

Dear brother or sister,

After the worship service this past Sunday I was asked a question in regard to the sermon. It was a question that had occurred to me while preparing the sermon but which I did not give attention to in the sermon. Therefore, I aim to use this article to consider this question. The question is based on Hebrews 9:23 which says, "It was necessary then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified (cleansed) with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."

As I stated in the sermon, this verse is teaching that heaven had to be cleansed by the blood of Christ in order for God to live with us there. The reason that the law required that the tabernacle and the articles used in worship had to have animal blood placed on them was to cleanse them from the defilement caused by the fact that sinful/unclean Israelites touched the tabernacle and articles (Leviticus 16:15-19). God could not dwell in the tabernacle, in the midst of Israel unless the blood of the sacrificial animals cleansed the "earthly things". This cleansing by the blood of animals is a copy of the cleansing of the true sanctuary, heaven itself by the blood of Christ. Heaven is defiled or made unfit for God's presence by our presence and only the blood of Christ can cleanse heaven from this defilement and make it fit for God to live with us there.

The question that was raised is this: If we are already cleansed by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:13-14, 1 John 1:7), declared not guilty, but perfectly righteous through Christ by faith (Romans 3:21-26), made perfect forever by his once for all sacrifice (Hebrews 10:14, cf. 12:23), unable to sin in heaven (1 John 3:2, 9) then how can we possibly defile heaven by our presence? The short answer to the question is that we are not told how heaven is defiled by us only that it is. I think there is a reasonable explanation but it is not a certainty.

It is important to note that the situation in heaven is clearly symbolized in Israel. The death of the animals and the blood shed in those sacrifices and the various cleansing rituals were said to cleanse those who participated (Hebrews 9:13, cf. Numbers 19) and yet the tabernacle had to be cleansed as well. The people are "clean" yet the tabernacle must still be cleansed from their uncleanness. The earthly copy is reflecting the heavenly situation but why it is like this is not exactly explained. The only reasonable explanation is that even though we are completely sanctified when we go to heaven, yet we were at one time identified with sin. We were at one time "sinners". Therefore our mere presence as former sinners, in a way that is not explained, defiles heaven.

There is one thing about this that is fairly certain. Verse 23 is very similar to 7:24-25, which says, "...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." There will never be a time throughout all of eternity when Jesus will not be interceding for us as our high priest. The intercession of the high priest in Israel was to gain access for the people to God. So there will never be a time when we can approach God on our own. We always will need Jesus at our side, so to speak, as our Advocate (1 John 2:2-3) in order to be in God's presence. In the same way

the blood of Jesus is eternally applied to the “heavenly things” to cleanse them from the defilement we bring with us so that God can live with us there. There will never be a time throughout all of eternity when we will be able to live in heaven apart from Christ, even though we have been cleansed and justified and we are no longer able to sin. So Jesus will forever remain at the center of our affections. He will always be our glorious Savior and thus we will worship him forever.

Rejoicing in Jesus’ cleansing blood,