

# CHRIST AS THE “MERCY SEAT”: UNDERSTANDING THE SHED BLOOD OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

by  
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## Introduction

The writer of Hebrews instructs believers to have *boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus* (Hebrews 10:19).<sup>2</sup> Based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as God and Savior, the Christian can enter into the very presence of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ *ever liveth to make intercession* (Hebrews 7:25) for those trusting in His payment of a debt that, as sinners, they could never pay. Therefore, those who are being sanctified<sup>3</sup> through the blood of Jesus have immediate access into the presence of God because Christ appears *in the presence of God for us* (Hebrews 9:12–14, 24).

The basis for the intercession is due to Christ being the propitiation (satisfaction) for sinners. He intercedes by means of His once-for-all bloody sacrifice upon Calvary’s cross. The blood that was shed in His voluntary death is the basis by which He cried, *It is finished* (John 19:30) and the basis for reconciliation with God.

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<sup>1</sup> The author read an earlier draft of this article at the third annual meeting of the Conservative Theological Society on 7 August 2000 at Tyndale Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

<sup>3</sup> A distinction is to be drawn in terms of position wherein believers are sanctified (John 3:36; Ephesians 1:3; 2:3–6; Romans 4:25; 8:9–14; 1 Corinthians 1:2) and await ultimate sanctification, which is the glorification of the body (Romans 8:29–39; 1 Corinthians 15:50–58; Philippians 1:6; 3:20–21). However, in terms of daily experience believers are responsible to be sanctified (Ephesians 3:14–19; 5:3–8, 33; 6:4, 18; Philippians 2:12–13; 4:6–7; 2 Peter 2:16). Therefore, depending on the context, it can be said that believers are already saved, are being saved, and will be saved.

It is because He is the actual mercy seat, or place of propitiation, that Jesus Christ entered the heavenlies to take up His rightful position as Lord over all. His office as the believer’s High Priest is not due to His shed blood being preserved somewhere in heaven or even offered upon the heavenly mercy seat. Rather the sufficiency of His shed blood on Calvary’s cross, as the sinners’ substitute, is the means by which He entered heaven and the means by which believers can also boldly enter the eternal presence of God having been sanctified by grace through faith in the merits of the death of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19–22).

### Theory of Imperishability

The blood of Christ is indeed *precious*, according to 1 Peter 1:18–19. The Greek word for *precious* [*timios*] is distinctly Petrine. The precious blood is “of great worth/value, precious.”<sup>4</sup> The blood of Christ is of highly esteemed value in contrast to the corruptible things. Peter states that believers are not redeemed with that which is corruptible, but are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Some commentators contend that Christ’s blood is incorruptible since it is contrasted with the corruptible things. However, Scripture does not state that the blood is incorruptible; it simply states that the blood is of immense value. One of the arguments employed in favor of the incorruptibility of Christ’s blood is that it was actually “divine blood.” For instance, M. R. DeHaan writes, “The Holy Spirit contributed to the blood of Jesus. It is sinless blood. It is divine blood.”<sup>5</sup>

Typically, Acts 20:28, which refers to *the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*, is interpreted to mean that *His own blood* is the blood of God. However, since neither God the Father or the God the Holy Spirit possess a body, is this true? Leviticus 17:11 states *the life of the flesh is in the blood*, but

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1006.

<sup>5</sup> M. R. DeHaan, *The Chemistry of the Blood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943), 34.

neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit are men nor inhabit a body of flesh and blood. Those who believe in the literal red corpuscles of blood to be divine interpret the antecedent, *the* [*tou*], to refer to *God* [*theou*]. However, it is better to translate the antecedent of *blood* [*haimatos*] as referring to Christ. In this context, Acts 20:28 is not referring to the “blood of God” as being divine since every New Testament reference to blood that is identified with a personality is referred to Christ. The passage is affirming that Jesus is God who shed His own blood for *the church of God* [*tēn ekklēsiān tou theou*].<sup>6</sup> The notion of divine blood is more akin to mysticism than sound biblical doctrine.

