

A SAMPLE CHAPTER

A MAN OF BLOOD

The Warrior's Wounded Conscience and the Blood That Cleanses It

By **Larry Herzog Jr.**

larryherzogjr.com

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Blood That Cleanses the Conscience

You asked the right question at the end of the last chapter, and it is the question this whole book has been climbing toward: how does the blood shed on that hill reach *this* conscience — the accusing witness that has sat in your chest since before you opened these pages, the one place the entire wound has lived? It is a fair question and it deserves a precise answer, and the astonishing thing is that Scripture gives one. There is a book in the New Testament, the letter to the Hebrews, that seems almost to have been written for you, because it asks exactly your question — what can actually reach and cleanse a guilty conscience — and it answers it with one word, and the word is blood. Not more of yours. The right blood. Let me take you through it, because it is the center of everything.

The letter begins by facing, head-on, the thing you have felt your whole life without being able to name it: that everything offered to you dealt with the surface and never reached the wound. Under the old covenant, Hebrews says, there was an entire system of sacrifice — bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, blood sprinkled and altars tended, year after year after year. And it did something real: it made a person ceremonially clean, purified the flesh, restored a man to the outward life of the community. But Hebrews says the thing that will make you sit up, because it is the diagnosis of your entire experience: all of that blood, all of those sacrifices, *could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper*. It reached the flesh and stopped there. It could scrub the outside of a man and never touch the inside. It could restore him to the camp and leave the witness in his chest still accusing. And is that not exactly what has happened to you? The discharge papers made you clean on the outside. The reframing scrubbed the surface. Even your own penance polished the exterior. And every bit of it stopped at the flesh and never once reached the conscience, because none of it was the kind of blood that can.

And then Hebrews turns, and I want you to hear this next line as if it were written with your name in the margin. If the blood of goats and bulls could sanctify the flesh, it says — *how much more* will the blood of Christ, who offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. There it is. The blood of Christ cleanses the *conscience*. Not sin as an abstraction, not the ledger in heaven only, but the conscience — the syneidesis, the witness, the very faculty we have been standing beside since the third chapter. The blood reaches the exact place the old blood

could not, the exact place your wound has always been, and it cleanses it. This is the answer to how the hill reaches this room. The blood of Christ was never meant to stay on the hill. It was shed precisely to travel all the way down into the accusing conscience of the man of blood and wash it.

Why can it reach where the animal blood could not? Hebrews is clear, and every reason matters to you. Because it is not the blood of an unwilling beast dragged to an altar, but the blood of a willing Person who offered *Himself*. Because it is the blood of one without blemish, the only clean man who ever lived, who alone could bear the guilt of others without being crushed by his own. And because it is the blood of God Himself, of infinite worth, able to bear an infinite weight — able, therefore, to carry the full reality of real blood-guilt without cheapening it or breaking under it. Animal blood could purify a body because a body's uncleanness is a small thing. Only the blood of God could reach a conscience, because a conscience's uncleanness is a matter of eternity, tried in God's own court, and nothing smaller than God could ever have answered it.

* * *

Now let me show you the sign that this cleansing is real, because it is the very thing you have been missing, and once you see it you will understand your own exhaustion for the first time. Hebrews makes a simple, devastating observation about the old sacrifices: they were offered again, and again, and again, endlessly, year after year — and that endless repetition, it says, was itself the proof that they did not work. Because if a sacrifice had actually taken the sin away, the worshiper would have been cleansed once and for all and would have had *no more consciousness of sin* — and then the sacrifices would have stopped, because there would be nothing left to offer them for. The fact that they had to keep being offered, the fact that every year brought another reminder of the same old sins, was the confession, built into the system, that the blood was not reaching the conscience. A sacrifice you have to keep offering is a sacrifice that is not working. The repetition is the failure, wearing the mask of devotion.

And I need you to look now at what you have been doing every night since it happened, because you are going to recognize it. You have been a priest. You have built an altar out of your own conscience, and you have gone to it in the dark, night after night after night, and you have offered the same bloody sacrifice on it every single time — re-killing yourself, re-paying the debt, re-punishing the man, re-litigating the deed, offering up your own suffering again and again to a conscience that never once accepts it. You never sit down. You never rest.

And you have thought your sleeplessness was penance, was devotion, was the seriousness your sin deserved — and it was nothing of the kind. It was the exact proof, written into your own exhausted body, that the sacrifice you keep offering cannot take the sin away. The endlessness of it was never your faithfulness. It was the failure of your own dead works, repeating themselves forever because they can never finish, because they are the wrong blood offered by the wrong priest at the wrong altar.

And here is what Christ did instead, and it is the whole Gospel in a single posture. He offered one sacrifice for sins — one, for all time — and then, Hebrews says, He *sat down*. You have to understand what that meant, because the old priests never sat. There were no chairs in the sanctuary. The priest stood, always, day after day, because his work was never finished and could never be finished. But Christ, having offered the one sacrifice that actually and finally and forever took sin away, sat down — because it was done. Finished. There was nothing left to offer, ever again, because the one offering had perfected for all time those it was made for.

