

Title: A Good Conscience

Text: Hebrews 9:6-10

INTRODUCTION:

—Have you ever had a warped view of someone, because your credentials limited the exposure you could have with that person? Imagine that you're a low-level employee of a huge corporation, but once a year you're given VIP access to meet with the boss for a half-hour; he seems to tolerate you but there's no time to relate. However, unbeknownst to you, you fall in love with the boss' child who is your age, and eventually marry. Through that union, the boss is now your Father-in-law and access opens to allow you to have close fellowship to know His true heart. —Just as the limited VIP access once a year didn't allow for close and intimate fellowship with the Boss, the Old Mosaic Covenant, specifically on the Day of Atonement, allowed temporary access to God, but was unable to provide close fellowship with Him. This passage in Hebrews 9:6-10 points towards this dilemma...

MOVEMENT 1:

—Hebrews 9:6 *These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties....* -This passage is taking into account the regulations for worship: lighting of the lampstand, preparing the bread of presence, and lighting the incense (Heb. 9:2-3). These duties were done daily by the priests in the Holy Place (outer room of the temple). Again, this room was a replica of Eden—the earthly mountain where God dwelled with Humanity.

—Hebrews 9:7 *BUT into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.* —Under the Old Mosaic Covenant this offering which is usually called a “sin offering” can be better understood as a “purification offering.”¹ The day of Atonement was a ceremony of temporary purification for the people so that God could grant them access into His presence, but its impact was limited. —**Hebrews 10:1-3** *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the TRUE FORM of these realities [namely Christ/the true temple], it can NEVER, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.* 2 *Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?* 3 *But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.*

—Like having chronic pain which you mask with pain medicine; you feel better but the pain killer only last so long until you have to take it again, reminding you that the problem isn't truly fixed —Although these ritual purification offerings served their intended purpose to temporarily approve a person to come into God's presence, they never had the ability to fix the imperfections associated with our fallen humanity, so that we could actually have ongoing fellowship with Him (abide/remain/pursue anytime and anywhere).² **God wanted**

¹ The term “sin” makes us think the animal offered was to forgive the moral failures of people, however this offering was one of ritual purification. Every person falls short of God's divine perfection, not because of evil we do, but because as people we are not holy or perfect like God (1 Sam. 2:2; Rev. 15:4); therefore our access into His holy presence and sacred space is limited by our impurities and imperfections. —On the day of atonement, once a year, the High Priest would take a bull and offer it as a sacrifice so that he and his sons were purified; he would then bring the blood inside the Most Holy Place revealing his undeserved but now acceptable entry into holy space (Lev. 16:2-3). On that special day, he needed the closest access to God's divine presence in preparation to purify the congregation of people —After that, the high priest presented a “purification offering” for the people, and it was a little different. Two goats were used. One goat was offered to the Lord and killed for the purification of people, so that they might have access to God, and the other goat was offered to Azazel which in ancient texts was the name of the goat demon of the wilderness. This goat wasn't killed but released to carry the sins of the people into the wilderness—the demonic realm where sin belongs. Although Lev. 4:20, 36, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18 says that through these sacrifices people “shall be forgiven,” this verb for “forgive” *salach* means to be “positively disposed toward” or “pardon,” but it does not mean to “take away sin” which would be *nasa’*. In other words, the purification approves the person to come into God's presence, but it doesn't remove the sin; only Jesus' sacrifice would both make the person pure and perfect before the Lord.

² The mosaic law couldn't fix the imperfections of our flesh which was enslaved to sin, but Isaiah writes: by his stripes we are healed of the plague (Isa. 53:5). The better hope was a person—Christ!

to draw near to His people, but because of our imperfections we had limited access to Him in time and space. This had to be spiritually exhausting and burdening for the people, because they couldn't participate in His holiness. —**Heb. 7:18-19** *For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside BECAUSE of its weakness and uselessness* 19 (for the law made NOTHING perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope [Christ and the new covenant] is introduced, through which we draw near to God. —In Christ—the perfect lamb who was sacrificed on the cross, outside of the holy city, in the wilderness—our sin went to where it belongs—the grave, the pit, death, Sheol³ so that we might be purified for all time. **HOWEVER, if Christ simply died, we would have been purified, but he also resurcts and conquers death, so that we would have NEW LIFE—becoming a new creation in which humanity can now relate and fellowship with God intimately, no longer separated by time and space** (2 Cor. 5:17)! —**Ezekiel 36:26-27:** *And I will give you a NEW heart, and a NEW spirit I will put within you. And I will REMOVE the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and CAUSE YOU TO WALK in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. In Christ alone we are now both purified and perfected!* Because of this, you can worship him in spirit and in truth whenever and wherever you are...and it's even sweeter when done in community.