Indeed, Christ’s blood is precious precisely because the shedding of His blood in death is the price of atonement for the sins of the elect and of the world (1 John 2:2). When Christ shed His blood in the supreme sacrificial act, He both ratified the New Covenant and purchased the believer’s redemption. Vincent Taylor has noted that when Scripture refers to Christ’s blood it does so nearly three times as often as it mentions the cross of Christ. Additionally, it refers to the blood of Christ five times as often as it refers to the death of Christ.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, *blood* [*haima*] is the prominent term used to refer to the atonement in the New Testament. As it is referenced in the New Testament, the blood of Christ indicates the all-encompassing redemptive work of Christ upon the cross.

Clearly, the parallel in the Petrine passage is between corruptible things and the precious blood of Christ. Nothing whatsoever in the Scripture states Christ’s blood is the incorruptible fluid of God. Christ’s blood was human; it was not divine blood. If one is to accept such statements that His blood is divine then one could also argue (on that basis) that Christ’s fingernails and hair were also divine. The fantasy, rather than sound biblical teaching, would not stop based on such faulty

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<sup>6</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1930), 3:353.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London: Epworth, 1945), 177.

conclusions. Since Christ’s blood was truly human blood it was subject to the same end as other human blood when it is shed.

### Theory of Heavenly Sacrifice

Based on a superficial reading of Hebrews 9:7, 12 some Bible teachers have proposed that Christ took His literal blood into heaven and sprinkled it upon the heavenly mercy seat. However, a detailed study of the passages in question leads to the conclusion that Christ did not offer His blood upon the heavenly mercy seat, but that His sacrifice for sin was completed at the cross of Calvary. The basis for much of this erroneous view of the blood of Christ can generally be traced to the teachings of the Socinians in the seventeenth century and John Albert Bengel (1687–1752), a German Lutheran Greek scholar and textual critic, in the eighteenth century.

In the Old Testament, the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies annually to present the expiatory blood.<sup>8</sup> However, Christ did not enter the true sanctuary with His blood.<sup>9</sup> The preposition *but* is the key word here drawing a contrast to the Old Covenant.<sup>10</sup> At His ascension, Christ entered the true Holy of Holies through (by means of) His own blood which was shed once for all on the cross (Hebrews 9:24). The aorist indicative *entered* [*eisēlthen*] and the aorist infinitive *appear* [*emphanisthēnai*] refer to an event in the past when Christ had entered and appeared before the throne of God, which would have been at the time of His exaltation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The term “expiatory” indicates a divinely appointed sacrifice in order to pay penalty for sin.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 144–213.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Wuest, *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 157; Carey Melvin Childrey, “The Necessity of the Literal Blood of Christ” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), 62–63.

<sup>11</sup> The title *Christ* [*christos*] (Hebrews 9:24) focuses on Jesus’ exaltation and is the emphatic subject of the entire sentence.

Similarly, the aorist participle *came* [*paragenomenos*] (Hebrews 9:11 refers to the past when the priesthood of Christ began, that is, His perfection (Hebrews 5:10). The deponent participle, *came* [*paragenomenos*], is active in function; it is temporal as antecedent action to *entered* [*eisēlthen*] in Hebrews 9:12. Delitzsch writes that *came* [*paragenomenos*] “is the usual word for appearance or manifestation on the stage of history (comp. Luke xii.51; Matt. iii.1; 1 Macc. iv.46).”<sup>12</sup> If the writer had intended that at His ascension Christ became High Priest then he would have used the aorist middle participle, *to become* [*genomenos*]. Bengel places a comma after *came* [*paragenomenos*], but this is not necessary as demonstrated above. Furthermore, there is no need to supply *in order that he may be High Priest* [*eis to einai archiereas*] to the text.<sup>13</sup> It is as being *High Priest* [*archiereus*] that Christ *came* [*paregenomenos*] forth and made a public appearance.

