

Is Cleanliness next to Godliness?

You might be surprised to know this phrase does not appear anywhere in the Bible. As you know, we are being told every day to wash your hands and wash your clothes. We are disinfecting every item in the house. Everyone is concerned about being clean, so we don't get the Coronavirus. Let's look at what the Bible says about being clean.

I. THE O.T. TAUGHT THAT ONE MUST AVOID dirtiness

In the books of Leviticus and Numbers, God gave the Jews many laws about the importance of being clean. There were certain foods considered to be clean and unclean.

For example, God told the Jews not to eat pork (Lev 11:7).

Another example about the importance of staying clean is found in Lev 11:2. God's people are told not to touch dead animals. Num 19:17-19, describes the importance of personal hygiene.

The book of Leviticus is not only about sacrifices but it also reads like a sanitation manual.

We have instructions for women after childbirth and other things (Lev 12:5, 15:19). We also have several chapters dedicated to diagnosing and treating skin diseases (Lev 14:32).

In the last few years, we've heard about the importance of getting rid of mold in houses—that's nothing new, God devoted over a hundred verses in Leviticus dedicated to getting rid of mold and mildew! Lev 13:47

Because of this emphasis on cleansing, the Jews became one of the most health-conscious groups of people in history. However, this will lead to a bad problem during the time of Jesus.

II. Outward Purity Verses INNER PURITY (Mark 7)

Through the centuries, these purity regulations degenerated into empty rituals. They substituted having a right relationship with God for rules and regulations. We see an example of this in Mark chapter 7 where Jesus and His disciples collide with purity rules. (Vs 1-4)

The hands of the 'disciples' weren't dirty; they just didn't observe the "tradition" of washing their hands in a ceremonial fashion, so the religious leaders were appalled. I want us to notice a few points.

1. The Jews believed that Cleanliness IS Godliness!

Jesus was extremely disturbed that the Jews replaced God's word with made up rules and traditions. In verse 13 Jesus said, "You have nullified the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Then in verse 14, He gets to the heart of the matter. Jesus taught that the real problem is not having dirty hands but having a dirty heart. In verse 21 He explained it more clearly:

It doesn't matter if you come to every worship service, it doesn't matter if you carry a big Bible in your hand if your heart is dirty. That's what the Pharisees failed to understand.

III. WE HAVE a STAIN THAT SOAP AND WATER CAN NEVER CLEAN

In the O.T., the Israelites kept washing up and cleaning up thinking that would make them presentable before God. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God said, "Although you wash yourself with lye and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Lord God." (Jer 2:22)

God's requirement is for us to be 100 percent pure and 100 percent holy. In Psalm 24:3, David asked a very important question. "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?" Then he answers his own question in verse 4: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart."

When talking about the inhabitants of heaven God says, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it...but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27).

1 Peter 1:16 says, "You be holy as God is holy."

The Bible says there is only one way for us to be made clean/holy and that one way is through Jesus. Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

IV. JESUS CAN CLEAN YOU FROM THE INSIDE OUT

In Matthew 23 Jesus said to the clean freaks, "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean." (Vs 25-26)

A. Jesus offers us the opportunity to have our lives clean from the inside out.

1 John 1:7, "The blood of Jesus, God's son cleanses us from all unrighteousness."

See Heb 9:14-15. Also, 1 Peter 3:21.

Close: Is cleanliness next to Godliness?

If you're talking about washing your hands, the answer is no. However, if you're talking about having a clean heart, cleanliness is the pathway to Godliness.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me (Psm 51:10)."