiven me, why can't I forgive myself for the same actions?" Yes we still may have to pay the price to society for things we have done wrong, but as far as God is concerned, Jesus has paid that full price.
 - b) Therefore, what He has called us to is to go make a difference for Him. Yes Jesus will return one day, not to punish us, but to reward us based on doing what He has called each of us to do to make a difference for Him. So what do we do? As I like to state, every so often, it is not up to me to guide you on that issue, but God Himself. Use whatever talents one has and do what one enjoys doing to make a difference for Him. If we don't know where to start, just do something and let Him guide us. There, on that positive thought, I can now end the lesson.
12. Heavenly Father, we thank You that we don't have to prove our worth to You. We thank You that You not only have completely forgiven us of all of our sins, past, present and future, and even the ones we are not aware of. Help us to use the most valuable gift You have given us, our time, to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to be a good witness for You to a lost and dying world. Help us not to trust in rituals and shows for the forgiveness of our sins, but only in what You have done for us. Guide us with what You want us to do so we can make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.