

Text: Heb 9.18-22

In our study of the New Covenant and its superiority to the Old Covenant, we are hitting the same theme again and again, albeit from different angles.

Last time we talked about the fact that death accompanies the validation of a covenant. We are going to take that same theme and expand on it as we consider the topic:

Cleansed by the Blood

Our title may seem improbable, if we stop and think about it logically, however it is very familiar in Christian circles. We've sung about it in several of our songs this morning.

As I was thinking about the topic, though, the subject of laundry detergent slogans came to my mind. Some are obvious, they include the name of the detergent in the line. I remember...

- Trust Tide
- All-tempa-cheer

How about these slogans:

"It does more than the wash. (1972)" — Clorox

"The April fresh smell of ... (1973)" — Downy

"Gets the tough stains out! (2009)" — Oxiclean

"It's that fresh. (2008)" — Febreze

"For the toughest grease use ... (2005)" — Dawn

"The smell of clean. (2001)" — Pine-Sol

"... softens hands while you do dishes. (1975)" — Palmolive¹

Detergents use chemical compounds called *surfactants*. These compounds do two things, they attach to grease molecules and they repel water molecules. When they interact with grease in the wash, they attract the grease and stains, drawing them out of the clothes to form "tiny spheres" suspended in the water. When the wash is rinsed, these spheres rush out into the drain and your clothes are cleaned.²

¹ Henrik Roth, "Historical Slogans and Claims of Brands from the Chemical Industry," *Neuroflash* (blog), August 30, 2021, <https://neuroflash.com/blog/slogans-claims-von-reinigungsmittelmarken/>.

² "How Laundry Detergent Works," HowStuffWorks, December 7, 2009, <https://home.howstuffworks.com/laundry-detergent.htm>.

All well and good. We like clean clothes, but think of my title again:

Cleansed by the Blood

How many of you would think of cleaning something with blood?

The idea is in our text, so let's turn there now.

Read Heb 9.16-22, text 18-22

Proposition: The blood of the covenant cleanses the sinful soul, changing it utterly.

I. Proposition: the necessity of blood (18)

A. The verse forms a proposition

1. It rests on the general statement of vv. 16-17: "therefore"
2. The first covenant is less important than the new covenant: "even"
3. Though lesser, it also required blood for inauguration

B. The inauguration of covenants

1. The word is "exclusively Biblical and ecclesiastical" — coined in LXX
2. Translated as "dedicate" or "renew" in OT passages

Dt 20.5 "The officers also shall speak to the people, saying, 'Who is the man that has built a new house and has not **dedicated** it? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would **dedicate** it.'

1 Sa 11.14 Then Samuel said to the people, "Come and let us go to Gilgal and **renew** the kingdom there."

3. Has the idea of formal validation or initiation; can mean a rededication
 - a. "to give newness to someth., *renew*

b. **“to bring about the beginning of someth., with implication that it is newly established, ratify, inaugurate, dedicate”**³

4. The idea here: the first covenant was inaugurated with blood: proving covenants **must** be inaugurated with blood

II. Demonstration: the first covenant and blood (19-21)

A. The picture of inaugurating the covenant (19-20)

1. The setting: Mt Sinai (Ex 24.3-8)

a. Pre-tabernacle

b. Pre-priesthood

c. Just after giving of 10 commandments (Ex 20)

2. The steps

a. Moses recounted the law God gave (3; “every commandment ... spoken” 19)

b. Built an altar, set twelve pillars around it (4)

c. Brought young men from Israel (12?) as representatives of nation, they offered sacrifices (5)

d. Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the altar (6)

e. Moses read from the book, the people pledged (7)

f. Moses sprinkled the people (8) and offers the quotation cited in our text, v. 20

3. Some additional details in Heb. (source unknown, may be conflating other passages)

a. Blood mixed with water

b. Scarlet wool and hyssop mentioned

c. Sprinkling of the book (maybe by virtue of being on a shelf on the altar)

³ ἐγκαινίζω in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

4. One difference in the quotation: “this is the blood...” vs. “behold the blood”
 - a. Some commentators (going way back) think this is influenced by Jesus inaugurating the New Covenant — “This is the new covenant in my blood” [unlikely]
 - b. Significance: the ratification/inauguration of the Old Covenant was by the blood of the sacrifices — “this” blood

B. The second picture of inaugurating the tabernacle (21, see Lev 8)

1. Moses sprinkled the altar of the tabernacle (19)
2. Moses marked the ears, thumbs, and toes of Aaron and his sons, sprinkled altar again (24)
3. Moses sprinkled Aaron and sons and garments (30)

Lev 8.30 ¶ So Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he consecrated Aaron, his garments, and his sons, and the garments of his sons with him.

