

## Hebrews 9:1-10

### “A clean conscience”

#### I. Introduction

#### II. Vs. 1-5 Better than the best

#### III. Vs. 6-10 Three limitations

#### I. Introduction

The ninth chapter of Hebrews is very detailed and to be quite honest for most of us, confusing with regards to how to apply its truths. First of all, we need to realize that what the writer was writing about was perfectly clear to the Hebrew readers. This section describes in detail Exodus chapters 26-28 and the tabernacle in the wilderness. The chapter deals with one of the most difficult aspects of humanity: *What to do with our nagging conscience?* The subject isn't immediately identified until we skip forward in Hebrews chapter 9 to verses 13-14. It is in those two verses that we gain perspective of this chapter: “*how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” The writer is drawing his readers into *the practical effect of Jesus' ministry* which are highlighted by the words to, “*cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*” The problem the author is dealing with is something that we all have to deal with, “*How to handle a nagging conscience?*” A Conscience has been defined as:

- “*That still, small voice that makes you feel smaller still.*”
- “*It's what causes you to feel bad when everything else feels good!*”
- The Disney prophet Jiminy Cricket defined it as, “*A conscience is that still small voice that people won't listen to.*”

*The truth is a conscience is NOT the means by which we tell what is right and what is*

wrong. A conscience was never supposed to be that. It is ONLY training in God's Word by His Holy Spirit that tells us what is right or wrong. It is only then that our conscience plays a part by insisting that we do what we now know is right and avoid what we now know is wrong. Without a sanctified conscience we can be misguided into thinking that what we think is right is wrong and what we think is wrong is right! Our conscience can accuse us when we violate whatever standard we have adopted, even when that standard may be wrong when viewed in the light of God's Word by His Holy Spirit. And our conscience can also wrongly approve us when we live up to some wrong standard.

Based upon the text, these Hebrews did not have a troubled conscience because of “*evil deeds*”, but because of “*dead works*.” The readers of this letter who were professing Christians knew how to handle the problem of sin. They knew that when they disobeyed God's word that the way to deal with their conscience was to confess their sin before God, and receive His forgiveness. But their problem was an overactive conscience that was plagued with guilt over sins of omission (good left undone), not sins of commission (sinful behavior). They were trying to put their conscience to rest by religious activity; trying to ease their troubled conscience by appeasing God by greater religious activity! You can't find fault with their desire to please God but you can find fault with the motivation they employed to do so; intensive religious activity! The difference from those who have an over active conscience in comparison to those who don't can't be measured by activity but instead must be weighed on the MOTIVE behind such activity! We don't serve to placate God! Our activity is not to try to win the acceptance before God! God is not impressed by our increased effort. At issue is the motivation behind the

religious activity that these Hebrews were being tested to go and do to “cleanse their conscience”. This section divides into two sections as we look at two covenants through the lens of two sanctuaries the first we will tackle this morning the next we will look at next week:

1. Vs. 1-10 We look at the religious activity of the first covenant: In verse 2-5 we will look at the sanctuary, verses 6-7 we will look at the services in the sanctuary and finally in verses 8-10 we will look at the significance of all of this.
2. Vs. 11-14 We look at the sanctuary in verse 11, the services in 12, and their significance in verse 13-14.

## II. Vs. 1-5 Better than the best

Vs. 1-5 Throughout the book of Hebrews the writer continues to illustrate the superiority of Jesus by comparing him to all that these Hebrews held holy about their religion. But through out all of these comparisons the writer never says that things that the Hebrews worshiped or held in high regard were worthless, instead he said they were God ordained.

