

The Power of a Cleansed Conscience

Hebrews 9

Opening illustration:

My first real experience with the gravity of guilt- was when I was a little boy – we broke my grandmother’s birdbath. My best friend JJ Hill and I had been warned not to touch this concrete birdbath in my grandmother’s front yard, but as we walked by we couldn’t resist splashing each other and eventually it tipped over. We had to do something and we thought fast and decided to hide the pieces behind a roll of shrubs. My grandmother got home and we told her that a couple of guys stole it – we even gave her a description of the men. As far as we could tell that was the end of it.

I went home and avoided my parents, I went back into my room and closed the door.

My grandfather got home later that day and as he was mowing he found the pieces to the birdbath. To teach me a lesson they called later and said, “We found the men you described and the police have them surrounded at gunpoint right now”. He called my bluff...

The guilt was enormous but somehow I considered the possibility of letting them just go ahead and shoot the guys..... ***Eventually I confessed.***

But it was at that age that I learned this incredible lesson –

- *I learned that guilt is experienced like a weight we carry.*
- *I learned that guilt from one relationship affects every relationship.*
- *I learned that guilt is like a monster that thrives in darkness and secrecy.*
- *It was like a spot that couldn’t be washed away.*

ILLUSTRATION: Shakespeare captured the essence of guilt in the character of Lady MacBeth who after urging for her husband’s murder... found that the guilt was like a stain she couldn’t wash away. She would wash her hands incessantly saying, “out spot, out I say” The guilt of her sin eventually drove her insane.

CONTEXT: In our text the author is showing the inability of the Old Covenant to completely remove the guilt of the soul.

When the author sat down to write the book of Hebrews (AD 60’s) the Temple still stood in Jerusalem in all of its glory. The Temple would be torn down in keeping with Jesus prophecy within a decade. At this point those Jews who embraced Christianity were still very much embracing Judaism as well. So it was common for them to worship at the Temple (or a synagogue) on the Sabbath then to gather with the church on the Lord’s day.

One of the great difficulties early church leaders faced was enabling these people to understand how this ancient religion of Judaism related to this new faith of Christianity.

Imagine - the Old system INVOLVED RULES, a PLACE, and a WORKS.

I. THE OLD SYSTEM

A. The Old System had HOLY RULES -

TEXT: Hebrews 9:1–28 (ESV)

¹ Now even the first covenant had **regulations** for worship and an earthly place of holiness.

There were clear **rules** - It was clear, you knew if you were keeping or breaking the rules.

- There were rules for washing.
- There were things you couldn't touch.
- There were people you couldn't hang out with.

The problem with rules is we have a tendency to **avoid the hard questions** when we base our spirituality on rules.

ILLUSTRATION: The prodigal son comes home and the Father throughs a party... but do you remember what the older brother said? I've kept all the rules... yet I never got a party! There were hard questions he needed to be asking...

- **Generosity** - If a person gave 10% they considered themselves generous. The fact is for some people 10% is incredibly stingy. Jesus would not allow people to mark a box that easily - generosity meant delving deep into the heart and asking some really hard questions.
- **Mission** - The Pharisees traveled about on sea and land to make one convert. They marked the box and considered the job done... but Jesus says, "Look at him.... he's worse after you "win" him than he was before! Stop it - ask hard questions... look at the fruit!

But you see, we prefer rules, simple, concrete rules... Now our rules may not be the same as theirs, but we have them and we love them.

ILLUSTRATION: I heard about one guy who had as his rule - do not be legalistic, so he wrote a list of 10 things he had to do to avoid legalism. Do you see how silly we are? We make rules to avoid rules!

But there is a problem with rules based Christianity - ⁹ this **cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper.**

The Old System had Holy Rules...

B. The Old System had a HOLY PLACE -

There is something about a place that we like.

ILLUSTRATION: Remember when Jesus met the woman at the well - she said, "well the problem with religion is we can't agree on the place... jews say here in Jerusalem and our people says it's over on that mountain". Jesus said - it's not about a place it's about the heart.

For them it was the TEMPLE in Jerusalem - I can go there and be holy.
We love places of holiness - For some it may be a building...

ILLUSTRATION: I'll never forget having a long talk with a man who readily confessed that he did a lot of bad things.. but he took great comfort in the fact that he didn't do them in church... Now I may dip tobacco in the parking lot, but I would NEVER do so in church... I may get drunk at home, but I would never come to church with even a hint of alcohol on my breath. WHY? Because he liked the idea of THIS being the holy place... Jesus wouldn't let you get away with that - he said, "You are the TEMPLE".

- We love holy *rules*
- We love holy *places*

But there is a problem - ⁹ this **cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper.**

See - you can keep all the rules and you can practically live at the church and still have a defiled consciences.

C. The Old System had HOLY WORKS -

The TEMPLE was in three sections -

- a. The Gentile Court - this was as far as non Jews could go
- b. The Jewish Court - this was as far as the average Israelite could go
- c. The Holy Place - this was only for the priest
- d. The Inner Sanctum - the Holy of Holies - only the High Priest could enter and that only one time per year.

Over the entrance to the inner sanctum was a great curtain. It was called the paroket, which means literally "shut off," which was exactly the veil's purpose.

It was a 4 inch thick curtain made over overlapping fabric of red, purple and blue. Behind it was thick darkness where it was believed that the shakinah glory of God was manifest.

The High Priest would enter the inner sanctum one time a year on the day of atonement (Yom Kippor).

