

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, there are no words eloquent enough to give You praise and glory, there are no feelings strong enough to express our thanks to You, and there are no actions powerful enough to show our commitment to You: yet You accept what we say to You, what we feel about You and what we do for You. We praise You, Almighty God! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Church community

Pray today for any church communities you know about, which are experiencing distress at this time; either through persecution or suffering, or through splits and division, or because of worldly pressures such as property or finance. Pray that all who own the name of the Lord Jesus may work together to alleviate suffering within the church communities of the world.

Meditation

See autumn colours and beautiful flowers;

Think of Creation's beauty and power:

Remember the One who looked at one flower, and said,

'Don't worry, your Father clothes you ...

See a child in the playground, carefree and happy

Think of potential, growth and progress:

Remember the One who took a child in His arms, and said,

Like this, you'll enter the Kingdom ...

See the cook in the kitchen, preparing a meal;

Think of the sights, the aromas and taste;

Remember the One who took bread and wine, and said,

Do this, in remembrance of me ...

See the world all around you, its sights and sounds;

Think of your past, your present, your future:

Remember the One who ascended to Heaven, and said,

I'm coming again in Glory ...

Bible Study - Hebrews 9:6-14

⁶ With these preparations having been made, the priests continually enter the first tent to perform their acts of worship; ⁷ but the high priest alone goes into the second, just once a year, and never without bringing the blood he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ In this way, the Holy Spirit shows that as long as the first tent is still standing, the way into the Holy Place has not yet been revealed. ⁹ This is symbolic of the present time, in which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot make the conscience of the worshiper perfect, ¹⁰ as they are only a matter of food and drink and ritual washing. These are earthly regulations which apply until the opportunity arises to put in place a new system.

¹¹ When Christ arrived as a high priest of the good things that have indeed now come, then by passing through the greater, perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), ¹² he made one unique entrance into the Holy Place to secure eternal redemption, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood. ¹³ For if those who are ritually unclean have their bodies purified by the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkled blood of a heifer, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself to God unblemished, purify our conscience from deeds which result in death, to worship the living God!

Review

In a remarkable way, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us in the clearest possible way that the work of Jesus Christ as our High Priest, deals completely and absolutely with the most serious of our sins; those which play on our conscience because they have been wilfully committed against

others and maybe even the Lord. How the passage says this may not be clear to you, but it is the purpose of this study to explain it. This is essential for us to understand, because it is still too easy for people to come to church and think of themselves as religious, and yet carry terrible inner burdens which are unresolved. Hebrews, of all the great New Testament letters, explains the Gospel of salvation in a way which deals with the most difficult of sins.

Hebrews has already explained the twofold structure of the tent, or 'tabernacle' which housed the Ark of the Covenant and God's Presence in Old Testament times (see study on Hebrews 9:1-5). Our passage begins with a description of the difference between the priests who offered the regular worship of God in the outer tent, and the work of the High Priest who went into the holiest inner tent annually, offering sacrifices for his own sins and the sins of the people. However, the important word in verse 7 is 'unintentional'; for if you read through the ritual laws of Leviticus, you will find that the sins which were dealt with through the rituals of that system were only the unintentional ones. Hebrews has therefore identified the important point that because of this, the Old Covenant could only deal with some sins and not others, and could not therefore make us 'perfect' (9:9). It could not deal with all our sins.

Hebrews regards this state of affairs as passing (see 9:8/9) because Christ has already come to change it (9:11f.). Then, in verses 11 to 13, our passage combines a picture of the old Temple system based on the tabernacle with a visionary depiction of what Christ has done through his death on the Cross (e.g. Matthew 27:50f.), describing our Lord as entering into the 'holiest place' with His own unique sacrificial blood, to 'secure our eternal redemption' (9:12). This act, because of its uniqueness, is therefore capable of doing what the old rituals could not, which is to 'purify our conscience from deeds which result in death' (9:14). Moreover, the phrase 'deeds which result in death' means all sin, including the most difficult of sins of rebellion and wickedness, which were not covered by the old sacrificial system because they are intentional. Every kind of sin and the impact on our consciences of them all, are now dealt with by Christ. His work of salvation offers redemption to all who accept the unique High Priestly sacrifice of His life and death, and this is the clear message of this passage.

In the last few decades, some within the world of academic theology have strongly attacked this understanding of Christ's work of salvation; which is sometimes called the Penal Substitution theory of the Atonement. This is because many people today do not like the idea that God allowed Christ to die for us and offer His blood, even for our salvation. You will find that fewer and fewer preachers use a text such as this today. The result is that many people who go to church are troubled by inner sins because they have no real assurance of their forgiveness. They may hear about forgiveness from the church, but no-one explains how it was achieved in Christ, and their sins remain locked inside their minds and consciences. For this reason, the rediscovery of passages like this are essential for the future of God's people today.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group the difference between intentional and unintentional sin. Is the difference as clear as we might think?
2. In what ways is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross more effective for dealing with sin than Old Testament rituals?
3. How can we best explain the idea of the 'blood of Christ' today?

Discipleship

Most of us do not spend a great deal of time going over the details of what we believe. If we have a faith by which we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, then we will live as we are guided by the other Christians we meet, and we read the Bible according to the example of others we respect. A passage such as this today, lying at the heart of Christian faith, can sometimes be left untouched and unread within the Bible if we do not make serious attempts to understand our faith and the work of Christ. An essential part of discipleship is the discipline with which we not only read such passages, but also think about them and use them.

Final Prayer

Be at the centre of my life, Lord Jesus; and by Your Holy Spirit, be with me in my brokenness and my joy, my thinking and my doing, my speaking and my listening, and my actions and my words. Then, when all is said and done, and heard and felt, speak to me Lord. Speak Your Words of Life. AMEN