MOVEMENT 2:

Hebrews 9:8-9a *By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is NOT YET opened as long as the first section is still standing 9 (which is symbolic for the present age).* This is speaking of the true Holy Place (Heaven) (Heb. 9:24). I personally take a position rooted in early Church history here, where it's understood that the author of Hebrews is acknowledging that as long as the Mosaic Law with its Temple practices was operational, when people died back then they were *not* going to heaven but still entering Sheol. OT describes Sheol synonymously with death, the pit, the grave—a dark chasm of lifelessness, unconsciousness, a holding place of a soul awaiting resurrection and judgment.⁴ With the exception of first century martyrs for Christ who seemed to have early access into the heavens through their blood,⁵ which wasn't necessarily reality for everyone else; but some believe that when the age of the Old Covenant came to an end with the destruction of the temple (70 AD), *then* the entrance into the true Holy Place—the heavens became open to the saints past, present, and future.

Hebrews 9:9b-10 *According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered 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.* In other words, as long as these purification offerings were active during the Mosaic age, they were hindering the entrance into the true Holy Place (heaven) UNTIL the consummation of the New Covenant, because the old way couldn't perfect one morally. **HOWEVER, Christ's sacrifice perfects us so we can enter heaven with him.** **Hebrews 9:14** *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.* Christ, the pure and spotless lamb (Jn. 1:29), willingly offered himself as a perfect sacrifice, so that we could be perfected morally in Him under this new and better covenant.

—**1 Peter 3:18-21** *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah,*

³ “For the wages of sin is death...” (Rom. 6:23).

⁴ Sheol also seemed to be a physical place, but not necessarily a place where those who passed away had a physical body: “...Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell” (Ps. 49:14b). Either way one looks at it, Sheol wasn't something anyone looked towards, but there did seem to have been a “good side” or positive perspective concerning Sheol (which could be referred to as Abraham's bosom or Paradise) while there also seemed to have been a darker side or negative perspective of the grave (sometimes referred to by the Greeks as hades). “Hades is comparable to Sheol as a domain within it, but within it resides a sanctuary for the righteous called Abraham's bosom.” Ultimately, the righteousness of a person prior to death, played a key role in where one found themselves in the “afterlife”—or a sorry attempt for a “life.”

⁵ Revelation 6:9-11

*while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, THROUGH the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. —Like one pointing back to the wedding ceremony as the marker of the union that had ultimately taken place behind closed doors, baptism reveals the union and perfection we have in Christ, by His death and resurrection! —**Baptism becomes the object we can look back on to remember Christ's resurrection and that we are new in Him.***

CONCLUSION:

—Why is any of this significant? As a Christian young man I had a warped view of God, because whenever I gave myself over to sin and temptation, I believed and agreed with the accusations of the enemy that would follow my failure, and the shame and guilt would lead me to judge myself by the Old Covenant law that revealed my sickness of sin and couldn't fix. In turn this made me believe that God was irritated, ashamed, and angry with me. —I thought I could only win His favor by trying to outdo my evil with good; this was exhausting, leading me to wonder each day if I had done enough to appease Him. —There's a lot of Christians who take to heart the accusations of the enemy, leading them to condemn themselves, and see God not as a loving Father but as an irritated, angry, ashamed and distant stepdad. —However, when one begins to understand that in Christ, they are a new creation and that they've been clothed in Christ's priestly garments, in the waters of baptism, He becomes their righteousness. Conviction now becomes a gracious gift to remind us to look to Jesus—our righteousness, so that we can be a living sacrifice, until we breathe our last and enter in the true Holy Place with our Great High Priest. —For those of us who have tasted the healing powers of Christ in our lives, be the lampstands who don't condemn your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and cast stones when they mess up, but love them as Christ loved you knowing that in gentleness this restores them. —**When your imperfections show, remember Christ is your perfection, therefore boldly live a sacrificial life of love!**