

## Christian Faith and Practice through Cleanliness

*“I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” Ezekiel 36:23-27*

The subject of being clean is illustrated for us in the Word of God in many different ways, from simply washing dirt off of the body (taking a bath) to gaining a new heart as in the reference above. Being clean is obviously a topic high on the priority list of our God and Father, judging from the hundreds of verses describing it or it’s opposite. The English word clean, along with variations such as cleanse, cleanness, and cleaned, is mentioned over 200 times in the NASB. This does not count related words such as pure (102), purity (6), purify (19), and other words like ‘holy’ (649). Uncleanness is mentioned about the same number of times as clean, again not including words such as filth (2), filthy (5), filthiness (6), impure (6), defile (37), profane (32) and the like. If you go through enough of the verses for clean and unclean, even if you don’t know Hebrew or Greek, you will see that a lot of them relate to the understandable, mundane concepts of the presence or lack of dirt. But they also relate to more difficult ideas such as perfect and imperfect, acceptable and unacceptable, righteous and unrighteous, or holy and unholy.

When I write an article such as this, I thank the Father for the tools that He has given me to use, especially the computer and a Bible search program. I believe that a person can compensate to a large extent for a lack of formal education in biblical subjects by examining as many texts as possible using a search program. If you plug in, as I did for this article, a word or series of words and have your search program tell you where they are found in the text, you’ll be surprised at the meaning that you will be able to draw out of the Word, just by comparing Scripture with Scripture. I don’t mean that you shouldn’t also take some higher education-type classes, but you can compensate for a lot of classes with just a generic search program and some time.

**All good things come from the Father.** One of the first things to observe in the study of these words is that a lot of times the bad word is a modified form of the good word. For instance, look at ‘clean’ and ‘unclean.’ The bad word (unclean) takes its’ meaning from

the good word (clean). To be unclean is to be the opposite of clean, or 'not clean.' Yes, I know we can also describe 'clean' as 'not dirty,' but the point remains. 'Not dirty' still points to clean as the desired condition (think about it). This is an important concept. All ideas and practices that are bad depart from the pre-existing standards, which are a part of, and belong to, God. It's a directional thing, in all cases pointing to God. Clean exists first, and unclean means to depart from that which is clean. Purity is first, and impurity is a departure from God's purity. To be unrighteous is to depart from righteousness. God is perfect and holy, and anything that comes short of His standard is imperfect and unholy.

**Ignorance is not bliss.** Another huge point I have to make, before we get into talking about the subject of being clean, is the fact that *we have to be told what it is*. We don't naturally know the difference between clean and unclean. If clean was a snake it could bite us on the nose and we still would have a hard time figuring it out. Like Moses in Exodus 3:5, God has to inform us of something as simple as taking off our shoes when on holy ground. We are supposed to have a knowledge of good and evil (from eating of the wrong tree), yet we have to be commanded to do the simplest things.

Or, more probably, we simply don't want to make a distinction. Perhaps we just flat out refuse to acknowledge the distinction between clean and unclean, holy and unholy. This second idea makes more sense in light of the biblical teachings on the hard hearts of people. In general, unless He gives us a direct command and backs it up with force ('do this or you're toast') we don't respond to Him or His standards at all. This is a sad testimony to the human relationship with Him. We only respond when He cracks the whip, and that many times only externally, not from the heart. At any rate, He has to spell out what clean and unclean means through His Word.

*"Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them."* Ezekiel 22:26

**Clean before the Law?** The first mention of the concept of clean in the Word is, oddly enough, applied to animals in Genesis 7 and 8. Just before the flood in chapter seven God tells Noah to take clean animals with him, and from this we know that clean and unclean were included in the worship of God before the flood. This is confirmed by Abel's acceptable sacrifice. Just after the flood in chapter eight Noah makes another acceptable sacrifice. We can't be certain, I suppose, just exactly what these things mean, but one thing to take note of is that sacrifices of clean animals happened long before the so-called Law was given at Mt. Sinai. It may also hint at the acceptability and resumption of sacrifices after Yahshua returns and takes up His reign on the earth. Hebrews (10:3) tells us that the purpose of sacrifices is a reminder of sin, which further hints at the possible reason for resumption.

