

The Conscience

STUDY THREE - CLEANSED and RENEWED

Ray Bell ~ 15th September, 2016

Last week we saw, particularly from Genesis 3, how the guilty conscience responds to the presence of God. **This week**, we come mercifully, to the subject of God's undoing of all of that, and his restoring of our communion with him.

As we have quoted George Smeaton previously, "*Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man that does not satisfy the law and perfections of God!*" For us to commune with God once more, without fear and dread, our own consciences must be purified. Together with this, God's own law and perfections— his own holy and righteous character, must also be fulfilled. **God has, therefore, a mammoth task to accomplish** if we are ever to enjoy communion with him, and with one another once more.

The wonderful good news of the gospel is that in his love and his grace, he has done just that, in his Son, at the cross. God's holy law has been fulfilled! His righteous wrath has been completely satisfied! The wages of our sin have been paid in full. Our sins have been forgiven and are remembered no more! Our guilt has been atoned for! **And this morning** we are going to trace that mighty work of purifying our conscience through some chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:1-4 tells us that, despite the sacrifices and Old Testament system of worship being given to God's people by God himself, they were insufficient! They could not make perfect those who drew near to God. They were only a shadow of the 'good things' to come. In fact, that whole Old Testament system of worship served **as a reminder** to the worshipper of their sin, year after year, and could not perfect the conscience of the worshipper.

However, the message of Hebrews, and the truth of the gospel, is not only that the Old Testament sacrifices were insufficient. Far from it! That whole system was set up and established by God with the purpose and intent of paving the way for 'the real deal!' - everything else was 'but a shadow of the good things to come'. The overarching message of Hebrews is that **God has gone and done one better - in his Son!**

- *Jesus is superior to the angels! (Chpt 1)*
- *He is greater than Moses! (Chpt 3)*
- *He is the greater eternal high priest! (Chpt 5-7)*
- *He is the guarantor and high priest of a better covenant! (7:22-8:13)*
- *He offered a better sacrifice! (9:22ff)*
- *And his kingdom cannot be shaken! (12:28)*

And it has taken all of this 'superiority' and 'greatness' of Christ for our guilt and sin atoned for once for all, and for our consciences to be cleansed.

Hebrews 9:11-14 compares and contrasts the ministry and blood of Christ with that of the old covenant system. Despite the vast preparations, regulations, and blood shed in this first covenant, none of this could perfect the conscience of the worshipper (Hebrews 9:9). **But when Christ appeared** (Hebrews 9:11) this all changed. He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle. He entered, not just once a year, but *once for all* into the holy places – not by the means of the blood of goats and bulls, but by means of his own blood. Christ was the perfect, spotless, sin offering! And his blood has now cleansed our consciences from dead works so that we might serve the living God!

In the next chapter, the writer of Hebrews makes sure it is clear that we understand Christ's sacrifice was 'once for all', and that it accomplished everything necessary for us to be washed and sanctified. In Hebrews 10:11-14 we read how every other priest *stands daily* at his service, offering the same sacrifice, repeatedly, year after year. **"But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God!"** His work is done– completed! "For," we read in verse 14, "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

The Holy Spirit bears witness to us, (Hebrews 10:15-18), for after saying,

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"

¹⁷ then he adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

God has accomplished that 'mammoth task' of salvation and cleansing which we spoke of earlier– every last bit of it! In Christ Jesus:

- we have been sanctified through the offering of his body, once for all
- he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified
- the wages of our sin have been paid in full
 - o so there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!
- we have been reconciled to God
- God's wrath and his 'law and perfections' have been completely satisfied
- our sins have been taken away and our guilt atoned for
- our consciences have been cleansed and purified
- and much, much more...
 - o so we can now serve the living God

Therefore, *"let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*