Whereas the King James Version reads *to come* [*mellontōn*], some manuscripts read *having come* [*genomenōn*]. Although there is good textual evidence for both readings, it would appear that the former is more likely to have been influenced by the attendance of *the good things to come* [*tōn mellontōn agathōn*] in Hebrews 10:1.<sup>14</sup> *Having come* [*genomenōn*] refers to the *good things* that have already come as being more than an eschatological hope. On the basis of the shed blood of Christ, the New Covenant was ratified. Although the church does not fulfill the New

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<sup>12</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1871), 75.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Wuest, *Hebrews in Greek*, 157; Delitzsch, *Epistle to Hebrews*, 75–76; W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 111–112; Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1994), 598. [Editor’s note: Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1999), 766, say about this problem in Hebrews 9:11, “T h S V M B.” T (Tischendorf’s 8th ed.), h (the margin of Westcott-Hort), S (von Soden), M (Merk), B (Bover) oppose the Nestle-Aland reading (as does the Majority Text also).]

Covenant, she does take part in the spiritual blessings *having come*.

Wuest comments that the word *through* [*dia*] is "the preposition of intermediate agency."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the preposition contrasts the tabernacles. The Old Testament tabernacle was only a type, whereas the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was through the "instrumentality" of the anti-typical, *greater and more perfect tabernacle*. It is expedient to interpret *through* [*dia*] consistently throughout the passage in Hebrews. The text is not speaking of locality when it states, *not [through] the blood of goats and calves* or *[through] His own blood*. Both prepositional usages denote instrumentality (by means of) and are not local in sense.

The Old Testament high priest entered with blood, but Christ entered the Holy of Holies *through* [*dia*] (preposition with a genitive), or by virtue, of His own blood (Hebrews 9:12; 13:12). That Christ entered into heaven through His blood, and not with His literal blood is indicated in Hebrews 9:25, 10:19, and 13:20 (*with* [*en*] and the locative *blood* [*haimati*]). Christ entered after securing (aorist middle participle, *obtained* [*heuramenos*]) eternal redemption. The passage does not state that Christ brought His blood into heaven; rather that through His shed blood Christ ascended into heaven. Christ, as the entirely sinless High Priest, did not need to bring any blood into the heavenly sanctuary. The blood was the proof indisputable that He, the sinner's substitute, had truly died. He was both the offering and the offerer. Christ presented Himself in heaven as the risen Savior possessing complete right of entry.

Bengel refers the reader to Witsius as holding a significant principle for overextending the biblical analogy between type and anti-type in order to correspond with each other in every notable way.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the high priest of the Old Testament entered

<sup>15</sup> Wuest, *Hebrews in Greek*, 157.

<sup>16</sup> "Witsius in Diss. de sacerdotio Aaronis et Christi, T.I. misc. 510., where he treats the passage Heb. xiii. 11, acknowledges, that *the analogy between the type*

the Holy of Holies *with* blood (Hebrews 9:7; note the double negative *not without*), but Jesus Christ entered heaven *through* [not with] *his own blood* (Hebrews 9:12). The conclusion is obvious: there was no need for Christ to present His blood in heaven (or anything for matter). The great High Priest only needed to present Himself in heaven.

He entered by means of *his own blood* [*idiou haimatos*]. The words *his own* (*idiou*) indicate that Christ entered heaven by virtue of His shed blood upon the cross of Calvary (cf. Acts 10:28). There was no need for Christ to apply His literal blood upon the mercy seat in heaven in order to complete His sacrificial death as atonement for sin. In contrast to the High Priest who entered the Holy of Holies annually on the Day of Atonement, Christ entered *once for all* [*ephapax*] into *the Most Holy Place*. It is important to note that the aorist participle, *obtained* [*heuramenos*], is conjunctive with the aorist verb *entered* [*eisēlthen*]. Christ did not enter heaven to accomplish eternal redemption or the writer would have used the aorist active *to obtain* [*heurōn*]. The aorist middle indicates that Christ found and *obtained eternal redemption* [*Himself*] through His shed blood for those who place all assurance in His sacrifice for their sin.