**The writer never elevated Jesus at the expense of running Judaism down, instead he made Jesus even greater by showing Him superior to what they already held as**

**precious!** He didn't need to elevate Jesus by belittling their faith! The first point the

writer needs to make is to defend the first covenant so that his readers won't

misunderstand his point. The activity of the first covenant was NOT worthless or

pointless. In fact, it was sanctioned and authored by God! There problem wasn't that that

they weren't from God, no **their problem was that they were temporary and symbolic!**

Here in these first 5 verses we see the description of the tabernacle with all of the activity

that went along with it. By comparison, only two chapter are dedicated to the creation

account where as there are over 50 chapter dedicated to the tabernacle specifically

chapters 25-40 of Exodus. The reason for this is that it is a portrait of Jesus and His work. This is why the the writer here in this chapter goes out of his way to show that the problem wasn't the activity, or the place of the activity, the tabernacle. All of this was God's idea and His design and all of the activity that went on in that place was God-authorized. There was nothing wrong with the activity of worship in the tabernacle; it was God-authorized, and perfectly proper. There was nothing wrong about the God-authorized regulations; the preparations the priests had to continually do in performing their duties. So if there was nothing wrong with the activity, why couldn't it continue? That is what the writer will go on to discuss in verses 6-10 and 11-14!

### III. Vs. 6-10 Three limitations

Vs. 6-10 All of these activities had to do with the Old Testament, the worship in the tabernacle, and the regulations connected with it. The writer in verse 9 points out these activities had three limitations:

1. **Vs. 9 Limited value**: First the writer says in verse 9 that these activities were, *"Symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which can not make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience."* These activities only affected the outer man and did nothing to change the heart. The activity of service, the ritual, sacrifice, or ordinance, had no power on the person who performed it let alone on the person they performed it for. The activity only affected the outward part of the body of the person involved in the activity. If all a person is doing is focusing on the the activity of baptism, then all they are really doing is getting wet and perhaps washing of the outer dirt from the body. It's not the activity of the "baptism" that's the problem it's the heart of the person getting baptized that's the problem. **No religious activity has VALUE in and of itself**. This truth needs to be declared over and over again to people. Religious people are convinced that God places value in religious activity! But the author of Hebrews says, *"No, not even if the religious activity that is God-authorized being done in God's place of worship."* Jesus spoke against such religious activity in reading the word of God in John 5:39 where he said, *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."* There was no value in religious reading of the Bible

- thinking that doing so would save a person; no it's in what the person does with what they read, TRUST in JESUS THAT SAVES A PERSON. If the conscience is not touched even though they have been engaged in the activity, then their focus is on the activity and not upon God who alone gives us rest and peace! Religious activity is like a person who goes down and buys new clothes every time they need a bath. Their activity never deals with their real problem; all it does is but keeps covering it.
2. **Vs. 9 Limited truth:** The **second** point the author makes is that these activities all were intended to have a deeper message. He writes, "*It was symbolic for the present time.*" **No ritual or activity had MEANING in and of its itself, instead the activity or ritual ONLY had meaning in what it stood for!** Every one of these activities in the tabernacle were intended to convey a deeper message. Take for instance the activity of the provisions of the show bread, the incense, the offerings, the ornate building itself with its altars. All of this religious activity was to teach the people their importance was not to place importance upon the outward activity it was only "symbolic". What was important wasn't the activity but what it stood for. But the Hebrews completely missed this and thought God was interested in the activity or ritual. In Isaiah 1:11-14 God tells the nation, "*To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them."*
3. **Vs.9 Limited reach:** The **third** point the writer makes is that these activities never touch the conscience. In verse 8 the writer said, "*The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.*" The phrase "*Is still standing*" is a mistranslation; as it should be "*still has any standing.*" That idea is, "*still has any value in their sight.*" The Hebrews could never see what the truth that God was showing them at as long as they had their attention focused on the activity or ritual. And the mere activity never had any effect upon their guilty conscience. All it did to their conscience is require more and more activity in an attempt to appease the conscience. The truth is these Hebrews needed to see the worthlessness of the activity or ritual before they could appropriate the truth behind the symbol. David illustrated this truth when he wrote about it in Psalm 51:16-17 "*For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, you will not despise.***" David realized that the activity of "*burnt offerings*" was just the symbol of the true sacrifice of "*a broken and a contrite heart*" of which "*God, will not despise.*" This psalm was written after David's double sin of adultery and murder. And in the Psalm **David confesses that God brought conviction to his heart, not through the activity of the ritual but what it pointed towards "a broken and a contrite heart"**. This is why David had conscience cleansed because it went beyond the endless religious activity.