

<sup>13</sup> For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

## Introduction

The notions of point and counterpoint between the old covenant and the new continue as we move to a discussion of Hebrews 9.13-14. Shadow is set over against reality to reveal the final, complete, perfect, and efficacious work of Christ.

In this text, another example of the “*a fortiori*” argument surfaces with this essence: “if this is the case, then how much more that is the case.” Recall, the *a fortiori* is a “much more” type of argument. There is contrast again in the flow of thought and the argument reflects it. This time the contrast is between purifications: <sup>13</sup> **if the sprinkling... with the blood of goats ... sanctifies for ... purification ... how much more will the blood of Christ...purify.** The first purification is outward and superficial pertaining to **purification of the flesh** (v. 13). The second purification is inward and radical: it has the power to **purify our conscience** (v. 14). Of course, we should not overstate this external/internal contrast, as Hughes puts it, “faith in the reality to which as a type [s] it [the old covenant externals] pointed led to the appropriation of the promised covenant blessings awaiting their fulfilment in Christ” (*Hebrews*, 354).

Essentially we have this argument: if shadow purifies the flesh, the outward person of the body, how much more does the reality (to which the shadows pointed) purify the soul, the inward person of the heart. This fact gives us our title, which is “A Greater Purification.” Two questions outline our discussion: why does the blood of the new covenant secure a greater purification? What is the greater purification that the new covenant secures?

### 1A. Why does the blood of the new covenant secure a greater purification?

The answer to this question is in 9.14a: **the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God.** There are four things that distinguish the blood of Christ of the new covenant from the blood of the old. The blood of the new is personal, divine, voluntary, and holy.

#### 1) Personal

Contrary to the use of the blood of goats and other animals in the OT, the blood of the NT sacrifice is a human being’s blood, a person’s blood. As Jesus stated in the inauguration of communion, He seals the new covenant with *His own blood*: **This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me** (1 Cor. 11.25). In this connection, we should comment on the figurative nature of the language of blood. Just as there is no actual blood poured into the communion cup, likewise, there is no actual blood sprinkled on an altar in heaven. Of course, actual blood drained from His body on the cross. Real blood (and actual blood shedding) is present just below the surface in the figurative use of the word blood. Referring to His blood is shorthand for His death as a substitute. His blood refers to His violent death by which He suffered the punishment for sin that we should suffer. So, pointedly, a human being, a person, the Messiah, the anointed one suffered in His death in order to exchange His life for persons subject to dying and death because of sin. Only a person could make this exchange for other persons. The personal death of Christ extends its purifying reach to the inner person of the heart. Therefore, this purification is better and greater because the blood of animals could do no more than purify in an outward and ceremonial sense.

#### 2) Divine

This aspect is easy to state but truly difficult to grasp. We have to press ourselves some and ponder the fact that the human person who suffered in our place was God. We can simply translate this phrase “through his eternal spirit.” Thus, the blood is divine blood; it is the blood of God (cf. Act. 20.28, **God...obtained the church...with His blood**). To put it succinctly and boldly: this

blood speaks of the death of God who is eternal and cannot die! Therefore, the eternal Son of God became incarnate in order to die for His brothers and sisters who partake of flesh and blood. He partook of the same so that “divine blood” could be shed on the cross, so that God could die in order to secure eternal redemption for His covenant children. He had to be a man to die and He had to be God to bear our eternal punishment in His death. The blood of the new covenant brings about a vastly greater purification because it is the blood of the person of Christ who is God from everlasting to everlasting and the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13.8). He therefore saves to the uttermost (Heb. 7.25); that is, He purifies for all times and through all circumstances. Therefore, we now have a far greater purification. (Note: if the Holy Spirit is in view in the phrase “through the eternal Spirit,” the ultimate point is unchanged: the personal sacrifice of Christ in His death saves, redeems, and purifies with eternally indestructible power).

