

INTRODUCTION

This week in American history: On May 3, 1675, a Massachusetts law goes into effect requiring church doors to be locked during services. Officials enacted the law because too many people were leaving before sermons were over.

We aren't going to lock the doors. But we are starting something new today. We're getting ready to start raising money for our next construction project. If you'd like to pledge \$10,000 to the building fund, just indicate by leaving before the end of the service. Our video cameras will be recording your pledge.

I am just kidding, of course. I couldn't do something like that. My conscience wouldn't let me. What is a conscience? Let me give you my definition of a conscience: Conscience is an alarm that God places in every person's soul to sound when they are about to do something wrong.

Ogden Nash is one of my favorite poets, because his poems are short and humorous. My favorite poem of his about marriage says:

To keep your marriage cup brimming;
With love in the loving cup;
Whenever you're wrong admit it;
And whenever you're right, shut up.

Good advice. He also has a short poem about conscience:

There is only one way to achieve happiness on this Terrestrial ball;
That is to have either a clear conscience;
Or to have none at all!

In this message we're going to see what God's Word says about "How to live with a Clear Conscience."

Hebrews 9:1-11. "Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now."

"When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was

showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.”

But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation.

In this section of Hebrews, we are studying the stark contrast between the First Covenant and the Second Covenant, which we called the New and Improved Covenant. The First Covenant was based on the Law of God and the New Covenant is based on the Love of God. To summarize this message in one sentence I could say that: The old covenant never led to a clear conscience; but the new covenant offers the way to live with a clear conscience.

I want to take a few minutes to examine four theological truths from this passage. Then I want to talk about the practical truth found in the passage.

I. GOD’S OBJECT LESSON: The Tabernacle reflected God’s pattern for reality

A couple of weeks ago we discovered God has an affinity for the number three. The Godhead is understood as three: Father, Son, and Spirit. Time has only three parts: past, present, future. And we see this tri-fold design in the tabernacle. The Bible says, “Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up.” (Hebrews 9:1-2)

Have you ever wondered, “Why did God command them to build a tabernacle and give them all these sacrificial instructions if He knew there would be a New Covenant?” God was using these things as an object lesson to prepare them to receive Jesus when He came.

In one of the churches I served in Alabama, we only had one morning worship service. And each week I would do a children’s sermon. I would call all the kids up to sit on the platform with me. There were usually about twenty kids. I always used an object to teach a spiritual lesson. Most of these object lessons went well, but I can remember a few disasters. For instance, one Sunday I gathered the kids up and handed a single pencil to one of the older boys. I asked him to try to break the pencil. He broke it pretty easily. Then I handed him a bundle of six or seven pencils and asked him to try to break them. He strained but couldn’t break the bundle. So I made my point. “Boys and girls, when we are all alone, we are weak. But when we come together like that bundle of pencils we give strength to each other.” Just as I said that I heard a loud “crack” behind me. I turned to look toward the choir loft. The kid with the pencils had walked up to the choir rail and had slammed the bundle of pencils on the wooden edge. He broke the pencils and left a huge gouge in the choir rail. That’s one reason why I stopped doing children’s sermons!

So what was the object lesson God was teaching by the Tabernacle? He was teaching them that it is possible for sinful human beings to approach a Holy God. But He was teaching them gradually. He didn't reveal the full truth immediately; He used progressive revelation to teach this truth in stages. First, there was the tabernacle. Then there was the Temple. Then Jesus came as the living, breathing temple of God. The Bible says, "The Word became truth and dwelt among us." That term literally means Jesus "tabernacled" among us." Today, the temple of God is found in us, the church. We are the Temple of Holy Spirit. God dwells in us personally and corporately as the Church. In the Old Covenant God had a Temple for His people and under the New Covenant God has a people for His Temple.

II. THE PRIESTS' MINISTRY: They offered sacrifices continually for centuries

From the time of the building of the Tabernacle until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. there were thousands of priests who offered hundreds of thousands of sacrifices. We read in our text: "When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood." (Hebrews 9:6-7)

This may surprise you, but the common people didn't really worship, only the priests worshipped. The people would approach the priests with their offerings and hand them over. Then the priests would take the offerings into the court of the priests and perform their acts of worship. All the people could do was to watch. In the Old Covenant, worship truly was a spectator sport. Even all the priests had to be spectators one day a year when the High Priest would go behind the curtain into the very Holy of Holies.