It is worth noting here also that outside of the Genesis 7 and 8 references, none of the words under consideration in this article show up in the text of Genesis. Either God wasn't teaching because He didn't want to, or people knew the difference without being told. We know that "every intent of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually," (Genesis 6:5) which is why God destroyed the earth with a flood. So perhaps these words don't start showing up until about half-way through Exodus because in the beginning nobody had to be told what was clean and unclean, but later on they did.

*The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. (Psalm 19:9 NASB.)*

**Physical and Spiritual clean.** There are two parts to being clean. One part is physical (external) and one part is spiritual (internal). Both parts have to be in place in order to be truly clean. To become clean physically in most instances is simply a matter of bathing, but you can stay in a bathtub for a week and not even come close to being clean spiritually. Physical and spiritual cannot be separated, unless we die. True spirituality is both physical and spiritual. It is impossible to have 'right thinking' or 'right believing' without 'right doing.' Actions change beliefs, and beliefs change actions. If I say I am 'converted' and do not have any actions to reflect that claim, I am not truly converted.

*Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."*  
John 13:10

It is also true that we may follow all sorts of physical commands, and if our hearts are not in it then we cannot claim conversion either. As evidenced by the reference above, Judas was shown to be unclean by his actions. His beliefs and his actions converged at death. A person can wear the right clothing, eat the right foods, avoid touching a dead body, or any other physical command or series of commands, and if they 'have not love' as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13, the works are worthless. In order for obedience to external commands to be acceptable, or 'clean,' before the Father, it must be accompanied by love for Him (clean internally). Truly, this is why following a command is worthwhile – because of love for the Father. Any other motivation means we are not clean, no matter how many baths we take. Right thinking along with right doing is faith. So, this brings us to some of the specific commands that not only help us to get and stay clean but also help us teach others about the distinction.

**Being clean through diet.** The Word of God teaches us that we are to make a distinction between clean and unclean through what we eat and what we do not eat. There are also health benefits that we gain through following these commands, but the focus seems to be more on making a distinction than health because health is not mentioned directly in the text. What are we saying when we avoid certain foods? Certainly that God is our God and whatever He says goes. But we are also saying that God cares about the smallest details of our lives, and that we are loving Him in return by striving to be holy as He is

holy. We are not trying to ‘add’ to salvation and the righteousness given to us through the death of our Messiah, but trying to ‘walk’ worthy of the calling to which we are called. We are also trying to teach others through physical application.

*“For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.” This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten. Leviticus 11:45-47*

**Being clean through washing.** Washing is described in places like Leviticus 12 through 15. God tells us that we need to bathe after becoming unclean, whether through the birth of a child, a contagious skin disease, or body discharges. A body discharge can be blood or semen. Isolation is prescribed while diagnosing skin diseases, but it is not prescribed for body discharges or giving birth. True, all who come in contact with an unclean person also become unclean. Being unclean means that we can’t go into the Sanctuary (Leviticus 12:4) or eat the meat of the peace offerings (Leviticus 7:20). But the cure or remedy for this physical type of uncleanness (as well as contact with the unclean person or thing) is simply to wash the clothes and body and wait for evening. There are no detailed instructions for how to wash, and the words used for bathing in most instances just means ‘to wash.’ It seems to me a regular shower or bath would suffice.

In my opinion, a huge mistake is made in the interpretation of the commands for bodily discharges (such as blood or semen). Nowhere does the Bible say to isolate ourselves from one another, or suspend the sharing of intimacy in marriage. The text does not say that we should live in separate houses or sleep in separate beds. There is also an inordinate emphasis in some circles on the female’s uncleanness, while virtually ignoring the male’s. Obviously, a man makes his wife unclean by body discharge when having sex (this happens way more often than she is unclean through her cycle, at least, if your sex life is as it should be), and nobody takes this to mean we should never have sex. Does a male’s uncleanness mean the man should isolate himself in his own bed and even sleep in a separate bedroom? Of course not. I think the Father is just trying to communicate the prevalence of uncleanness, helping us make distinctions so we know the difference. Then we can take steps to remedy the situation by (in this case) making sure we take a bath and wash our clothes.

