

**Text:** Hebrews 9:23-28

**Title:** The Three Appearances of Christ

**Truth:** Christ's once-for-all sacrifice was effective to put away sin for all time.

**Date/Location:** May 15, 2011 at FBC

## Introduction

The title of my message might throw you for a loop, but it is Biblical! Here are the three appearances of Christ given in this passage:

1. Christ's appearance to put away sin by His self-sacrifice (v. 25-26)—during His first coming to the earth;
2. Christ's appearance in God's presence for us in heaven (v. 23-24);
3. Christ's appearance at His second coming to bring salvation to completion (v. 27-28).

We have seen in Hebrews the superiority of Christ to the prophets; to the angels; to Moses; to Aaron and to the Levitical priesthood. We further learned that Christ has come as mediator of a better covenant that is far superior to the old covenant. Both covenants have a priest, a sanctuary, and a divine sacrificial service. Christ is the high priest of the good things to come; His sacrifice is Himself and is presented in heaven before the very presence of God, not in an earthly copy and shadow of heaven.

We saw that all this serves a greater message, and that is that we must have persevering faith in Jesus in order to be saved from our sins and enjoy eternal life with God. Without Jesus, without faith in Him, and without the kind of faith that continues, there is no salvation.

## I. The Appearance Before God, v. 23-24

A. The purification of the copies, v. 23a

The **copies of the things in the heavens** refers to the Old Testament tabernacle that was the subject of 9:1-10. The tabernacle had multiple parts, pieces of furniture, etc. that were **made with hands**.

These **copies** were ritually **purified** by the sacrifices that were offered as described in 9:18-22 and elsewhere in the Mosaic Covenant texts of the Old Testament.

**Therefore** refers to the connection between v. 22 and this purification. If there was to be any purification, according to the principle of v. 22, it had to be done with blood, because **without the shedding of blood there is no remission** of sins.

## B. The purification of the heavenly realities, v. 23b

We learned before that the **heavenly things themselves** refers to the heavenly sanctuary, or the very dwelling place of God (8:1-2, 9:11). This is supported by the fact that Christ entered **into heaven itself** in v. 24. We are not talking about a heavenly edifice that is a board-for-board pattern of the earthly tabernacle. It is simply the highest heaven where God's presence is manifested in a special way.

The question is, how should we understand the purification of the heavenly things? It would seem there is no sin or defilement of sin in heaven—and that is true. Yet the Bible speaks of reconciling things in heaven (Col. 1:20).

Thinking back to the physical representation in the tabernacle, we should realize that the building and furniture themselves were not changed by sin, but the God of them was present there and needed to be satisfied with blood sacrifice.

Likewise, Christ is appearing in the presence of God on behalf of believers, as our representative. In a similar way then God needs to be satisfied that proper care has been taken of sin of those being represented before Him.

As you might expect, to accomplish purification on the heavenly level, a better sacrifice was required than that to purify the tabernacle that was on the earthly level.

## C. Christ's appearance before God, v. 24

This verse starts with **for** and explains further the necessity of the better sacrifice. Not only the requirement of blood to accomplish remission of sins, but the place where Christ has entered is much greater than the earthly tabernacle.

Remember that Christ is called the forerunner in 6:19. He is the advocate before God the Father (1 John 2:1). He has gone in before God for us.

## II. The Appearance to Completely Put Away Sin, v. 25-26

A. The thought may come to the reader that if Jesus is in heaven before God, He is making an ongoing or repeated sacrifice to appease the wrath of God while He is there. This would be a natural thought for a Jewish person who experienced the high priest going into the earthly tabernacle, because every time he went in there, he was making sacrifice for sins. The high priest went in every year and brought blood of an animal (another) to make sacrifice for the sins of himself and of the people. Perhaps, the thought might be, if Jesus is always up there, then he would be always making a sacrifice.

B. The author of Hebrews here emphatically points out that such a notion is far from correct. He does this by the use of **often** and **every year** (three times) in strong contrast to **once** (also three times).

The key word **often** is associated with the old covenant in 25-26a.

The key word **once** is associated with the new covenant work of Christ in 26b-28.

- C. If it were the case that Christ had to offer a sacrifice **often** for sin, then He would have had to suffer many times throughout history. The idea is that as long as sin was being committed, Jesus would be suffering for it, *if* we were operating under the kind of often-sacrifice principle of the OT.
- D. The beginning of history is called *the foundation of the world*. The implication is that sin was present from the very beginning, which Genesis 3 indeed confirms. Sin was present from the time when Adam and Eve first disobeyed God. The entrance of sin also brought physical and spiritual death (Rom 5:12, 6:23).
- E. In contrast to the beginning of the world, Christ's coming marked out the **end of the ages**, as in the culmination or apex of history. Everything before pointed forward to this event, and everything after looks back to what He accomplished.
- F. What happened there some 2000 years ago was that Christ **put away sin** by His self-sacrifice. That is, he removed it or set it aside. It has been dealt with. It is still an issue in that non-Christians need to be cleansed from sin and Christians still commit sin, but as far as God is concerned, the means to care for sin have been settled. The sacrifice of Christ stands as the immovable rock of history that set aside sin as the ultimate blockade for entering the presence of God.

### III. The Appearance to Bring Final Salvation, v. 27-28

These verses offer a further justification for the singularity of Christ's sacrifice for sin.

A. The Principle: People die once and then are judged, v. 27

Everyone knows the part about dying, and many know that they are supposed to "meet their maker," though they wish to avoid this unpleasant encounter.

There are some exceptions to the general rule. The Bible records that a handful of people were raised from the dead to a natural body. They apparently died again (e.g., Lazarus in John 11). Then there are Enoch and Elijah who were whisked into heaven without dying. And finally,

there are the Christians who are alive in the last generation when Christ returns at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

There are no other exceptions that are revealed in the Bible. There is no such thing as reincarnation and multiple deaths. There is no avoiding final judgment, as in the view of annihilationism.

#### B. The Application: Christ also died only once.

Note that verse 27 is not a stand-alone verse, though we almost always use it that way. It gives a principle which serves a larger argument.

The argument is an “as...so” comparison, which tells us that since Christ was a man, He too only can die once. And since He died to bear the sins of many, he did so with a single death, not more.

Any notion of re-sacrifice or ongoing sacrifices, or altars or any such thing is in conflict with this Biblical teaching. Take, for instance, the Catholic church teaching on the subject. Very little of what we have discussed from this Bible text is accepted by our Catholic friends. Their Council of Trent (1545-1563) “reaffirmed the mass as an unbloody propitiatory sacrifice offered by priests who were so designated by God.” This should revolt your theological sensibilities. For one thing, an unbloody sacrifice can *not* be propitiatory!

#### C. The Second Coming

The idea of the second portion of verse 28 is that when Christ returns, He will not do so to deal with sins. He already came once to bear the sins of many. At the second coming, He is going to appear to bring **salvation** in its final and full blessings to His people.

Note that He will also come as judge (Acts 17:31).

**Eagerly waiting** is a phrase that should describe each believer in Jesus Christ. The more mature I become in the faith, the more I long for the day when Christ returns—for my own final salvation from the presence of sin, but also for the righting of wrongs, for governmental justice, for righteousness throughout the earth, and so that Christ will openly receive the honor that is due to Him.

### Conclusion

Are you eagerly awaiting Christ’s return? Are you washed in the soul-cleansing blood of the lamb? Have you been trying to do some repeated ritual or offering to make God happy at you? Have you realized that there is a sacrifice that was done once for all time, never to be repeated again, that deals with sins finally and fully?

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