### 3) Voluntary

Next, it is voluntary blood; that is, the violent death of Christ is something that He experienced voluntarily: **Christ...offered himself...to God**. We must remember that the shedding of the blood of Christ was not a necessity that forced itself on Christ, as if something outside of God could constrain Him in some way. Giving His blood to cleanse sinners was His voluntary act. Jesus had a purpose in His coming; He came to accomplish the work that the Father gave Him to do (Jn. 17.1-5). Lambs, bulls, and goats died in sacrifice involuntarily not knowing what they were doing, but Jesus laid down His life of His own accord; no one took His life from Him (Jn. 10.17-18). Although he recoiled from the dreadful hour of the cross and said, “**Father, save me from this hour,**” nonetheless, He said “**For this purpose, I have come to this hour**” (Jn. 12.27). Therefore, in willing covenant obedience, He set His head like a flint to go to Jerusalem to die there in shame and suffering. This is a marvelous free will doctrine because our Lord exercised His free will in a marvelous way. He freely chose the way of suffering in order to give His blood for ours, in order to exchange His life for ours. He did this to free our enslaved (non-free) wills. Thus, we have a marvelously greater purification: the Christian has a freed will and grows in freedom.

### 4) Holy

You have heard of holy water, but have you heard of holy blood? The sprinkling of blood made many things ceremonially holy in the OT. To get that blood, priests had to shed the blood of an unblemished animal. Thus, it is holy blood because it made things holy and because it came from a “holy” animal. Granted, on one hand, this meant that the people were to give their best to the Lord, not some sickly animal about to die anyway. However, God ordained the killing of spotless lambs and goats in order to picture the fact that the blood of the new covenant would come from a messianic Savior who has no sins on His record. How could purification come from a sinful man? It could not. Therefore, the cleansing of this purification is greater because it not only washes something away, but it also puts something in place, namely, the pure righteousness of Christ. A far greater purification comes to us from the blood of Christ because when He washes away sin, He gives us His purity in the place of our sin. He can do this because pure holiness saturates the life He offered voluntarily in exchange for our life.

Thus, a number of things are implied in the argument about purification that ground its superiority, but to what implication does the writer direct us explicitly? To that we now turn.

## 2A. What is the greater purification that the blood of the new covenant secures?

In other words, what greater washing of purification flows to us from the personal, divine, voluntary, and holy blood of Christ? The answer has to expand our grasp of baptism, the promise of purification through the sprinkling of Christ’s blood (cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.15.2). What greater cleansing comes to us from the sacrificial offering of Christ to God in death through unspeakable suffering? The author emphasizes the deep-rooted purification of the conscience. He makes his point in two ways: there is purification “*from* this and *for* that.” He speaks of a beginning point and a continuing path.

### 1B. The beginning point: purification of the conscience *from dead works*

First, we have purification in a definitive sense when the Spirit initially applies the redemption that Jesus secured for His people (for the Father's elect); this is the break with sin that begins the Christian life: **how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works** (9.14). To appreciate the radical nature of this purification, we need to understand why the language here is that of purification in light of the fact that the cleansing is from dead works. Pointedly, the works are dead (v. 14) and the people (all of us in the fall) are defiled (v. 13). Why, then, we may wonder, do we not have discussion of resurrection, quickening or making alive instead of purification? The answer has to be that defilement is the stress and resurrection is the implication. It is a life-giving purification that marks a new beginning for people defiled by sin and in bondage to death.

When we come to Christ under this basic call of the gospel, what do we turn away from according to Hebrews? We turn away **from dead works**. As Hughes puts it, this "is theological shorthand for the state of the unregenerate man and his activities" (197). Sin brings death. Sinners in the fall are dead in sin. Every attempt at good works amounts to nothing more than dead works. The bondage in a **lifelong slavery to death** (Heb. 2.15) affects everything we do. That is a deep and bold indictment of the human family because, as Calvin notes, "every sin is a dead work, either as it leads to death, or as it proceeds from the spiritual death of the soul" (Hebrews, 132). Every action is a dead work tainted by sin.

So, why call the works of the non-Christian dead works? Calvin helps us on this subject by outlining three senses in which the unbeliever's works are dead works: they arise from death, death accompanies them, and they lead ultimately to death on the Day of Judgment. This is the way things are before Jesus sets us free on the basis of the redemption He secured for us (Heb. 9.12). That these works arise from death means that the people who do them are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2.1). In this state of separation and alienation, sinners live their lives on a pathway of broken fellowship with God. That these works are accompanied by death means that they are unproductive; they do not yield the fruits of righteousness. The works these people do are futile. If they make a lot of money by their works in life, the works are still dead. If they do works that advance science, technology, and medicine, their works remain dead nonetheless. That these works end in death means that they lead directly to eternal punishment (**because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.** <sup>6</sup> **He will render to each one according to his works:** <sup>7</sup> **to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;** <sup>8</sup> **but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury** (Rom. 2.5-8).