**Being clean through separation.** Separation is, however, called for in the case of death. Not from each other, but from the dead thing. Our Father also wants us to be clean by avoiding contact with death if at all possible. One of the distinctions connected with our diet is that we are not supposed to eat any animal that is dead before you find its’ body (possibly because we don’t know why it died). Another distinction is that we are not to eat of an animal that itself eats carrion (dead animals). God created scavengers for His reasons, but this didn’t include sticking their flesh in our mouths.

I was surprised to see, in my studies of these things, that if a person comes into contact with a dead person the only way to become clean is through the ashes of the red heifer solution (if I understand the verses in Numbers 19:10-13 properly). Since we don't have this solution (and haven't had for a long time), and since anyone who is unclean through touching a dead body can make others unclean just by touching, what are we to do? I have touched a dead body unwittingly – I checked for the pulse of a man in a hotel room whom we couldn't tell had been murdered and was lying on the floor face down. Therefore everything and everybody I touch is unclean. Other people have done the same thing, and if the verses are correct then probably everyone and everything is unclean! So how do we get clean away from this entanglement?

**Being clean through the Word.** The answer, I think, lies in the Word of God.

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.”*

John 15:1-4 NASB

This could apply only to the apostles, or it could apply to any of God's people because we are clean through the application of His Word (written and Flesh). Hebrews (10:19-22 NASB), much like the reference at the head of this article, helps illuminate this too.

*Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Our High Priest Yahshua haMashiach (Jesus the anointed) sprinkles our hearts clean and washes our bodies with pure water, by the 'full assurance of faith.' If we abide in Him then we are clean. Does this mean we can ignore all the other physical cleaning? Probably not, because as it says in John 13:10 *Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.”* Again in John 15:10 Yahshua gives the meaning of 'abide' as 'keeping His (and God's) commandments.' Apparently we need to keep getting washed with the Word, and this includes doing what He says. By practicing His Word we wash the parts of ourselves, both outside and inside, that become unclean. This is further illustrated for us by Yahshua in Matthew 23:26,27 (NASB).

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.”*

If I read this correctly, then Yahshua is telling us to do both interior and exterior cleaning. One without the other is impossible. You see, the critical idea behind attempting to practice as many of His instructions as we can, is not so much that we are mechanically following some rules or looking really holy. It is more that it proves the attitude or motivation which is moving us to do what God says. Even if the rules themselves are immaterial (pun intended), our *attitude* about those rules says volumes about what we really think of God. If we run around trying to find loopholes in the rules He gives us, what does that say about how clean our interior really is?

**Having clean lips.** Isaiah tells us in chapter six (verse 5) of his book, “*Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.*” He becomes aware of his lack of cleanliness after he sets his eyes on God. To get clean he had to kiss a coal taken from the altar. Then his ‘iniquity is taken away’ and his ‘sin is forgiven.’ Thank the Father we don’t have to kiss a real coal now in order to get clean. Ouch! But the illustration is a good one. It goes along with the comments of Yahshua in Matthew 15:11. “*It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.*” No, this does not mean we can stick any garbage we want into our mouths and we will be fine. Try doing that sometime with poison hemlock. Even if you think it’s clean you will still be dead. Yahshua means we are not made sinful by what we eat but we are *already sinful* because of what’s inside. Isaiah was not saying that he had dirt on his lips either, but that he was defiled because of his sin.

Perhaps you can begin to see why God is so concerned with being clean. He uses the everyday examples of the presence or absence of dirt to illustrate for us the how and the why of being clean. From my study I saw how easy it is to get dirty (and how prevalent it is), and why there is a need for consistent and regular cleansing. I also saw how humans are not clean, in and of themselves. Otherwise we would need no instruction on avoiding dirt and becoming clean. We are children of our parents Adam and Eve, who begat descendants “after their own kind.” They were the only people ever created who became sinners by sinning, who departed from God’s place and standards of perfection. All of their kids are born with the genetic imprint of mom and dad. We are born unclean, in unclean conditions, and must look to God to get clean. We come into this world through water and blood, but we must be ‘born again’ by the Spirit in order to enter into the permanent form of God’s family. There is only One who was born clean and stayed that way, Yahshua haMashiach, God in the flesh, and it is through the cleansing features of His blood that we can even hope to become clean and fellowship with our Father.

*It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.* Revelation 19:8 NASB

Shalom, Bruce S. Bertram