

## Cleanliness and Godliness

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness  
1 John 1:9

I'll admit that I've been a real germ freak in the past. The worst time was my adolescence when I couldn't wash my hands clean enough. In hindsight my uncontrolled imagination was the real enemy; still, in my young mind the danger was genuine. I envisioned nasty critters lurking everywhere, on ordinary things such as doorknobs and handrails. If I inadvertently touched such an unclean object, the resultant all-consuming obsession drove me to find the soap and water. But more, I needed to re-wash constantly throughout the day to cleanse the lingering doubt that some unseen invaders might have crept onto my skin. No amount of washing could fully remove that lingering doubt and I had the dry, reddened hands to prove it.

At some point I just surrendered the war against germs. It was long ago, but the reason may have been that I simply lost the energy to continue the vicious cycle. Yet I didn't morph into a disease-ridden human Petri dish, but survived just fine. In fact, it was my God-given immune system that protected me infinitely more than all the soap and water in the world.

But I couldn't just abandon hand washing altogether. Although in a way I'd been addicted to washing, I couldn't be like the recovered alcoholic who can never touch a drop again, or the ex-gambler who must avoid Las Vegas. Good hygiene is important, and it shouldn't be overdone or underdone. Our practices ought not to turn us into living biohazards at one extreme, or chapped, parched over washed germ fanatics at the other. The outworking of practical wisdom falls somewhere in between.

Just as on the outside our hands need appropriate cleansing from physical dirt, on the inside we need periodic cleansing from spiritual dirt. Sin is at enmity with God; it severs our fellowship with Him and hinders our spiritual growth. So the same Creator of our germ-killing immune system also supplies powerful resources for putting to death sin and washing it away. However, spiritual cleaning isn't an involuntary function like our immune system; we must choose to practice it in the manner God has prescribed.

But periodic, temporal, cleansing differs from the eternal cleansing of salvation. Those who have been redeemed are cleansed once and for all from sin's guilt by the Blood of Christ. Eternal washing comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ to make us positionally clean forever. It is finished, and we'll never be unclean again, eternally-speaking because we've been delivered from the penalty of sin. Forever.

As a result of regeneration, we've put on the "new man" (Colossians 3:10), yet the "old man" still lurks within. The Spirit within us is stronger than our sin nature, but fleshly weaknesses can cause us to fall prey to sin from time to time. Meaning we need periodic cleansing. Yet Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord our Provider, reveals to us His provision for cleansing away daily spiritual dirt.

His Word promises, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The Greek word "confess," is *homologeō*, which means to concede, to say the same thing, or to agree with. Confession means we agree with God that we did something sinful, or missed the mark when evaluated according to God's righteous standard. Maybe we're guilty of a wrongful emotion, such as jealousy or covetousness; maybe we lashed out spitefully at someone, or lied or cheated. There's a litany of possibilities under the black umbrella of sin but all break our fellowship with God. When we don't confess them but rather choose to deny or sweep them under the carpet, our fellowship with God remains severed because He has no part of sin (1 John 1:5). Nor does He want His children to be part of sin. Therefore, because He loves us, we're chastened (Hebrews 12:6) so that we'll repent, confess and abide in the best possible place -- in His love.

So when we confess our wrongful deeds, we're forgiven. Moreover, we're cleansed from all unrighteousness, and God completely erases our guilt when we fess up. Forgiven sins need never be re-forgiven, unless of course we re-commit them. Indeed, I must wash my hands again when new dirt appears, but I needn't over wash my hands from worry that the soap didn't get all the grime the first time. Once the visible dirt goes down the drain, it's gone; likewise when we confess sin God completely washes the stain and guilt away. God promises it, so I need to believe it; if I fail to trust in God's complete forgiveness I'm guilty of unbelief and have allowed emotional parasites like worry and doubt to hinder putting past things behind. Furthermore, consumed with guilt I'm miserable to boot. What a relief that His commands aren't weighty (1 John 5:3) like the burden of sin!

Thankfully, there's no limit to God's forgiveness. Although Jesus told Peter to forgive his brother "seventy times seven" (Mathew 18:22), God forgives us infinitely more in our lifetime. But the picture changes in timeless, sinless eternity where "forgiven" as our permanent state of being is fully realized. We're not there yet; until then we have God's Word to discern good from evil so that we're pure from every manner of spiritual dirt. Because the cleanliness that's really next godliness is spiritual.

*By Mary Nixon*