

## Prayer

We crave Your attention, Lord Jesus Christ, for each of us would have Your attention, and each of us longs for Your love. Teach us not to indulge our immaturities, but enable us to grow through the indwelling of Your Word, so that we stand in grace and wisdom both before this world and before Your throne. Build us up by Your Spirit we pray: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Church community

Give thanks to God for the people who are special to you within your own church community, in particular those whose prayerful support and care provide the sustenance which binds the fellowship together. Pray for the Lord to work amongst you with greater liberty and power in the coming days, and for the love of Christ to be shown through everything you do together.

## Meditation

Train my soul, Lord Jesus Christ, my body, my mind, my feelings;  
May I learn from and be trained by You, the source of all truth.

When I run away from You, grasp me firmly and keep me close;  
When I turn to You, give me Your attention and hear my voice.

When I speak out for You, inspire my faith by Your Spirit;  
When I am silent about You; stir my spirit and open my heart.

When I am confident in You; use my enthusiasm to do Your will;  
When I question You, satisfy my mind with Your Holy Wisdom.

When I make myself available to You; use my every gift and talent;  
When I hide myself from You, draw me out and comfort my soul.

For I seek to live my life for You; going on to Your eternal Glory;  
And I need Your discipline and power, for only love will guide me there.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 9:15-22

<sup>15</sup> Therefore He is the mediator of a new covenant; for now that a death has occurred for deliverance from sins under the first covenant, those who are called may now take hold of the promised eternal inheritance. <sup>16</sup> Where there is a will, the death of the one who made it must be verified; <sup>17</sup> for a will takes effect only at death, and it has no force as long as the one who made it is alive <sup>18</sup> (not even the first covenant was put into effect without blood). <sup>19</sup> When Moses had spoken every one of the commandments of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, and with water, scarlet wool and hyssop, sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, <sup>20</sup> and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God has appointed for you.' <sup>21</sup> And in the same way he also sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels used for worship. <sup>22</sup> In truth, under the law almost everything must be purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

## Review

Although it does not appear obvious to us, the purpose of this passage from Hebrews is to confirm that Christ has done everything necessary to establish a new Covenant which replaces the old inadequate one. As we saw yesterday, Jesus Christ went further than previous High Priests who served the old covenant, by sacrificing His own life so that every kind of sin could be dealt with, thus offering the possibility of complete salvation for all (9:6-14). In this reading, the writer now explains the detail of Christ's work as the 'mediator of a new covenant' (9:15).

Our difficulty with the reading is twofold. Firstly, there is a word-play in Greek in the first four verses, and unless you know what it means, you cannot follow what is said. It appears to us that Hebrews suddenly introduces the idea of a 'will' in verse 16, interrupting what is said about covenants: we will look at this shortly. Secondly, from verse 19 onwards, the writer talks about the 'sprinkled blood' which brings about purification and the forgiveness of sins. It is an idea which is completely foreign to us because we do not sacrifice animals in worship!

Firstly, we will identify the word-play. A covenant is an agreement which defines a relationship, in this case, between God and His people; and the Greek word for 'covenant' is 'daitheke'. This happens to be the same word used in Greek for a 'will', which meant then what it means today; it identifies an inheritance (normally in a written form) passed on when someone dies. Once we know this word-play, we can easily see the point being made in verses 6 and 7. There is a new covenant available to us because Jesus' death activates His 'will' and gives us access to His inheritance! This is the argument used by Hebrews to justify the claim that a 'new covenant' has replaced the old. We should not forget, however, that Hebrews is concerned throughout to say that the new covenant offers deliverance from all sins in a way that the old could not, despite the rigorous nature of its rituals (3:15). Hebrews is not a letter about theory, it is concerned for the reality of our salvation.

Secondly, the point made in the second half of our reading is one that would be obvious to all who knew the old sacrificial system. The blood of an animal represented its life, and as part of the ritual for the forgiveness of sins, it was 'sprinkled' on both the law (see the 'scroll' – 5:19) and the people to symbolise purity (5:19). Once purified in this way, people obtained forgiveness for their unintentional sins (see 9:7). Hebrews quotes what happened when Moses first instituted this ritual (9:19-21), using the words 'this is the blood of the covenant which God has appointed for you' (9:20). Now, although we do not like the idea of sacrificing animals in worship, we should have the emotional intellect to accept that this meant a great deal to ancient peoples, including the Israelites. Hebrews does not ask us to like this, but it asks us to understand it, because 'under the law almost everything must be purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins' (9:22).

The letter is about to explain how Jesus' 'blood' was shed at His death as a symbol of His life to forgive our sins (see 9:23-28), but fortunately, the sacrifice of Jesus was done only once and can never be repeated (7:7, 9:12). We will read about this tomorrow. However, most of us will be familiar with the way Christians relate to the 'blood of Christ' and what it either represents or symbolises, in the sharing of bread and wine at 'the Lord's Supper' or the 'Eucharist'.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you find it easy to talk about the details of the death of Christ and what it meant, or is it hard?
2. What is the inheritance we receive because of the death of Jesus? Discuss in your groups what this means for each one present.
3. Should we find a way of eliminating the talk of 'blood' from our services of worship and the forms of service we use?

## Discipleship

It is important for us to concentrate on the substance of a passage of Scripture such as this, rather than our feelings about part of it. We must also accept that things we do not like, such as the idea of 'sprinkled blood' had meaning to people of ancient times, but perhaps not to us. Most people who have spent time with this text find that in the end, they cannot just eliminate the talk of 'blood' from our understanding of Jesus' death, indeed, if we wanted to do that, we might as well not talk about his death! The disciple has to work at understanding these things so that they can be explained, and then cause no barriers to faith.

## Final Prayer

We rejoice, Lord God, at the incredible nature of the life You have given us. May we never be so dull as to cease to wonder at the gift of life, or fail to give thanks for the amazing things that happen all around us, or not notice the love with which we are surrounded. Open our hearts, our minds and our feelings to the world in which we are set, Lord God: AMEN