In an effort to reconcile the concurrent aorists, some translators supply the copula, “having obtained.” However, the conjunctive actions indicate that eternal redemption was not accomplished *when* He entered heaven but *through* Christ’s entrance into heaven. Christ entered once for all into the holy place as the One who found and obtained eternal redemption for those trusting in Him alone for salvation. Eternal [*aiōnian*] refers back to *once for all* [*ephapax*] so that *redemption* [*lutrōsin*] is the purpose of Christ Jesus upon entrance into heaven through His shed blood.

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*and the antitype should be preserved*; but he at the same time interprets the *blood* of Christ to be His soul, not correctly: for *blood*, properly so called, is denoted, as in the type, so in the antitype [*italics original*].” John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, rev. and ed. Andrew R. Fausset (Edinburgh: Clark, 1860), 4: 476.

The resurrection and ascension are not stages in Christ's presentation of Himself in heaven. They are subsequent stages in Christ's victory and exaltation (e.g., events that resulted from Christ's past work and the victory He had already won). His ascension was the enthronement as the High Priest whose work of redemption was already complete. It was in Christ's body of flesh and blood that He offered Himself to God, not the glorified body of the resurrection. Believers do not enter heaven with the literal blood of Christ. Rather they enter in the same way that Christ entered heaven, that is, by virtue of His blood. To enter by the blood of Jesus is to appropriate the benefits of Christ's death through the one requirement of faith.

Leon Morris points out the serious error of teaching that Christ presented His blood in heaven. It would imply "that Christ's atoning work was not completed on the cross but that he still had to do some atoning act in heaven like the earthly high priest who took the blood into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement."<sup>17</sup> Not only is this theory unbiblical but it also gives support to the Roman Catholic/Anglo-Catholic theology of the perpetual offering of the blood of Christ.<sup>18</sup> Heretical groups argue this point to a destructive (cf. 2 Peter 2:1) extreme in teaching that the blood of Christ is used as a perpetual offering in heaven.

The theory that Christ needed to take His blood with Him into heaven denies the work of Christ on the cross as being finished. The sacrifice for sin was completed on the cross. However, the subsequent benefits of Christ's sacrifice extend to the elect and heaven itself (Hebrews 9:23). The appropriation of

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<sup>17</sup> Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews–Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 86.

<sup>18</sup> "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*. . . 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner.'" *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 1367 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 381.



the benefits of Christ's death to the elect is the result of His death and victory on the cross. When Scripture states that believers are cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7), this does not mean that the literal blood of Christ is physically applied to them; rather, that Christ's shed blood on the cross is God's righteous basis for forgiving sinners who have placed their trust for salvation in Christ alone. It is the Spirit that gives life, not the blood (John 6:63). Scripture speaks of a spiritual application rather than a material application.

### The Sufficiency of Christ's Shed Blood

The shedding of Christ's blood in His death on the cross results in numerous benefits for the elect. Consider a few of the accomplishments that Scripture records of the death of Christ. The first is *redemption*. Three words in the New Testament illustrate the various qualities of redemption: *agorazō* ("to purchase in a marketplace"), *exagorazō* ("to purchase out of the marketplace"), and *lutroomai* ("to set free by payment of a ransom").

The divine scene is that of a Roman slave market, and the sinner is depicted as bound in slavery. The sinner is *sold under sin* (Romans 7:14) and remains under the sentence of death (Romans 5:12). The purchase price of the slave is the blood of Christ who died in the sinner's place (Revelation 5:9). Christ became the elect's Redeemer when *He Himself likewise shared in the same [flesh and blood]* (Hebrews 2:14), and in obedience to the Father offered Himself in place of the condemned sinner shedding His own blood as the price of redemption (Matthew 20:28).