2B. The continuing path: purification of the conscience *for living works*

**How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**

We often talk about the real person, the real you, as the person you are when you are alone and not trying to impress others to be stroked and praised. Jesus spoke of the heart as the fountain of all that we do for "out of the heart the mouth speaks." Moreover, an aspect of the real you deep down inside is your conscience. In simple terms, your conscience is your ability, your unavoidable ability to discern right from wrong. Still, the phrase "let your conscience be your guide" is more of a half truth than a whole truth; and half truths are dangerous. The conscience can be seared, which is just to say that it becomes insensitive. People suppress their consciences; that is, they suppress the truth (the right versus the wrong) that their consciences point them too. Thus, to do one thing versus another because we must be true to our conscience may be devilish. What is missing? Missing is an objective standard. Missing is the acknowledgment of God and His word. Missing is submission to God. By suppressing the truth we know of God and His revelation of Himself in His creation and in Scripture, we seek loyalty to a conscience that is bound to error, unrighteousness, defilement, and impurity. This is devilish.

However, when the Spirit applies the blood of Christ (that is, when He applies the redemption Jesus secured by the payment of His life in a violent death under God's judgment), then you who were dead in sin are set free from death and made alive in Christ (Eph. 2.1-7. **And**

you were dead in the trespasses and sins... <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus). Now your works are productive as the fruits of righteousness by the power of the resurrection of Christ. You are saved by grace and not by works, but your salvation by grace is a work of God that produces good works according to His eternal plan (Eph. 2.8-10, **we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them, v. 10**).

## Conclusions

### 1) Let us begin with our need

Lurking in the background of the old to new contrast is the poignant fact of our defilement. Granted, the OT system of clean and unclean is no longer relevant as a way of life, but the design in that system was to impress us with the truth that we are defiled at the seat and depth of our personal existence. It is hard to think of ourselves as “defiled persons” but the lesson is that the human family is fallen, sinful, unrighteous, impure, and defiled. The Christian life begins with the acknowledgment of spiritual uncleanness and poverty: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven** (Mat. 5.3).

### 2) Second, consider why the blood of Christ purifies

It purifies because it is personal, divine, voluntary, and holy blood. Consider what this way of talking about blood means. It means that the spilling of the blood of Christ involved the painful death of a person (not an animal), a person who was God and became God incarnate *to voluntarily give His holy life in exchange for our defiled lives*. These facts are astounding and meaningful contemplation of them will ignite a song in your hearts. You cannot sit still or remain silent. You must respond with love to the one who loves you. So, you speak and you sing songs about the love of Jesus, “O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast unmeasured, boundless, free; rolling like a mighty ocean in its fullness over me; underneath me, all around me is the current of thy love, leading onward, leading homeward to that glorious rest above.” It must light a flame in your heart to consider why it is that the blood of Christ purifies the conscience.

### 3) Third, note the promise

There is no imperative in this text. What we have is an argument that establishes a fact, namely, that the children of Christ by covenant will in fact be brought from death to life and from bondage to freedom. If God so arranged it that purification by the blood of animals brought external cleansings that enabled sinful people to be the people of the living God and to worship Him through appointed representatives, then how much more will the blood of Christ bring about the purification of our conscience from dead works for living works. It is so much greater that it will in fact purify your conscience (step by step now on the way and fully in glory).

Still, without an imperative, duty does arise from the text by implication, but it arises from the powerful promise. He promises you that He will cleanse you all the way to glory. Knowing this is the case, you are to be what you are. Thus, you must aim at fruitful living as a Christian athlete. You do this by study and practice, practice and study always exercising yourself in the fruits of righteous living for regular competition in the Christian race. You study to practice, you study the practice, and you practice what you study in striving for improvement always to learn and live Christian charity and its fruits. (Phil. 1.9-11, <sup>9</sup> **And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,** <sup>10</sup> **so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,** <sup>11</sup> **filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God**).

**May the Holy Spirit teach us how to live the repentant life; may He enable us to go way beyond the foundation of repentance from dead works that we may serve the living God with works that are alive because they are the active fruits of repentance. To the glory of our living Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord, amen**