

# HOLY HELP FOR THE HOPELESS BY A ONCE FOR ALL DEATH (PART TWO) Hebrews 9:16-28

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

## INTRODUCTION

The most astonishing claim of the Christian religion is that the death of Jesus Christ is the most important event ever. How can it be that the founder of the Christian religion's most important work was his dying a bloody death on a Roman cross? P.T. Forsyth, a famous pastor and theologian of the past century said it this way, "Christ is to us what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there... Christ, I repeat, is to us just what his cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand his cross." It is this death that sets Christianity apart from every other religion. While the leaders of other religions die, their death is not the main event. Rather, the main event in all other human religions is what the founders of those religions taught. Not so in the only true religion. In God's explanation of reality the most important event is that Jesus died, not that he taught truths about God. As we began to see last week it is the aim of the author to this letter to the Hebrews in chapter 9:16-28 to show why it is that the death of Jesus is so important. He is out to answer the question, "why did Jesus have to die?"

In the first part of this study we saw (vv. 16-18) that Jesus had to die because a will does not go into effect until the one who made the will dies. When Christ died, God died and so the will, the covenant, went into effect. The inheritance has been given. The second reason we saw for why Christ had to die is in the last half of v. 22, "without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness." We saw that Christ had to die because God cannot simply forgive sins without becoming a corrupt judge. He must punish sin. He has punished the sin of everyone who trusts in Christ by killing his only Son on that Roman cross in his or her place. We are going to continue now to look at three more reasons for why Christ had to die in vv. 23-28.

## STUDY

### 1. What surprising thing is being said in v. 23?

*Verse 23 appears to be saying something that I doubt any of us could ever imagine being said. It says that heaven needs to be cleansed. We've talked before of how the blood of Christ cleanses us (9:9 & 14) but in v. 23 we are told that the blood of Christ is necessary to cleanse heaven itself.*

### 2. According to 8:5 the tabernacle and all that takes place there is a copy of heaven and what is happening there. Verse 23 says that it is necessary for the copy of heaven to be cleansed with the animal sacrifices. Why was it necessary for the tabernacle and altar, etc. to be cleansed? See Leviticus 16:15-19 & 20:1-5.

*The materials from which the tabernacle and the vessels of worship are made are not inherently defiled, that is, unfit to be in God's presence. There is nothing evil about linen or gold or silver or bronze considered as physical objects. The answer is again stated numerous times in the OT. The tabernacle becomes defiled, unclean and therefore unacceptable to God because of its contact with human beings. That's what is meant by that phrase in Leviticus 16:19 that the altar had to be cleansed "from the uncleanness of the Israelites." A few verses before that this uncleanness is described as the "rebellion of the Israelites." It is the sinfulness of the Israelites that defiles the tabernacle. This is made clear in a number of places. In Leviticus 20:1-5 God commands that if anyone offers one of his children as a sacrifice to the pagan god, Molech, he is to be stoned to death by the Israelites. God says that by committing this sinful act the person defiles God's sanctuary and profanes his holy name.*

### 3. Why does heaven need to be cleansed of defilement by the blood of Christ?

*It is for the same reason the tabernacle had to be cleansed by the blood of animals. The reason is because sinners live in heaven and sinners contaminate everything they come in contact with, including heaven itself. The presence of sinners in heaven infects heaven with*

*the contagion of sin. Right now the disembodied spirits of every person who has trusted in Christ is in heaven, going all the way back to Adam and Eve. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sara, Rahab, David all the way up to the most recent Christian who has died is in heaven. It is the presence of these sinners, though not yet resurrected, but only present in their disembodied spirits that makes it necessary for the blood of Christ to cleanse heaven itself. God could not dwell in heaven if not for the blood of his Son cleansing heaven from the defilement brought to it by the presence of sinners.*

4. How does this affect your view of yourself, of Christ and of heaven?

**Christ had to die because sinners contaminate everything they touch.**

5. According to v. 24 what is the difference between what the Jewish high priest did on the Day of Atonement and what Jesus has done?

*The high priest only entered a man-made sanctuary, a mere copy of the heavenly reality but Christ has entered into heaven itself. The high priest only entered into the presence of God symbolized by the cloud of God's presence and the Ark of the Covenant but Christ has entered into God's very presence. Finally, just as the high priest enters into the Most Holy Place on behalf of the people of Israel so Jesus enters into God's very presence for us.*

6. Why is it significant that Jesus now appears for us in God's presence?

*He is not in God's presence for his own sake but for our sake. He makes an appearance in the presence of God as our representative. All of the resources of heaven are now for us and not against us because Jesus is representing us in God's very presence. Jesus by dying and rising from the dead has now entered into God's presence on our behalf to gain for us the favor and assistance and acceptance of God himself. He is there so that one day we can join him there.*

7. According to vv. 25-26 in what other way is Jesus superior to the Day of Atonement ritual?

*In vv. 25-26 Jesus is shown to not only be there as our high priest, our representative but also as our perfect sacrifice. It is because of his offering himself as a sacrifice that he is able to appear for us in God's presence. Again there is the contrast with the Jewish high priest who enters into the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of bulls and goats, with blood that is not his own. Jesus did not, like the high priest enter heaven year after year and thus offer himself as a sacrifice year after year. If he were simply acting like the Jewish high priest then he would have had to offer himself time after time since the beginning of creation to pay for the sins of God's people throughout the ages. However, he did not do that. His offering is so superior to that of the animals offered by the high priest that he only had to offer himself once, for all. He entered heaven once for all and offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, once for all. He is not only our perfect and permanent representative but he is also our perfect and permanent sacrifice.*

