

Lesson 25
Christ Cleanses the Conscience
Hebrews 9:6-14

The ninth chapter of Hebrews may seem a little confusing to us who are removed two thousand years from first century Judaism, but this letter was perfectly clear to the Jewish-Christians to whom the author was writing.

This section may seem difficult and even a little dull, so we are going to start with the author's conclusion and then give an exposition of the passage.

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:13-14)

The basic thought is that the death of Christ can “cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living and true God.” The issue here is what to do with the nagging religious conscience. The conscience is that immaterial part of man that sits in judgment over the will. Conscience gives us a human sense of right and wrong. Someone has said that the conscience is “that still, small voice that makes you feel smaller still,” or as a young lad said, “It is that which feels bad when everything else feels good.”

In the case of the Hebrew-Christians, their consciences were not troubled over evil deeds but “dead works.” The “dead works” refer to the Old Testament Levitical worship system that was part of the Mosaic Law. When Christ came to this world the Mosaic Law and the Levitical worship system came to an end. Christ fulfilled all the types and shadows of the Old Testament. However, these professing Hebrew-Christians were thinking seriously about abandoning Christianity and going back into Judaism to participate in the Jewish sacrifices ritual because they felt this was how they could best please God. They had two thousand years of Jewish history behind them that told them that they had to offer sacrifices as Jews to be accepted by God and many were having a difficult time resting in the finished work of Christ for their sins. Their consciences told them that they were not saved unless they did something for their salvation. They, therefore, put their nagging consciences to rest by religious activity. Their consciences goaded them into a high-gear program in order to please God.

We can apply this same situation over to twentieth century Christianity. Today there are millions of churchgoers who are strangers to the grace of God and are involved in endless church activity to please God. This high-intensive program may range all the way from bead-counting and candle-lighting to serving on countless church committees, passing out tracts, teaching Sunday school or whatever. A person may have a nagging religious conscience and know nothing about God's free grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What real difference in motive is there between a poor, blinded pagan who, in his misconception

of truth, crawls endlessly down a road to placate God, and an American Christian who busies himself in a continual round of activity to try to win a sense of acceptance before God? None whatsoever! Religious works can never cleanse the conscience,

OLD TESTAMENT SERVICE WAS INADEQUATE TO CLEANSE THE CONSCIENCE - Hebrews 9:6-7

“Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing divine worship, but into the second only the high priest enters, once a year, not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.” -- A priest could enter the Holy Place at any time as long as he cleansed himself at the Laver, but only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and he could not enter it without the blood of animal sacrifices. Only one person (the high priest) could come to the one place (Holy of Holies) only once a year (on the Day of Atonement) and he could come only on one basis (blood). The blood came from the sacrifice of goats and bullocks. The goats' blood covered the sins of the people and the bullocks' blood covered the sins of the high priest, the priests and their families. The high priest had to make a sacrifice for himself because he was still a sinner, even though he held the highest religious office in all of Judaism.

Notice carefully that the sins atoned for on the Day of Atonement were sins of ignorance. Willful sins were to be confessed to God and a sacrifice made on the Brazen Altar. God is concerned that a person's sins of omission, as well as his sins of commission, be atoned for. This sacrifice on the Day of Atonement when the blood was poured on the Mercy Seat covered believing Israel's sins for one year, but each year this ritual had to be repeated.

This Old Testament ritual was only a type or symbol that pointed forward to Christ who would come to be the perfect sacrifice for sins. Animal sacrifices only prefigured salvation; they could not save in themselves. The conscience of the Israelite could never find real rest or peace or assurance of being inwardly purified and brought into full communion with God in animal blood sacrifices because these sacrifices dealt with external ritual and not internal spiritual power. The Old Testament priest had to keep on serving God through ritual because their sins were never really atoned for until Christ came to be the perfect sacrifice.

OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES WERE INADEQUATE TO CLEANSE THE CONSCIENCE - Hebrews 9:8-10

“The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the Holy Place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ...” -- As long as the earthly tabernacle and the Mosaic Law were in force, there could be no open and free access to the heavenly tabernacle or holy place because Christ and the New Covenant had not come, but when Christ came, all was fulfilled.

“...which is a symbol for the time then present, according to which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect (complete, mature) in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.” -- The Old Testament worship and sacrificial system awaited its “time of

reformation” which means “until the time of the new order.” In Christ comes a new order of worship and a new Christian life style.

If the Old Testament worshippers saw no deeper than the ordinance they were performing, (and rarely did they ever go beyond this outward act), the only benefit of the ritual would be to the body. These affected only the outer man and not the inner man. Service, ritual, sacrifice and ordinances do nothing to the performer but affect the body. No ritual or ordinance has value in itself. In the Old Testament system, the conscience was not touched and therefore the worshipper had no rest and his conscience was continually hounding him, making him feel guilty, dragging him back to perform the same thing over and over again in a restless search for peace.

The ritual of the Old Testament was designed by God as an object lesson to point to Christ, and there were many spiritual lessons for the Jews to learn. However, most of them missed the whole point and thought that God was interested in ritual. God has never been interested in ritual per se, but only in the heart of a person for Him. Religious activity in itself will never please God or cleanse the conscience. A person must go behind the ritual to get the spiritual meaning, and until he does go deeper than the ritual, he will be caught in the trap of endless religious activity that can never please God.

King David, after he had been guilty of murder and adultery, came to realize that God was far more interested in one’s heart than his ritual. In Psalm 51:16-17 he says, ***“For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”***

CHRIST’S SACRIFICE IS ADEQUATE TO CLEANSE THE CONSCIENCE - Hebrews 9:11-14

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come ...” -- Christ is superior to the Old Testament system because He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament types, symbols and promises. When Christ came, the Levitical system became old or dated. Christ brought “good things” in that a whole new order of spiritual worship had arrived.