Inside the Holy of Holies there was a beautiful box called the Ark of the Covenant. Everything about the tabernacle and its furniture was a picture of Jesus. At the Ark, God met sinful humanity once a year on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest would sprinkle the blood of an innocent lamb on the lid of the box, which was called the Mercy Seat. Inside the ark there were three items. It contained a bowl of manna, which pictures Jesus as the Bread of Life. There were two tablets of the Ten Commandments, which point to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law. And there was a stick, the rod of Aaron, that had come to life and budded out with blooms. This was foreshadowing the resurrection of Jesus. Today, because Jesus our High Priest has entered the true Holy of Holies we don't need a human priest to enter the presence of God.

III. THE SURPRISING ILLUSTRATION: Temple sacrifices never cleared a guilty conscience

Again, the writer tells us that all of the sacrificial system was just an illustration for us; that's another word for an object lesson. But it is a powerful illustration. What the priests did in the temple was for ceremonial cleansing, but there was never any moral cleansing. In other words, the priests and the people still had to deal with a guilty conscience.

"This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper." (Hebrews 9:9)

That's not a misprint or a typo. The blood of ALL those animals was never able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. In Hebrews, the writer stated it even clearer. "It is IMPOSSIBLE for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:4) The point is religious deeds can never fix a guilty conscience. An illustration is a way to point to a truth. So what was the illustration of the Old Covenant pointing to? That's our next point.

IV. GOD'S BRILLIANT PLAN: Only Jesus can give us a clear conscience!

So what's the point? Why the object lessons in the Old Testament? They were all pointing to Jesus. The blood sacrifices of all of those innocent animals were predicting a time when an innocent man called the Lamb of God would make the final sacrifice.

The Bible says, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14)

God had a plan all along. Remember, Jesus was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. Those are the theological truths in this passage. But let's get personal. How can you and I live with a clear conscience? Here are four Take Away Truths:

A. We experience guilt because we are guilty!

The Bible has declared war on sin. But our culture loves sin and they have declared war on guilt. People are looking for guilt-free deserts, and guilt-free living. If you feel guilty, you don't get rid of the sin, you simply get rid of the guilt. A recent article in *Psychology Today* was entitled "Nine Ways to Talk Yourself out of Guilt."

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve felt no sense of guilt. But when they disobeyed their Creator, they felt differently. They experienced an uncomfortable feeling called guilt. They suddenly realized they were naked, and the first thing they wanted to do was to cover their nakedness. So how did they realize they were naked? Their consciences had been activated. When God approached them in the Garden, they tried to hide from Him.

Since that day until now, people have been trying to cover up their sense of guilt. They try to hide from God. They go to all lengths to get rid of this nagging sense of guilt. But the truth is a guilty conscience can be your best friend; it can lead you to seek forgiveness.

Your conscience is to your soul what your nerves are to your body. When your finger touches something hot, the nerves send a warning message to the brain: "THAT'S HOT! REMOVE THE FINGER!" The brain sends a message to the muscles in the arm to withdraw the finger.

No amount of drugs or therapy can truly remove this guilty feeling. Rather than trying to cover it or ignoring it, we must admit we are guilty before we can find forgiveness and freedom from guilt.

B. You can't let your conscience be your guide

Years ago I wrote a book entitled, *No, that's NOT in the Bible*. It's a book about sayings that people think come from the Bible, but they don't appear in the pages of the Bible. One of those misquotations is when someone says, "The Bible says, 'Let your conscience be your guide.'" Nope, that's not in the Bible.

But it is found in a Disney Movie. As a little boy, I can vividly remember watching Disney's 1940 production of the movie *Pinocchio*. It was the thrilling story of a little wooden puppet who wanted to be a real boy. I'm not going to issue a spoiler alert, in case you haven't seen it. But there is a delightful character in the movie named Jiminy Cricket who sang a song to Pinocchio, "Take the straight and narrow path [which actually IS in the Bible]; and if you start to slide—give a little whistle, give a little whistle and always let your conscience be your guide." Poor Jiminy was wrong.

Your conscience can be compared to a compass. When you hold a compass, the needle points to magnetic north. In the same way, we are born with a moral compass that points to right thing to do. Your conscience doesn't make you do right, or wrong, it just lets you know when you are about to do wrong, and it makes you suffer when you have done wrong.

When a person continually ignores the dictates of his conscience, the conscience can become faulty. You can take a perfectly good compass that is pointing north, and hold a magnet next to it, and the needle will rotate and no longer be a reliable guide. The same thing happens to your conscience when you expose it to repeat sin—it no longer is reliable guide. Your conscience doesn't become ruined instantly, it usually happens gradually.