8. What does it mean that Jesus offered himself once for all "at the end of the ages"?

*The death of Christ was the beginning of the end of this universe, as we know it. His coming and dying was the pivotal event in the history of the universe. His death set in motion the final events in the history of the universe.*

9. Why did Christ appear "once for all at the end of the ages?" Why is this important?

*His appearing once for all at the end of the ages was for the purpose of nullifying sin. He has done away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Sin is what separates us from God. It is the barrier that keeps us from him and he from us. Christ destroyed sin and its power to keep us from God when he died on that cross. P.E. Hughes in his commentary says it more eloquently than I, "This nullification... is comprehensive: it covers sin in its totality, without qualification, in every form and degree and also in every age of human history,*

*retrospectively as well as prospectively. Were this not so, we would be confronted with the incongruous conclusion that 'then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world...' What was needed, and what the old system cried out for, was a single perfect sacrifice which would deal fully and finally with the sin of the world, throughout the whole course of human history" (Hughes, p. 385-386). If you are one of the "us", for whom Christ died and for whom he appears in God's presence, then all of your sins have been destroyed, nullified, rendered powerless by the sacrifice of Christ. You are no longer guilty. You can no longer be punished for your sins. Your sins can no longer be used to condemn you to an eternal hell. God is no longer angry with you but is smiling upon you, because Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for your sins. Your debt has been paid, your pardon has been granted, the gallows made for your execution have been thrown down, God's wrath against you has been appeased because Christ offered himself once for all to do away with sin.*

**10.** What difference does it make to you to know that your sin has been done away with, that is, nullified, rendered powerless?

**Christ had to die because sinners need a perfect and permanent priest and sacrifice.**

**11.** According to v. 27 what is true for every human being?

*Every human being is destined to die once and after that to face God's judgment. This is a universal reality. The verb "is destined" indicates that someone has determined that this is man's destiny. The word actually refers to the act of storing something up to be given in the future. This verse is referring to the fact that because we are sinners God has stored up death and judgment after death for every human being. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 14:10 & 11, "We must all appear before God's judgment seat.... So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God." This is the destiny of every human being. None can escape it.*

**12.** How often do you think about his fact? How does this knowledge affect you?

**13.** How is this fact compared to Christ and his work? Why is this comparison made?

*The key words in these two verses are the "so also Christ." The reason that Jesus had to die once for all is because this is the experience of every human being. Jesus had to die because he is fully human. As the author said in 2:17, Jesus "had to be made like his brothers in every way so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest and so that he might make atonement for sin." Also, his death was because of sin, just as our death is because of sin but with this important difference. We die and are judged as the punishment for our sins whereas Christ dies and is judged as the punishment not for his sins but for our sins. "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people." And there is another important distinction between his death and judgment and our death and judgment. While he died and was judged for our sins, that is, he experienced hell for us, yet God's ultimate judgment on him was to approve of his sacrifice for us. God raised Christ from the dead to show that his life and death were acceptable. Jesus earned eternal life by his obedient life and death. His judgment did not result in eternal damnation but in eternal salvation for himself and for all his offspring. God's judgment of Christ is that he is worthy to receive that eternal life that is promised to the obedient. And he is worthy to give that life to all his people. This is the final judgment of God on Christ.*

**14.** What is the chief characteristic of those for whom Jesus died and for whom he is going to return?

*The identifying mark of those God has called, for whom Jesus appears in God's presence and who have had their sins taken away is they are eagerly waiting for Jesus to appear a second time so that he can give to them that full salvation.*

**15.** What does it mean to eagerly wait for Jesus to appear a second time? What is the relationship between eagerly waiting and faith? How does eager waiting affect your daily life?

*All of us have eagerly awaited the arrival of some person or event that we believed would bring us some great good, some measure of*

*happiness that we do not at present possess. Any of you who know my son Jordan know that this summer he is working at Frito Lay packing bags of chips in boxes to be delivered to stores. Since the day he began working he has not stopped talking about August 9th, the day he is done working. It is the thought of being done with work at Frito Lay that gets him up every morning at 5:15am to go to work. He is eagerly awaiting the day when the work is over. All of us are like this. We do not wait for happy events by refusing to fulfill our duties and responsibilities now. If you know you're going on vacation in a month, you don't stop going to work and taking care of your house now and just sit on the step of your house with your bags packed for a month. You go to work and fulfill the duties of everyday life but with anticipation for the good that is coming. Thinking about the coming vacation helps you to be joyful and responsible while you do your work. Eager expectation is the result of your faith that that which is coming is a good thing and that it will certainly arrive. I've found that when I'm eagerly waiting for something that the coming event helps me prioritize my work. It is easier to figure out what must be done now, when I know that my work will soon be over. If something difficult happens to you while you wait, you find some joy and relief in the burden by thinking about the joy that is coming.*

**16.** Are you eagerly waiting for Jesus to appear a second time to bring salvation? Why or why not? What can you do to increase your eagerness for his return?

**Christ had to die because death always precedes judgment.**