“...He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation ...” -- Christ is superior to the Old Testament system because Christ serves in a heavenly tabernacle. The heavenly tabernacle is a greater and more perfect tabernacle than the earthly tabernacle. Furthermore, Christ entered into this heavenly tabernacle on the benefits of His death.

“... and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood. He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” -- Christ is superior to the Old Testament system because He shed His own blood, not the blood of brute animals. The “blood of Christ” speaks of Christ’s atoning sacrifice for sins, and because He shed His precious blood. His sacrifice gave Him entrance into the heavenly sanctuary.

Why did Christ die? Why did He shed His holy blood? That He might obtain eternal redemption and the objects of eternal redemption are true believers in Christ. True believers in Christ have been redeemed; that is, they have been purchased out of the slave market of sin and Christ paid the ransom with His own blood. Believers have been purchased eternally. We belong to Christ because He redeemed us, for we have been bought with a price, the inestimable price of Christ's blood.

Christ's shed blood is the basis for our salvation and without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

“Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

“And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood” (Rev. 1:5).

We must never be ashamed of the blood of Christ, for upon that blood our salvation rests.

In the first century, slave trade was part of the Roman culture. According to some papyri writings there was a beautiful woman who was put up on the slave block for sale to a new master. There was a Roman soldier who was quite rich and his eye was attracted to this woman. He bought this woman, after much bidding, for a very high price, and when he had purchased her out of the slave market he said, “Woman, I have bought you out of slavery and now you belong to me. I am your new master and I can do whatever I please to do with you. I am pleased to set you free. I, from this moment on, make you a free woman.” He set her free and walked away. As he turned to walk away, the woman was so amazed at this man's graciousness, concern and love, she fell at his feet, grasping his toga and said, “Sir, you have set me free and I am so grateful that from this day on I voluntarily become your slave!”

Can a man be saved if he denies the blood of Christ atoned for sin? No! Can a person be saved if he is trusting in anything else to save him but the sacrificial death of Christ through the shed blood? No! We must trust only in Christ's blood. When I ask some people what they are trusting to get to heaven they reply, “I am being as good as I can,” (trusting self), or “I am trying as hard as I can,” (trusting works), or “I have faith that I am going to heaven,” (trusting in faith), but it is not until one is trusting in Christ's death and His shed blood that he is genuinely saved. This is resting squarely on the work of another to save us and to take us to heaven.

The song, “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus,” is true: “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Men naturally want to work for their salvation and they so want to soothe their consciences that they will get involved in endless religious activity, thinking that activity will appease God. Nothing appeases God but the blood of Christ and all anyone can ever do is trust the blood of Christ to save him. God does not like men better because they serve Him. God does not love

men because they serve Him but because God is love and He has fixed His eternal love upon all who trust wholly in Christ! Service for Christ springs out of a heart filled with God's love and our motivation for service is to be a delight as well as a duty.

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh ...” -- Christ is superior to the Old Testament system because those sacrifices could only cleanse in a physical sense, but they did not cleanse his conscience. The Old Testament did give external, physical and bodily cleansing.

“... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” -- Christ's sacrifice is superior to the Old Testament system because Christ's death does cleanse the conscience. Christ, in His death, made a voluntary offering of Himself. He chose to die for sin and sinners as the Lamb without spot or blemish.

The death of Christ purifies one's conscience; it gives a sense of forgiveness; we experience peace and pardon because we have been reconciled to God. When the conscience is purified, there is a great moral and spiritual change in us. We flee all dead works; that is, religious works done to please God and salve our conscience. We now know and understand that forgiveness is only in the death of Christ through His shed blood. All religious works are dead works and devoid of any power before God. However, with the conscience cleansed by the blood of Christ, we now “serve the living God.” Before conversion to Christ, we did religious works to please God, but after conversion we serve God out of appreciation for our purified hearts through the blood of Christ. Religious works were motivated by fear but spiritual works are motivated by love.

I remember reading a story about a woman who was saved in a New York downtown mission. This woman was a woman of the street and was saved off the streets by God's grace. After she was saved she used to stand in New York pulpits and give her testimony and would say, “It was no common blood that washed Nellie Conroy from her sin. It was the blood of Christ.” Before she was saved she would come into the meetings in the mission and take a back seat. If anyone would come near her she would put up her hand to stop them. She did not want anyone to come near her. She said afterwards that she felt if a decent woman would brush her skirts that woman would be defiled. As she walked the streets she gave decent women lots of room so that they would not touch her. However, one night at the mission she came under the convicting work of the Spirit and trusted Christ as her Savior and Lord. Those that wanted to trust Christ were asked to come forward and she did so with tears in her eyes and she fell down on her knees at the altar. When she got up many of the mission women who had witnessed to her threw their arms around her in great jubilation. Nellie Conroy did not push them away but she threw her arms around them too. Why? Because Nellie Conroy had her guilty conscience cleansed by Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

You who are without Christ are in desperate need of cleansing. If you are not cleansed by Christ, you will perish in your sins. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse you and give you the forgiveness of sins. You must trust Christ's sacrificial death and shed blood alone to save you.

Stop trusting any human works to get you to heaven. A moral life, church membership, baptism, liberal giving, humanitarianism and endless religious activity will not purify your conscience. Only Christ's blood can forgive sins and cleanse the sin-stained conscience.

The song writer puts it,

*“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins.
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”*