PRIESTLY RITUAL - Old Testament scholar Ray Dillard describes it: "*A week beforehand, the high priest was put into seclusion— The night before the Day of Atonement he didn't go to bed; he stayed up all night praying and reading God's Word to purify his soul.*

Then on Yom Kippur he bathed head to toe and dressed in pure, unstained white linen.

He offered three bulls.

- The first he paid for, and it was an offering for his personal sins—you see this referred to in verse 7.

- After that he came out and bathed completely again, and new white linen was put on him, and he went in again, this time sacrificing for the sins of the priests.
- He would come out a third time, and he bathed again from head to toe and they dressed him in brand new pure linen. HE put on AN EPHOD with stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel showing that they were on his heart and he was representing them), and he went into the holy of holies and atoned for the sins of all the people....

Dillard continues... *“this was all done in public. The temple was crowded, and those in attendance watched closely. There was a thin screen, and he bathed behind it. But the people were present: They saw him bathe, dress, go in, come back out. He was their representative before God, and they were there cheering him on. They were very concerned to make sure that everything was done properly and with purity, because he represented them before God.*

After this the High Priest would come out and they would go through the ceremony of the **scapegoat**. Two goats were brought: one was sacrificed for sin, the priest would take his blood and sprinkle it toward the people (you’ll see that referred to); and then they would take a piece of wool and dip it into the blood and tie it around the neck of the other goat (that’s what the ‘scarlet wool’ in verse 19 refers to) and then set that goat free in the wilderness, representing the fact that the goat was carrying away the sin of the people. (That’s where we get the phrase “scapegoat”.)

Now all of that was supposed to be a “**Shadow**” that pointed to the **Substance** of Christ - but there is something about works that causes us to miss the point...

There is something about when we sin - we just want to do something in order to regain holiness. That is why the catholic system is so appealing to some... say 5 hail Mary’s and your good. Someone told me last week - I just want to dig a ditch or something to get forgiveness... it is much harder to just accept it.

BUT LOOK AT VERSE 9...

⁹ ...that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,

¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

NOW NOTICE THE SOLUTION:

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing **an eternal redemption.**

Three things Christ Accomplished that the Old System could not -

II. The Gospel

A. Genuine Purity

Jesus did not simply cover our guilt - he removed it entirely.

¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**

How is it that the blood of Jesus can purify us of our sin? To be perfectly honest with you, I cannot full comprehend it - but that is what the bible teaches.

C.S. Lewis called it the “Deeper magic” of the universe, that when an innocent willfully suffers for the guilty, then the curse upon the guilty is reversed.

ILLUSTRATIONS: One of the false teachings going around these days is that the blood of Christ, the death of Christ wasn't necessary it was just a way of him showing us that he loved us... that it totally illogical.

Can you imagine if I were walking down the street with my daughter Caitlyn and I said, “Caitlyn let me show you how much daddy loves you - and then I through myself into oncoming traffic and was killed”. That doesn't communicate love it communicates insanity.

But suppose Caitlyn was about to be run over by oncoming traffic and I through her out of the way and in the process it cost me my life. I substituted myself for her - that is love.

When Christ died he push us out of the path of God's wrath and the absorbed it on our behalf.

So you sins HAVE BEEN PAID FOR. The wrath of God has been poured out - there is no hell for you to take it was emptied on Christ.

B. True Service

¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**

When you look to Christ by faith - your works are revolutionized. No longer are you working to appease God... but because God has been appeased.

ILLUSTRATION: Listen - if you do something good so that God will reward you with forgiveness... you don't love God you love YOU.

We have a lady in the church and her parents have a nice home in the mountains. She has told my family that we are welcome to go there on vacation anytime we want. It was incredibly gracious of her.

But suppose I heard about this Mountain home and she hadn't offered it to us. Suppose I invited her family over for dinner and made them a big steak dinner... thinking to myself - If I'm nice to her, perhaps I can stay in her Parents place. Do you see that the dinner wasn't out of love - it was an investment.

That's what dead religion is - it is doing stuff, giving stuff, attending stuff - so maybe God will be good to us. Christianity is all about relationship - God says, "I love you - done deal, its settled" now we serve because we love him back, not to gain something.

B. Eager Longing

²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Before we are cleansed we dread God.

Like Adam in the garden we hide from him. Have you ever thought about it? Adam was no more naked after he ate of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil than he was before... but now everything he was had been touched by sin... he was polluted... and he hid himself.

That's how sin works - we begin to put up walls between us and God and us and other people.

Sometimes we even punish ourselves - we say, "well I just can't forgive myself".

But when we really see grace, we really see the Gospel - it is so revolutionary... we see that the most perfect person in all the universe has completely and totally accepted us and loved us and brought us in... no one else's opinion, not even our own compares to his.... so we LONG for him... we don't fear him.

CONCLUSION: Today every single person under the sound of my voice is living in one of two realities.....

You are either in some form of the Old System:

You have rules, you have a place, you have a plan - where you do stuff to make yourself feel better... but deep down you know...the guilt remains... the conscience is still defiled.

OR you are in Christ -

He, through his blood has cleaned you from all guilt... NOT JUST COVERED IT... REMOVED IT... and you are walking in purity because of it.

Which is it?

I have discovered the best way to discern what you are trusting in... is to look to those times when your mind is truly relaxed - your most sincere answer will surface... what was your answer at the beginning of this sermon?

Did it point to Christ and his work? Or you and your work?

LET'S PRAY...