Not only did Christ *redeem [agorazō]* by payment in the market, but He also takes His own out of the market. Those who have exercised the one requirement of faith in Christ Jesus are purchased by Christ's blood and will never again be exposed to sin's bondage. They are eternally secure (John 10:28–29)! This concept extends beyond *redeem [agorazō]*. As already stated, *redeem out [exagorazō]* indicates the purchase out of the marketplace (Galatians 3:13; 4:4–5).

The third Greek term, *redeem; set free* [*lutroomai*], means that the redeemed one is set free forever from sin’s power (1 Peter 1:18–19). The term refers to the liberation of the elect. In other words, Christ did not merely pay the ransom price with His blood so that the condemned sinner could be transferred from one master to another. On the contrary, Christ has paid the ransom so that those who are redeemed are set free; and thus, Christ will hold none that do not desire to spend eternity with their Savior.<sup>19</sup>

A second benefit of Christ’s death is **reconciliation**. God and man can again be reunited in fellowship (Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20–22). Man was originally separated from God by his sin (Ephesians 2:14), but the sinner can be reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19). When Christ shed His blood in death He paid a debt that man could never pay. Truly, *the soul who sins shall die* (Ezekiel 18:4), so only one who was *without sin* (Hebrews 4:15) and *who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth* (1 Peter 2:22) could offer Himself as the perfect substitute and shed His blood efficaciously thereby satisfying the righteous demands of the just and holy God who had been offended.

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<sup>19</sup> Redemption does not mean that a believer should live his life recklessly. Grace through faith is the requirement for salvation, yet there is now a *law of Christ* for the believer. For instance, the redeemed have been purchased out of the market (that is, from the bondage of sin) and now they are redeemed *unto God* through the blood of Jesus Christ (cf. Revelation 5:9). Prayerfully, a believer understands God’s estimate of his sin and now, having been redeemed, desires to become a bond-servant of Jesus Christ out of love for the One who bought him from the bondage of sin. Of course, Christlikeness is more evident in some than others. For instance, there are those who Scripture describes as *saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Corinthians 3:15). In other words, they have believed the gospel of grace through faith in Christ alone, but have not lived a life of obedience (apart from faith itself). They will be judged at the *Bema* (judgment seat) of Christ, not to determine their salvation, but in order to receive reward or loss. Not all will hear the words: *Well, done, good and faithful servant*. This should be a sober motivation to reflect gratitude to God in one’s life for the work of redemption on His part.

Another benefit of Christ's death is **propitiation** that signifies expiation (payment for sin). Christ Himself gives efficacy<sup>20</sup> to His work by reason of Himself who is the propitiation (Romans 3:25). Christ alone atones for the sins of the guilty by sacrificing His own life. The word *mercy seat* [*hilastērion*] is, of course, the same word as used in Hebrews 9:5 (*and above it were the cherubims of glory overshadowing the mercy seat*).

Specifically, *mercy seat* [*hilastērion*] is the place of propitiation. Christ is the propitiation; He is the mercy seat. He alone was "sufficiently 'blood-stained' by reason of His death on the cross."<sup>21</sup> The mercy seat under the Mosaic Covenant was only a type of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christ is the mercy seat who was sprinkled with His own blood.

A fourth benefit of the death of Christ is **substitution**. Although the word "substitution" is never found in Scripture, the substitutionary aspect of atonement is evident in the sacrificial work of Christ. For instance, a perfect lamb would be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. The lamb that was perfect and innocent took the sinner's place and died in their stead. When Christ died it was in the sinner's stead. The words of the Lord before His death (Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:19, 20; John 6:51) clearly illustrate that He was fully conscious that His death would be as the sinner's substitute. Passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:21 (*He made Him to be sin for us*), Galatians 1:4 (*Jesus Christ . . . gave Himself for our sins*), Galatians 3:13 (*Christ . . . having become a curse for us*), Ephesians 5:2 (*Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us*), and Ephesians 5:25 (*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it*) give precedence for the use of the term substitution when referring to Christ's death.