Have you ever told a lie? The first time you told a lie, you felt badly about it. But the next time you told it, the lie came a little easier. We have all known people who were so good at lying that they can look you right in the eye and lie without any sign of moral compunction or remorse. They have convinced themselves that telling a little lie is actually not so bad.

Your conscience can become dull, and it can also become deadened. A person can commit sin so often over a period of time that his conscience can basically die. The Bible makes this possibility clear in 1 Timothy 4:1 Paul warned young Timothy about evil teachers. "Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared [*kauteriazō*] as with a hot iron." (1 Timothy 4:2)

When a person suffers from a cauterized conscience, he is able to commit the vilest kinds of sins without feeling any sense of guilt or remorse. You wonder how the Nazi prison guards could participate in the wholesale slaughter of Jewish prisoners during WWII? Their consciences had become so deadened, that many of them truly thought they were doing the

world a favor by killing Jews. So you cannot let your conscience be your guide. There are two much better guides: the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

C. You don't have to live with guilt

Guilt can destroy a person. Unresolved guilt will haunt you for a long time. In one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, the ambitious Macbeth murders King Duncan to claim the Scottish throne. But he and Lady Macbeth are tortured by guilt. In one famous line Shakespeare captures their misery. Macbeth says, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red." He feels as if all the water in the oceans can't wash away his guilt. Instead his bloody hand would turn the oceans red.

So how do you get rid of guilt? The Jews thought they could get rid of guilt by making sacrifices at the Temple. But we just read that those offerings never cleared a guilty conscience. Today, there are religious people who think you have to climb to the top of a mountain on your hands and knees until they are bruised and bleeding; and then, perhaps they are worthy of finding forgiveness. Others try to resolve their guilt by giving large sums of money to help hurting people. But there's nothing you can do to earn God's forgiveness. He offers it to you freely when you place your faith in Jesus. Jesus has already done everything necessary to remove your guilt. That leads to the final take away truth:

D. A clear conscience is the softest pillow

Many cultures have a proverb to this effect. There is a French proverb that says, "There is no pillow so soft as that of clear conscience." There is an Italian proverb that says, "A clear conscience never fears the midnight hour."

The bottom line truth is that the ONLY way to have a clear conscience is to place your faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Look again at the powerful words in Hebrews 9:14, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

CONCLUSION

Let's go into the bedroom of the Jewish High Priest on the night after Yom Kippur. He tosses and turns as he reviews his day's work. "I went behind the curtain. I sprinkled the blood. But was it enough? Tomorrow we will keep sacrificing animals. Next year, I will enter the Holy of Holies again. When will it be enough? What else can I do to remove my guilt?"

Let's go into the bedroom of the poor man who thinks religious suffering is the way to salvation. He tosses in bed. His knees and elbows are bloody from his painful climb up the steep rocks to the church. He thinks, "Maybe I should have climbed higher. Was that enough? What else can I do to remove my guilt?"

Let's slip into the bedroom of a misguided Baptist man who thinks he can earn God's acceptance. He thinks, "I've given lots of money to the work of God. I have perfect attendance in church for five years. But is it enough? I've worked for years in my church. Is it enough?"

In all the history of the world, there have been millions of religious persons performing religious acts. But there was only one time when God said, "It's enough." And that is when Jesus took my sins in His body on the tree and died."

And when you place your trust in Him. You can rest. You can sleep soundly at night with a clear conscience. I love the words to the old hymn written by Eliza Hewitt: My faith has found a resting place; Not in device nor creed; I trust the Ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead. I need no other argument, I need no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me!"

And that's how you can live with a clear conscience!

OUTLINE

I. GOD'S OBJECT LESSON: The Tabernacle reflected God's pattern for reality

"Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up."
Hebrews 9:1-2

II. THE PRIESTS' MINISTRY: They offered sacrifices continually for centuries

"When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood."
Hebrews 9:6-7

III. THE SURPRISING ILLUSTRATION: Temple sacrifices never cleared a guilty conscience

"This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper." *Hebrews 9:9*

IV. GOD'S BRILLIANT PLAN: Only Jesus can give us a clear conscience!

"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" *Hebrews 9:14*

TAKE AWAY TRUTHS

- A. We experience guilt because we are guilty!
- B. You can't let your conscience be your guide
- C. You don't have to live with guilt
- D. A clear conscience is the softest pillow

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*