

Text: Hebrews 9:15–22

Title: New Covenant Mediator By Means of Death

Exegetical Truth: Christ's death was necessary for the forgiveness that is at the foundation of the new covenant.

Date/Location: May 1, 2011 at FBC

I. How Were Old Testament People Saved?

A. I get this question more often than you might expect.

B. The Answer is Clearly Given in the Bible

1. The answer is predicated on the fact that no one could possibly be saved by the Law of Moses. This is so for at least three reasons. Let's just focus on the smallest subset of that Law, the 10 commandments. First, **no one** has ever kept nor is able to keep the 10 commandments, except Jesus. Second, the 10 commandments are design-limited in that they are intended to **point out infractions** of God's holy standard (sin), not to change the internal character of a person. In other words, they are a moral fence. Good fences make good neighbors, but good fences do not make perfect neighbors! Third, even though there were animal sacrifices to cover sin, they did so only for a temporary period of time until the next sin was committed, and **did not provide a full, equivalent-value substitution** for the person doing the sin. You see, the penalty required for sin is the death penalty of the person who committed it (Romans 6:23), so an animal death is not an adequate full payment for sin.

2. The Answer is found in Romans 3:25-26

- a. God had patiently passed over the sins that were committed before Christ came. He restrained His righteous demands against sin for a future time when Christ would satisfy those demands.
- b. God sent His Son to become a propitiatory sacrifice for sin (that is, a sacrifice that satisfies God's wrath against sin).
- c. This sacrifice demonstrates God's righteousness, namely, that He did not simply overlook sin permanently. This means that God, though he initially overlooked sin in this way, is just (righteous) and He can justify (declare righteous) other people even though they have sinned. This is a marvelous thing!
- d. The people who God justifies are those who have **faith** in Jesus.

3. The Answer is also found in Hebrews 9:15

II. The New Covenant Mediator, v. 15

1. People living under the first covenant committed sins. These sins are called transgressions, which are acts in which the boundary of right is crossed and the act is in the wrong territory. In other words, the fence of the law is breached.
2. Those OT people were called (like we are, Heb. 3:1), and had a promise of an eternal inheritance. This inheritance is harder to find in the OT than in the NT, but passages like the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 and resurrection passages like Job 19:25-27, Isaiah 26:19, and Daniel 12:2 demonstrate that there is an expectancy of eternal life even for the OT saint. How it was achieved did not become totally clear until the NT era.
3. But they could not receive the inheritance on any grounds other than righteousness with God. Many texts of Scripture demonstrate this—that eternal reward is impossible apart from faith and righteousness (Heb. 12:14).
4. Christ by means of death made redemption for those past transgressions. **Redemption** means release or acquittal for the persons who did the transgressions.
5. The absolutely certain connection between those who are called and those who receive the promised inheritance comes about because of the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He became, by that death, the fully qualified Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5).

The idea of mediation and high priest are very similar. Christ came as High Priest (9:11) through the heavenly tabernacle, by His own blood, and thus could clean your conscience.

6. Now we are ready to understand the beginning of verse 15, where it says **and for this reason**. What reason are we talking about? On account of Christ's sacrificial death that accomplished what the old covenant could not, He has become the mediator of the new covenant. No one else could be the mediator of the new covenant. Since his death effected that which was necessary for the NC to operate (cleansing of conscience), he is qualified to be mediator. So, Christ's sacrificial death is the reason that He is the Mediator.

III. The Illustration of a Last Will and Testament, v. 16-22

A. The Last Will and Testament, v. 16-17

1. Hebrews now uses an illustration of a last will and testament that only comes into force once the person dies.

The word same “covenant” (διαθήκη diatheke) is used to talk about the will, but a person’s will is not precisely like the unilateral new covenant nor is it like the old covenant. For instance, the maker of the will dies; but the animal that died in the old covenant did not make a will. Also, the maker of the will depends on those living to execute his will, but God, who made the new covenant, will fulfill it Himself.

The idea of a will or testament of a person being enforced after death appears to be absent from the OT, except for few references to someone requesting burial at a certain gravesite. There was a more automatic or customary distribution of the inheritance, with the eldest receiving a double portion (Deut. 21:17).

The concept of a will is similar to the new covenant in that Christ is God and He made the new covenant with Israel; and He Himself is the One Who died.

2. The point of the illustration is this: a specific kind of covenant, a last will and testament, is used to illustrate how a death must occur before the terms and conditions of the will are in force. This more specific kind of covenant illustrates the New Covenant.

The illustration shows how reasonable it is for death to be the gating function to the fulfillment of a covenant.

A death occurs before fulfilling a last will and testament.

Likewise a death occurred in the first covenant in order to purify the book, people, and tabernacle (next section).

Likewise a death happened to fulfill the New Covenant.

B. The First Covenant Similarity: Death Inaugurates the Covenant, v. 18-22

1. Remember, the extent of the illustration is that death is frequently used as the inauguration event of a covenant or will. Not all the details can be transferred (e.g., animal death versus Christ’s death.)
2. In verses 18-21, the old or first covenant is shown to have had a death to get it officially started. Read Exodus 24:3-8 for the original narrative; some details have been added in Hebrews.
3. Verse 22 says that in the old covenant system, almost everything was purified (cleansed) with blood. This means that it all was dedicated or consecrated to a holy purpose on the basis of a blood sacrifice that was made just beforehand so that the blood would be available.

The sprinkling of the actual blood signified the application of the purifying / forgiving benefit of the sacrifice to those items.

Remission means to free from an obligation, guilt, or punishment. It can mean to pardon or cancel a debt, or to forgive.

The Bible shows that everything was cleansed with the sprinkled blood. **The principle is that without the death (= shedding of blood) of an innocent sacrifice, there is no forgiveness.** Thus, we rejoice to know “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

4. The verse thus points out the connection between death, blood, and purification from sin. Note: death (v. 15), death (v. 16), dead (v. 17), blood (v. 18), blood (v. 19), blood (v. 20), blood (v. 21), blood (v. 22, twice). The life of the flesh is in the blood (Lev. 17:11), and the death of a living thing extracts the life and allows the extraction of the blood for the ceremonial use (OT).
5. So, we learn that death was necessary not just to become the mediator of the new covenant, and not only to inaugurate that covenant, but also for the remission of sins. Remember that the new covenant promised to deal with sins (Jer. 31:34). Christ’s death accomplishes all this—the purification, the inauguration, and the mediation of the new covenant. If sin was not addressed, there would be no new covenant to start up, and no mediation between parties.

Conclusions

Sometimes, people’s lack of care for the dead person is shown in their scrapping over the will to try to “get the money.” They want the goods the will provides, but they don’t seem to care much about the person who died. When it comes to the “last will and testament” of Jesus Christ Who died to secure remission of their sins, people collectively don’t show a lot of care for the Person who died (and rose again), nor for the benefits that He made available (eternal life).

If Jesus died to pay for sins that occurred over the many centuries of human life before He came, do you expect He can forgive you who have many past sins as well? Of course He can, and He will if you give up trying to save yourself and ask Him to do that for you.

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