

Lord Jesus, by Your holy body and blood there is forgiveness of sins. Continue to purify us that we might honor You by serving with all that we have been given by You as living sacrifices in daily worship by all that we do and say. Amen.

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 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. 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 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 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.

In Christ Jesus, in whose name we alone can worship the Triune God aright, dear fellow redeemed:

If you have a clean conscience, you may dare approach the throne of the Triune God in safety and with blessing. Without a clean conscience His Word is distorted for you and His gifts are used inappropriately by you. *"A guilty conscience regards God either as an indulgent grandfather or an angry judge. It mishears God's Law as an impossible demand for total self-improvement or as a critical message of condemnation; it mishears the Gospel as a sanction for sin or as an indiscriminate message of affirmation. It takes God's gifts as rightful entitlements or misuses them as self-indulgence."*¹

You and I desire to have a good conscience. As we learn in our text the blood of God's Son purifies our consciences from being bad tainted with sin and death, to being good declared righteous for His sake and given life everlasting. Consequently, we long to serve God in righteousness now and forever. So let us hear how our Lord accomplishes this for us and particularly through the blessings of His

¹ Concordia Commentary: Hebrews, by John H. Kleinig, CPH, 2017, p. 431.

holy meal. It is the divine **Purification Process: Changing Dead Works to Living Sacrifices.**

I

Now do not misunderstand, we as believers in Christ will still have our consciences troubling us at times because we continue to sin. But faith in Christ overcomes any loud scream or even whisper of condemnation coming from within, because by faith in the Blood of Christ we live in the joy of complete remission of all our sins. A bad conscience does not know God aright and therefore scrambles to understand what are to it dead letters of His Law and His Gospel.

A couple weeks ago we got a robo-call from Moose Lake, MN perhaps. Its recorded message was informing us that we were in trouble with the IRS. Now that did not phase me, but another call came in shortly afterward from the same source informing us that there were four charges against us and we needed to respond in a very short time period. This one, caught my attention and caused my conscience to start having a sinking feeling, until I sufficiently assured myself this was a scam. Guilt is always lurking around even when you know you are innocent attempting to seize your conscience. All you need is for someone in authority to speak your name in a loud stern voice, and you know how you would react.

Our text speaks of the way our Lord established with His Old Testament people to deal with bad consciences through the sacrifices that were regularly prescribed. The tabernacle or tent had the holy place where regularly the priests would enter for their sacrifices. In the most holy place only the High Priest could enter on the Day of Atonement.

But all such sacrifices could not provide lasting forgiveness or permanent atonement for sins for the people, but were effective by directing sinners to Christ's sacrifice that would be made once and for all. It was no coincidence that the animals used for these sacrifices were to be first-born males without defect – the holy Son of God was to be THE sacrifice that would be required. Remember how on Good Friday when Jesus died the curtain in the temple separating the holy place from the most holy place was torn in two, symbolizing that now with purified consciences a believer may approach the throne of the holy God.

“[W]hen Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal

redemption.” The true payment that would atone for all our sin was poured out by the Son of God made flesh and all mankind was redeemed. We were bought back from the Kingdom of Satan, so that the Father might receive us into His family, the Kingdom of His Son.

II

Based upon this work done by Christ in our behalf, the Spirit sanctifies us, makes us holy, purifying our consciences from all the dead works done to make ourselves right before God. We have been set free from lives attempting to make ourselves alive to be found acceptable before God, which is impossible for us who are born into this world spiritually dead. But when the Spirit, through the power of the Word, gives us new life, we are born again to live not for ourselves but for our Lord and for our neighbor.

We are set free to sacrifice self, that is, all our desires and demands for ourselves, to love neighbor as self, doing for him or her what we would like done for us. When we live sacrificially what we desire in this life is often put off or even forgotten and never fulfilled. We might compare it to the life of parents, who for the sake of their children will do things that are often taken for granted, demanded as entitlements, or even despised. But the parent loves the child so much that such self-sacrifice is not even questioned. Our Lord has loved us and acted for us with such a self-sacrificing love that we have been transformed in our lives among more than just our families, but all our neighbors God places in our lives, yes, even those neighbors who act like enemies toward us.

You also know what it is like when you do things for others with a bad conscience. They are dead works because you have been made to feel guilty if you did not do them, or feel obligated to maintain your status or position, or do them in order to get something back in return. But the sacrificial blood shed for us forgiving us all our sins, purifies our consciences, so that those dead works are replaced by living sacrifices. We love, because He first loved us. Jesus acted to save us willingly, not under compulsion.

So as we constantly proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes to rescue us from these bodies of death, receiving of His true body given and blood shed we submit to His purification process. *“As Christ has given Himself to us so completely with His body and blood, so, too, the Sacrament strengthens us to give ourselves in sacrificial love and service to neighbor.”*²

² Luther’s Small Catechism: with Explanation, CPH, 2017, p. 333.

The lawyer's desire in the Gospel lesson to have "neighbor" defined was so that he might fulfill the love he is commanded by God to show, a love comparable to his love for self. We are told he wanted to know this because he was seeking to justify himself. Jesus told the story of the Samaritan's love for one like this lawyer who was a Jew. Jews generally considered Samaritans as hated enemies, not neighbors whom they were to love. But the story revealed a love on the Samaritan's part toward a Jew, which was truly a living sacrifice.

My fellow redeemed, you have been set free from all such efforts of self-justification. You know and believe that Christ Jesus, without the blood of "goats and calves but by means of His own blood" secured your eternal redemption. Your conscience has been purified from all dead works in order to fill your days with living sacrifices. Rising from the altar, you are not leaving so blessed with an attitude that you now get to go back to your everyday lives performing self-serving dead works, but truly desire to perform living sacrifices for your neighbor in all that you do. Lives so focused upon the love of Christ Jesus, you worship God aright. Amen.