

The Power of a Cleansed Conscience to Serve the Living God

Hebrews 9:13-14

In the Old Testament, a person could become ceremonially unclean by touching a dead body (Num. 19), being sick with an infectious disease such as leprosy (Lev. 13), eating foods that God had pronounced as unclean (Lev. 11), or various other reasons that are symbolic of sin and its devastating effects on us. The unclean were not allowed to approach the Temple without performing a cleansing rite that involved either the shed blood of a goat, a bull, or a heifer. Those of us this side of the cross are defiled by the lust of the flesh (sensualism), the lust of the eyes (materialism), and the pride of life (egoism). Since the Old Covenant is gone (Heb. 8:13), *“How do I have conscience cleansed to serve God?”* What is required?

I. The blood of Jesus Christ is the only hope for having a cleansed conscience.

I know that the language of *blood* and the *shedding of blood* are considered old-fashioned and even to some *blood* in religion is offensive. God, though, has said, *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins”* (Heb. 9:22). The word ‘blood’ is mentioned a dozen times in this chapter. Even pagans and the irreligious understand the concept of blood shedding for the act of forgiveness. The old hymn is absolutely correct: *“What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”* Why Jesus? **God ordained** that the unclean one who wishes to approach Him come by faith in Christ. Faith in Christ saves sinners from ever being cut off from God’s goodness and presence (Heb. 7:25). But what does a “cleansed conscience” look like? What will I feel when I experience it? What is it?

II. A cleansed conscience is one where “dead works” are removed.

“How much more shall the blood of Christ cleanse your conscience from dead works?” (v. 14). Some versions say “our conscience,” but this text refers to the individual conscience, not the corporate.

A. What is your conscience? It is the “self-awareness of my relationship with God and others.”

A man with “no conscience” does not care of his relationship with God or other people. A man with a seared conscience is one who is often insensitive about his actions. A conscience that is convicted is one where the Spirit reveals sin and its uncleanness and its effects on God and man.

B. What are dead works? Some people say that “dead works” are things *I do* that lead to death.

There are even some translations that translate “dead works” in this manner. However, the dead works are not something you do, *they are the way you think*. It says cleanse your conscience.

What is a ‘dead work’? It is thinking you make amends to God by promises and commitment.

C. A cleansed conscience means a particular way of thinking.

“I am guilty of __, but I believe Christ died for me, and He has cleansed my conscience of my sin. That does not mean I will not bear the consequences of my sin in this life or that you and I will not bear scars brought by my sins. It means that I cannot attempt to atone for my mistakes by making you promises. I have no claim on God's forgiveness and future goodness by my (or your) commitment to reform. The humiliation brought me by the public exposure of my sin is healthy, for it has reminded me why Christ died. He alone rescues me from being cut off from my God. I am being changed by the grace of God from the inside out, and if you will be patient with me, I think you will see that I will not be the same person tomorrow that I was yesterday. If you find you cannot place your trust in a person whose conduct has been like mine, I will understand, and simply remind you, that one's faith is always misplaced when found in men and not in God.”

III. A cleansed conscience precedes any meaningful service of the living God.

Too many of us try to serve God *in order to cleanse* the conscience rather than the other way around.