

Some late night shows, like Jimmy Kimmel, have a segment where an inside reporter goes out into the streets of a big city and asks random passersby pointed questions. Responses vary from confused to creative to cringe-inducing, though often amusing. If you went out into the streets of Verona (Monroe) and asked people, "How comfortable are you with being judged?", chances are you would gather plenty of negative reactions and responses. A majority of people today have no desire to be judged. Judgment is seen as a dirty word and some might be convinced that it's among the worst things that could happen to them. In a certain context, their point is fair - being misjudged and unrightfully looked down upon is an upsetting place to find yourself. But do you realize that some people actually look forward to being judged? You might be one of them.

Consider a school's science fair. Kids have worked for weeks on their projects, they've set up their 3-panel display board and have positioned themselves proudly in front of their table. Judges come around to take a close look at each individual's presentation. The kid whose project is complete, cleanly presented and meets the standards of the judges' expectations is confident and ready for judgment. The kid whose project was thrown together the morning of, unkempt and unsightly, and missing key components is not ready for judgment. That kid is under a lot of pressure. Any who walks by could see that they are in no way ready for the judges to review their work. The first kid who's prepared anticipates the judges' marks and hopes they will return quickly with good news. That kid can't wait for the judges to come back with perhaps a ribbon or medal or something that acknowledges a job well done. How do you feel about being judged? Instead of a science fair project, this time it's your life that is up for judgment. Are you ready for judgment? By exploring Hebrews chapter 9 you can say, "Yes, I am by Christ's blood" and "Yes, I eagerly await Christ's return."

The book of Hebrews focuses in on Jesus and how he affects the practices of the Old Testament. During the time of the Israelites when the tabernacle was the place of worship, sacrifices were made by officials called "high priests" who took animals and killed them on altars for the sake of the people. Hebrews reminds us, "there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood." It's a solemn statement that shows us the severity of our sinful condition. These animals that they would sacrifice were dying in the place of sinful people, and they pointed ahead to the coming sacrifice that Christ would make by dying on the cross in the place of sinful people. Christ's sacrifice was superior to what the high priests could perform with their lowly animal sacrifice. Only the blood of Christ is holy.

Back in the Israelites' camp was the tabernacle, a movable meeting place for worship. The tabernacle was a staple of their society and the center of the high priest's duties. We hear from our text, however, that it was not the tabernacle which Christ entered into, not this man-made structure that the high priests would go into, but heaven itself which God made in the beginning. A distinction must be made between the tabernacle, called "the copy of the true sanctuary" , and heaven where Jesus went to perform the duties of a high priest, being the mediator between God and mankind. It's true that God decided to reside within the meeting tent of the Israelites, reserving the inner most part, the Most Holy Place, for his presence. But heaven surpasses this temporary residence since it stands forever.

When Christ entered heaven his purpose was to intercede for us before the presence of God. Here he acted as high priest, coming to God on behalf of the people. He speaks on our behalf, defending

us and declaring us to be free from sin because of his life that he gave in our place. Because Christ goes before God citing his sacrifice on the cross we have confidence. The way he came into heaven was powerful, listen again to the words - "Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own." The blood that the high priests of ages past used was not their own. So again and again the people of Israel would provide animals to be sacrificed for their sins. They continued to bring forth sheep and cattle because they were imperfect and failed to keep God's law.

Just like the ancient Israelites, we also have failed to keep God's law which he provides for us in the Bible. On our own we are exposed, having nothing to show but ugly misdeeds and thoughts, a life that has gone against God's commands. It's for this very reason that Christ entered the world to give himself up for us! If Christ were no better than those high priests he would have had to come to earth over and over "and suffer many times since the creation of the world" to cover for our constant disobedience.

Yet we see that Christ's sacrificial offering did not need to be repeated. There's power in his blood, precious and perfect, not tainted by sin. The sacrifice was himself, not an animal, not another person. Without Christ's sacrifice we would not be ready for judgment at all. Thankfully, this is not the case. We are not left to our own devices. "He [Christ] has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Jesus appeared on earth, died once, for all people. What great love! To do something so monumental for those who could do nothing but disobey. It's as if the teacher of the student at the science fair who was ill-prepared came over and fixed the errors and put the correct data on the graph. God accepted this offering as one that mended the fissure between God and humanity. Have no doubt that you're ready for judgment because of Christ's blood that takes away your sin and purifies you.

"Once and for all" is a powerful phrase that deserves more consideration. The payment for sin came in a package labeled, "once and for all." When the delivery guy comes into a convenience store to drop off supplies, the manager signs on the line week in and week out. Here, God has personally signed for you and told you that Christ's death and resurrection is all you need for the rest of your life. There won't be another delivery or an expectation for you to sign your name. God has done that for you.

Just as Christ died for all people once, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that death comes to each person, "Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." Judgment comes when death comes. The Bible makes this clear enough. We've earned death for ourselves. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God", and "the wages of sin is death." When Revelation talks about heaven it says nothing impure will enter it, no one who does what is shameful, only those whose names are in the book of life. The Greek in this verse points out that this judgment occurs with no break, no extra time, no space between death and judgment. Others attempt to try and wedge another chance in there and take the words of this verse and twist them to align with their faulty interpretation, but our time here on earth is the only time to be brought to faith.

After all, what could you do after you die to make yourself right with God? You can't even make yourself right with God now while you're alive! Being a sinner, you are powerless to undo the sin you have on your account. Right... there's nothing you can do to make yourself righteous and follow God by sheer will and determination. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Ephesians 2 reminds us of our position prior to the gift of faith, we're spiritually dead, unable to move towards God. Of course, neither Ephesians nor God's Word stops there, leaving us with no hope. God has provided the solution. God has provided grace. When you know that payment for sin comes in a package with a "once for all" sticker placed on top of it, the sacrifice of Jesus gives you complete confidence. It's a done deal.

Christ shouldered the weight of our sin and offered himself as a sacrifice once "and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." Note the difference in bringing salvation. Christ will not come again to take up the sin we've committed, he's already done that. He's secured salvation and the hope of heaven. The second time he will come to bring salvation to those who eagerly await his return.

What does this mean for us? Heaven will be an immediate reality for believers, finally arriving at our true home. Our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like Christ's glorified body. We no longer suffer at the hands of a corrupt world. This is a judgment for which we are ready! Christ will usher in a new era where the old things have passed away. He says, "I am making everything new!" Great reward awaits those who believe, who trust in Jesus as their Savior.

So are you ready for judgment? Do you feel like the kid who has a prize-worthy project? Imagine if at that science fair you overheard murmurs that your project had made the top list. "This one is getting first for sure!" More than just rumors running around the room, you have God declaring salvation to be a fact. You are in the winner's position, on the right side of judgment because you are connected to Christ. You're not knocked down by God's verdict, but lifted up, just as Jesus was brought to life again in the resurrection. Christ took on the wrath of God so that you would be spared.

You are ready for judgment because the blood of Christ purifies you from your sin. Knowing the good news of sins forgiven means eagerly awaiting Christ's return. When he comes again you will receive eternal life with God, a gift of his grace, where you will not be dragged down by the world or your sinful nature, but instead enjoying heaven with your Savior. Look ahead to Christ's second coming with joy! There is nothing to fear for those who belong to God. Christ has bought you back from death and given you life!