

Hebrews 9:13-15

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If the blood of animals was able to cleanse sins, then through the blood of Christ we will gain much more, leading to a life of constructive service to God and freedom from a cluttered conscience.

Christ not only obtained eternal salvation in the form of justification in the presence of God for us (deliverance from hell to heaven). He is also able to cleanse our consciences on an ongoing basis, saving us from a guilty conscience. The Pauline Author already pointed out that the law and Temple sacrifices were not sufficient to make our consciences perfect (“teleo,” “complete,” “fulfilled,” or “finished”) but Christ did.

The Author writes, *For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God* (vv 13–14)? Christ offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God on our behalf so that we might obtain eternal justification in the presence of God and also obtain a cleansed conscience to serve God daily.

Although we are made right in the sight of God once for all through the finished work of Jesus, our experience of forgiveness occurs in real time during our daily lives. We are told in Scripture that when we mess up, we should confess our sins, both to God (1 John 1:9) as well as to one another (James 5:16). As Jesus illustrated to His disciples, if a person has been bathed (made a new creation in Christ), he only needs to wash his feet (confess his or her sins) (John 13).

In this passage, the Pauline Author is making it clear that Jesus is working at His high priest job continually, and His ministry in this job is “for us” (Hebrews 9:24).

Verse 14 says that Christ is able to *cleanse your consciences from dead works*. *Dead works* is likely referring to the inability of the law to cleanse consciences. You could go through all of the motions of the law and sacrifices and still have a guilty conscience. Religious observance might fool other people, but it does not fool either God or ourselves.

But there is an alternative. We can enter the true Holy of Holies in heaven where Jesus is there for us, and He will sprinkle our hearts with His blood and cleanse our consciences from sin. This frees us of the burden of guilt so that we can take our focus off our own inadequacies, and instead focus on the work God has prepared for us to do in obedience to Him.

Knowing that Jesus has fully and eternally paid the price for our sins enables us to freely *serve the living God*. And having our consciences cleansed through approaching our high priest Jesus for ongoing forgiveness relieves us of the weight of guilt in our conscience so that we might serve Him freely.

Hebrews 6:1 referenced dead works when the Pauline Author was admonishing his readers to move on to maturity. Pursuing maturity and obedience to God through faith moves believers

away from dead works. Back in Hebrews 3:6, the Pauline Author explained our ability to be God's house if we serve God and obey Him. Jesus ultimately enables us to be God's house by giving us a cleansed conscience and the ability to freely serve God.

Christ's work is completely sufficient to give us eternal redemption, once and for all, as well as giving us cleansed consciences as we approach Him as needed. This daily experience of walking in fellowship with God is what allows us to live a transformed life through the resurrection power of Jesus.

Christ is now the *mediator of a new covenant* (v 15), meaning He brought about and established this Covenant between us and God. His *death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant* (v 15).

The Pauline Author's audience can be assured that their faith in Christ has freed them from all the guilt of their sins; religious observances such as sacrifices at the Temple cannot do that. Because of Jesus's greater sacrifice, we have obtained the eternal salvation of being justified in the presence of God (delivered from hell to heaven), but this verse makes it clear that *those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance* as well (v 15).

The promise of the eternal inheritance is conditional; we must be obedient to God to obtain it. In Hebrews 4:3, the Pauline Author compared this inheritance to entering God's rest, that is to say to persevere until our work is completed ("teleo"). We must be faithful and obedient to complete our work on earth, our service to the living God, to inherit (as Jesus inherited) the reward of being called a "son" (Hebrews 2:10). We become a child through simple faith in Jesus, and that is something that is unconditional. But the reward of "adoption" as a ruler in the royal administration, to share the throne, is awarded to those who persevere in faith.

A wonderful, amazing reality of this reward of faith is that Jesus stands ready to help us as a faithful high priest who has encountered the same difficulties as we have encountered. We can mess up and get cleansing of our conscience and a new start, because Jesus is our high priest. We can also approach the throne of grace to receive help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

What we cannot do, as the Pauline Author will make abundantly clear, is sin willfully and expect to escape negative consequences by covering it up with religious practice. Every believer has the experience of coming to the realization that we are really messing up. Jesus is "on duty" as a high priest to relieve us from guilt when we have that experience. Willful disobedience is something else altogether.

Biblical Text

¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

¹⁵ For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.