C. The relationship of the blood to the covenant

1. Inauguration of the covenant at Sinai
2. Inauguration of the tabernacle

“The act of sprinkling the blood sealed the ratification of the covenant, while the peace offerings attested to the fellowship between the covenant partners.”⁴

III. Resolution: spiritual life by the blood (22)

A. The universality of blood in first covenant religion

1. The text says “almost all things” – ignore italics in NAU
2. Some things not cleansed with blood

⁴ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 244.

“Indeed, our author goes on, ‘almost everything’ which requires to be ceremonially cleansed under the Old Testament law must be cleansed by means of blood. ‘Almost everything’ but not absolutely everything; there are certain exceptions. For example, an impoverished Israelite might bring a tenth of an ephah (four pints) of fine flour to the priest as his sin offering instead of a lamb or even instead of two turtledoves or young pigeons (Lev. 5:11). In Num. 16:46 atonement was made for the congregation of Israel, after the destruction of Korah and his company, by means of incense; in Num. 31:22f. metal objects captured in war were to be purified by fire and *mê niddāh*; in Num. 31:50 the Israelite commanders in the fighting against Midian brought the gold objects which they had captured ‘to make atonement for ourselves before Yahweh.’ But such exceptions were rare; the general rule was that ceremonial cleansing or atonement had to be effected by means of blood.”⁵

B. The point of cleansing: to remove grime and pollution

When we wash our laundry, we are making it “presentable, useful” — we don’t (usually) put on dirty clothes at the beginning of the day.

1. The sinner is polluted by sin, barred from access to God
2. The sprinkled blood cleanses him, allows him access to God

As if he had died, all his sins are mortified, the blood of the victim covers his sins and him, so he can come before God.

This is the point of the Day of Atonement, as we’ve often pointed out.

C. The further benefit of shedding blood: forgiveness

1. As to the essential character of blood
 - a. Essential to access to God (7) “not without ... blood”
 - b. Essential to inaugurating the covenant (18) “not ... without blood”
 - c. Essential for forgiveness (22) “without shedding blood...”

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 226–27.

2. The bottom line is forgiveness

- a. Placed last in the verse for emphasis
- b. What else did the blood do in Heb 9?
 - 1) Access to the Holy of Holies (7)
 - 2) Purges conscience (14)
 - 3) Inaugurates the covenant (18)
 - 4) Consecrates [cleanses] the people (19)
 - 5) Cleanses the tabernacle and vessels (21)
 - 6) Cleanses almost everything in first covenant religion (22a)
 - 7) And now... forgiveness

Westcott: "It is the power of a pure life which purifies."⁶

3. The bloodiness of the first covenant religion is essential; but the blood of the New Covenant is finally and fully efficacious

Chrysostom: "Where then is 'the book'? He purified their minds. They themselves then were the books of the New Testament. But where are 'the vessels of the ministry'? They are themselves. And where is 'the tabernacle'? Again, they are; for 'I will dwell in them,' He says, 'and walk in them.' (2 Corinthians 6:16)."⁷

- a. In other words, not just symbolically, but really and internally
- b. The believer, by the blood of Christ, becomes the vessel for the life of Christ to be displayed on the earth

Conclusion:

Proposition: The blood of the covenant cleanses the sinful soul, changing it utterly.

Are you cleansed? Live as a vessel for the master, cleansed, presentable, useful for the Lord's work.

Are you still in your unbelief? Turn from your sin, turn to Christ, and be made whole.

⁶ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 270.

⁷ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, electronic ed. (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2000), Homily 16.4.