Lastly, Christ's shed blood is **covenant ratification** (Hebrews 9:13–20). Jesus referred not only to his blood as anticipatory of

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<sup>20</sup> The term "efficacy" indicates effectiveness or power. The death of Christ fulfilled the eternal will of God.

<sup>21</sup> A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word "Blood" in Scripture* (London: Tyndale, 1947), 20.

His death, but also the New Covenant that would be ratified by the shedding of His blood. It was through Christ's blood shedding in death that God ratified the New Covenant (Luke 22:20). The covenant of God is called a testament in Luke 22:20, a willing deed of God, whereby He bestows covenantal blessings, effective upon the death of the One making the covenant. Therefore, it was necessary that Christ die, not only to obtain the blessings of salvation for the redeemed, but also to give authority to dispense the blessings described in the covenant.

The priest caught the blood of the sacrifice in a basin, and then sprinkled that blood seven times on the altar (during Passover the blood was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of the houses; Exodus 12; Leviticus 4:5–7; 16:14–19). According to the Mosaic Law (Exodus 24:8), the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the people, as well as on the altar. By doing this divine act, the people would be consecrated to God, that is, they entered into covenant with Him (hence, the blood of the covenant; Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:19–20; 10:29; 13:20). It should be noted that under the Mosaic Covenant it was necessary for the sacrificial blood, which was shed in the court, to then be brought into the Holy of Holies. However, this was not required for the New Covenant. Christ accomplished the one oblation<sup>22</sup> that Aaron and his sons did in two acts, namely, the slaying of the sacrifice and the offering of the blood in the Holy of Holies.

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<sup>22</sup> The Anglican Church of Canada, "Articles of Religion," XXXI (Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross): "The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifices of Masses, in the which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits." <http://www.anglican.ca/resources/documents/39articles.html>

## Summary and Application

Reconciliation provides the dynamic for a changed life, salvation *by [Christ's] life* (Romans 5:10). This passage refers to Christ's present high-priestly ministry in heaven where *He ever lives to make intercession* for those who have trusted in Him. Christ's ministry to believers did not end after He ascended into heaven; rather He entered heaven in order that He would take His rightful place as Lord of the church and the universe. Christ's position as the believer's High Priest is highly significant as the means of their salvation and sanctification.<sup>23</sup>

Hebrews 4:14 states, *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession [of faith]*. The writer to the Hebrews views the ascension of Christ as being analogous to the Old Testament high priest who entered into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice that would be offered on the Mercy Seat. In contrast, Jesus Christ entered heaven by virtue of His blood. Jesus' sacrifice is effectual since as High Priest, propitiation has been completed (Hebrews 2:17) through the benefits of His death. As a result, Christ has *obtained eternal redemption* for those trusting in Him alone for salvation (Hebrews 9:12). It is only by the accomplishments of this once-for-all sacrifice that took place on the cross that He is the believer's Intercessor before the Father.

Grace has been defined as God giving to man what he does not possess himself, that is, spiritual life and strength. God also gives grace in order that man can do that which he is not able to do through his own efforts, that is, overcome the *lusts of the flesh* (Romans 7–8). Jesus Christ is *the* superior High Priest (Hebrews 8:1–6; 10:19–25) for the explicit reason that there is no earthly high priest who could offer grace through the blood of the

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<sup>23</sup> According to John 14:1–3, Christ is even now preparing an eternal dwelling place for believers.

sacrifice. For the believer grace enables obedience, while mercy remedies failure.

Hebrews 7:25 gives the fullest meaning of Christ’s intercession: *He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.* There is never a single moment of intermission by Christ before the Father. As believers confess their sins and offer their praise to the Savior, Christ responds with grace, mercy, and sympathy. This means that ultimate salvation for the elect is assured through the efficacious application to each saint the merits of the High Priest’s own blood. It is when believers confess their sins that, *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9). Jesus has entered heaven as *the forerunner. . . having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek* (Hebrews 6:20), and because of this believers have *boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. . . having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water* (Hebrews 10:19–22).

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