

Today's Topic: Old and New Covenants — Why the Blood?

I. Scripture: Ephesians 2; Hebrews 8-10

Ephesians 2: 11-22. Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— 12remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. . . . 19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household . . . 21In Christ Jesus the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Hebrews 8: 3-13. Every high priest (of Israel served) at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. . . . 6But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. 7For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah . . . 10This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." . . . 13By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Hebrews 9: 1- 28. Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary (and all of the holy arrangements of the tabernacle). 6When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 7But 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 of the people . . . 8The 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. 9This 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. 10They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order. 11When 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. 12He 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. 13The 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. 14How 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! 15For 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. . . . 22In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. . . . 26(Christ) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. . . . 28and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Hebrews 10: 1-22. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.' " . . . 9He sets aside the first (covenant) to establish the second (convenant). 10And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . . 19Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

II. Discussion Questions

- a. What "better promises" is this new covenant founded on that Heb. 8:6 speaks of? And what was wrong with the old covenant (Heb. 8:7)?
- b. Why is it only through the shedding of blood that sin is forgiven?
- c. How can the shed blood of Christ cleanse our guilty consciences (Heb. 9:14, 10:22), and make us perfect (Heb. 10:1) and holy (Heb. 10: 10)

III. Next Week's Topic & Scripture: Israel and the Church, Romans 9-11