



## #19: *Hebrews (Part 2): Atonement & Promise*

**Bible Readings:** [Hebrews chapters 9 & 10](#)

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### **INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: *Faithful God, Covenant People***

This series, taking us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, puts the spotlight on God's purposes – God's loving intention in calling human beings into a binding relationship with our Creator. God offers us a glorious promise, if we respond in sincere and lasting commitment.

### **PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS**

In this, our second study of **The Letter to the Hebrews**, we focus on two key passages of this profound text. In [Hebrews 9:11-15](#), we are shown how Christ, by his own self-sacrifice on the cross secures for us full atonement. His willing obedience to God does what the annual rite of *Yom Kippur* was unable to achieve ([Leviticus 16](#) spells out the legal requirements and drama of that observance).

In [Hebrews 10:11-25](#), the writer says that the once-and-for-all 'work of Christ' is both **unrepeatable** and **all-sufficient** (see [v.18](#)). He goes on to spell out the vital importance of the Christian believer's response to what Jesus offers, within the fellowship of a truly supportive community ([verses 22 to 25](#)). God's ultimate promise of the approaching 'Day of the Lord' ([v. 25](#)) makes it all worthwhile.

In leading your group, please encourage members to explore their questions, and to discover what this all means for relationships within the church (local and worldwide) today.

### **PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)**

*Reflecting on the questions you discussed together during the last meeting (#18), have you had any further thoughts about their relevance for Christian faith and life today? Are you encouraged to learn more?*

In preparation for this session, it might be useful to [read chapters 9 and 10 of Hebrews](#), if you have time.

*What does 'atonement' mean to you? Some find it useful to split the word: **AT-ONE-MENT**. Is this helpful?*

### **STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, you came into our world, born a Jew, of the house and lineage of David.

Your simple home was observant and devout.

Today, your fellow-Jews continue to observe the Day of Atonement as the most solemn day of their ancient calendar.

Move us, by your living Spirit, to desire atonement in our fractured and insecure time.

Help us to find, in your all-sufficient sacrifice, the vital assurance we need as you go ahead of us, leading us into a new age of peace, and freedom and joy. In your powerful name we ask it. **Amen.**

### **READING THE SCRIPTURES and DIGGING DEEPER – Part 1: Chapter 9**

**Read together the first Bible passage: [Hebrews 9: 11-15](#)**

Here we are told that the old sacrifices were still valid, for the purposes intended. Provided the sacrificial animals brought to the altar were without blemish, and the biblical rules obediently followed, the ceremonially unclean could be made 'outwardly clean' ([v.13](#)). **Yet, the new covenant provides much**

**more than this:** (a) By means of Christ's self-sacrifice, the **inner person** is purified (our consciences are cleansed, **v.14**); (b) It is Christ, by his own blood, shed on the cross, who offers himself, not as an unwilling beast, but **by an act of his own will** (see **10:7**); (c) In this way Jesus is himself **both** priest *and* victim; (d) Under the old covenant, it is the blood of goats and bulls that is offered in the 'inner room' once a year on the Day of Atonement (**9:7**); now Jesus enters the Most Holy Place (**heaven itself**) by his own blood; (e) In this way, he is able to give us **direct access** to God himself ; (f) As **mediator** of a new covenant, and in **setting us free** from the burden of sins committed under the old covenant, he opens up the promise of an **eternal inheritance** (**v.15**).

An old children's chorus contains these words: '**There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin; / there's a door that is open and you may go in: / at Calvary's cross is where you begin, / when you come as a sinner to Jesus**' (by E.H. Swinstead). *Are these lyrics a helpful summary of **Hebrews 9:11-15**? Do they speak to your own faith experience? If not, what is your experience of finding God's grace and 'atonement'?*

In the Communion hymn '**Alleluia! Sing to Jesus**' (*Singing the Faith*, **568**), our Lord is acclaimed as our Great High Priest: 'on earth both priest and victim'. *What light do those words shed on 'Priest' as a title for Jesus? What impact might they make on Christian believing and worship? Do you see Jesus as your Priest?*

## READING THE SCRIPTURES and DIGGING DEEPER – Part 2: Chapter 10

**Read together the second Bible passage: **Hebrews 10: 11-25****

In the first part (**verses 11-18**), the writer is stressing three things: (a) The importance of Jesus's death on the cross. Unlike the old sacrifices, its purpose, to take away our sins and their devastating impact on our relationship with God, was **gloriously achieved**; (b) Consequently, it is **effective for all time**; (c) Therefore, Christ's sacrifice is **unrepeatable**. Human sins have been atoned for, and forgiveness is freely available to those who accept God's offer. So, any further offering to take away sins is unnecessary.

In the second half (**verses 19-25**), the practical impact of Jesus's 'work' is spelled out. Because there is no 'veil' separating us from God, we have freedom to go into 'the Most Holy Place', cleansed of our guilt and troubled consciences. With sincerity of heart and assurance of faith, we can confidently draw near to God.

Our lives take a new direction. **No longer brooding on our failures, we are free to focus on the needs of others**. Within the Christian community, so long as we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, we can spur each other on to faithful living, in love and good deeds. We need to make **meeting together** a real priority, because things can get burdensome and tough. Openness to the Spirit and to each other will enable us to give and receive encouragement with our conviction that the 'Day of the Lord' draws nearer.

*Have you ever been aware of the 'veil' between yourself and God being withdrawn, and the way being opened up? Give thanks and hold fast to the reality. Or is this something you would like to pray for?*

William Barclay said that Jesus's entire life 'showed God', and on the cross **the love of God** was fully disclosed. Recalling the rending of the Temple curtain when Jesus died (**Mark 15:38**), He said that it was the rending of the flesh of Christ that revealed 'the full greatness' of divine love, opening up the way to God (*The Letter to the Hebrews*, St Andrews Press, 1976). *Does that help you discern the 'victory of the cross'?*

*How can we best live in **unswerving hope with a real practical concern for others**? How widely do we draw the circle of those included? When do we unwittingly exclude people from the scope of God's love?*

*Have you been through times of **flagging commitment**? Has anyone been effective in spurring you on with honest challenge and loving encouragement? Thank God for the difference they have made.*

## PRAYING TOGETHER

Read together or sing '**Come let us use the grace divine**' (*Singing the Faith*, **549**), one of Charles Wesley's Covenant hymns. (Notice the links to the message of Hebrews.) Pray **The Lord's Prayer** together, and pray for any places on earth or in your lives where you would like to see God's kingdom come.

Finally, read the blessing from **Hebrews 13: 20-21**, in grateful thanks to our great Shepherd and High Priest.

## COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE (to think about afterwards)

*From the hymn above (STF 549), what does it mean for us to be 'of one accord'? Who enables us to 'use the grace divine' so that our Covenant promises may be sustained? In the Lord's Prayer, are the words 'Your kingdom come' a pointer to the future 'Day' which has always inspired Christian hope?*