And do you see what that means for you and your altar in the dark? It means you can put down the knife. It means you can stop being your own priest, because the priesthood is filled and the sacrifice is made and the one who made it *sat down*. You have been standing at your altar for years because you believed the work was not finished. It is finished. He said so with His last breath and He proved it by sitting down. You are not required to offer what has already been offered. You are not able to add to what is already complete. You may leave the altar. You may, at long last, sit down too.

* * *

There is a moment in the Old Testament that shows you this in a single unforgettable picture, and it is the picture of a man exactly in your position. The prophet Isaiah is given a vision of the LORD, high and lifted up, the holy God filling the temple, and his response is not joy but terror — the terror you know, the terror of the unclean brought suddenly into the presence of the pure. *Woe is me*, he cries, *for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King*. That is the cry of a man who knows he cannot survive the holiness of God as he is — the cry, in your own words, of a man of blood who is certain he cannot stand before the clean and terrible God.

And watch what God does. He does not tell Isaiah to go and clean himself up first. He does not agree that the unclean man must be cast out. A seraph takes a burning coal from the altar — from the very place of sacrifice — and touches it to the exact place of

Isaiah's uncleanness, his lips, and says: your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for. God did not deny the uncleanness; Isaiah truly was a man of unclean lips, and God did not pretend otherwise. God took it away — with fire, from the altar, applied directly to the wound. The uncleanness was real, and it was removed, and then, only then, the cleansed man was sent out to live. That is your story. The coal comes from the altar, which is the cross. The fire is the blood. And it is applied not to some general notion of sin but to the exact place of your uncleanness, and the word that comes with it is the word Isaiah heard: your guilt is taken away.

Do you feel the name of this book closing over you now, the way it was always meant to? Because there is a terrible logic to a bloodstain, and it is this: the only thing that can answer blood is blood. A conscience marked with blood cannot be cleansed by good intentions or by the passage of time or by argument or by tears — it can only be cleansed by blood. And you have known this, darkly, all along, which is why you have kept trying to pay in your own blood, night after night at your altar. But your blood cannot cleanse your blood; it only adds to the stain. And the blood of animals cannot reach the conscience at all. There is only one blood in all the universe that can answer the blood on a man's conscience, and it is the blood of the Lamb — God's own blood, shed once, that reaches down into the deepest court and washes the witness clean. The man of blood is cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. That is the whole book. That has been the whole book from the first page. Blood answers blood — but the right blood, offered once, by the right priest, who sat down.

And now let me hand you the thing that will let you actually believe it, because I know your conscience, and I know it is going to want to throw this pardon back too, out of long habit. Remember why your conscience rejected every forged pardon you ever tried to sign — remember that it was not being cruel, it was being *accurate*, refusing the counterfeit because it could tell the counterfeit was false. That incorruptible honesty was your torment for years. Now let it become your assurance. The same conscience that would not, could not, accept a forgery *will* rest before the true blood — not because it has finally gone soft, but because it was never rejecting forgiveness in the first place. It was only ever rejecting a fake. And a true witness accepts a true verdict. So when the blood of Christ is applied to your conscience and the accusing at last falls quiet, you will not have to wonder whether you have merely talked yourself into it — because you know this witness, you know how faithfully it threw back every lie you ever offered it, and a witness that reliable does not fall silent for a counterfeit. If it rests, the cleansing is real. The very stubbornness that would not let you off is the thing that now guarantees that

when you are let off, you are truly let off. Your conscience's honesty, which was the whole problem, turns out to be the seal on the whole cure.

This is where the stone comes off. Not lightened, not managed, not carried more skillfully — off. Hebrews says it plainly: your heart is sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and so you may now draw near, with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith. The man who was certain he could never approach the holy God is given a clean conscience and told to come close with confidence. And the cleansing was never meant to be only the end of your torment; look again at what the blood cleanses you *for* — from dead works, to serve the living God. You are not being scrubbed clean merely so you can stop hurting. You are being freed so you can *live* — raised from the altar in the dark to walk out into the daylight as a husband, a father, a brother, a servant, a man with a conscience quiet enough to love again. The point of an empty altar is a man who gets to go home and live.

But a general truth has never yet held you on the worst night. You can believe that the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience of the guilty — and still lie awake asking: how do I know it cleanses *mine*, tonight, by name, so that I am not merely hoping but *sure*?

God knew you would ask that, and He did not leave the delivery of the blood to the strength of your own believing. He appointed a way to place the one blood, shed once, over your specific sin, out loud, from outside you, by a man He sent to do it. That is where we go now.

*This is where the sample ends. The rest of A MAN OF BLOOD
is the invitation it opens onto.*

Continue reading — get the book →