

# *Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church*

## **The Believer's Experience: Cleansing, Consecration, Consummation (Leviticus 14:1-20)**

-Martin Rizley-

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During the first five years of my Christian life, I hardly read the Old Testament. That's because I found it much harder to understand than the New. It was also difficult for me to see the relevance of much of the Old Testament to my Christian life. I enjoyed reading from the book of Psalms and Proverbs; but when I tried to read through the Old Testament, I always got bogged down in the book of Leviticus, and went no farther. Later on, thankfully, through the help of commentaries and various Bible teachers, I began to see more clearly the connection between the Old and New Testaments, and I realized that even a book like Leviticus has much to teach about the Christian life. That's because the rituals that were prescribed in this book for the Jews to observe were prophetic in nature. They foreshadowed the redemptive work of Christ in the New Testament.

Last week, we began to consider this unusual ritual in Leviticus 14 by which a leper who had been healed of leprosy was declared clean by a priest and permitted to enter once more into the assembly of God's people. As I pointed out, a diagnosis of leprosy was about the worst thing that could befall a Jew living under the Old Covenant, because it meant the end of normal life as he had known it. Once it was determined that a person had contracted a seemingly incurable skin disease, he became an exile from the community. He was cut off from all contact with his fellow men, and was sent outside the camp to live the lonely life of outcast, without home, without friends, without family.

Happily, however, some lepers were cured by God, and in that case an elaborate ritual was appointed whereby the ceremonial defilement caused by their disease could be cleansed, and they could be restored to the community.

I. Cleansing-- That ritual began with the presentation of two living, clean birds to be used for the initial cleansing of the leper. One of these was slain so that its blood could be poured out and sprinkled on the leper for his cleansing, the other was set free to signify that the man whom God had healed was now set free of his terrible disease, and free to be rejoined to the people of God. The process of complete restoration to normal life was not automatic, however; for other rituals had to follow before the healed leper could return to his own family and enter once more into his own tent. That is what I want us to consider this morning.

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As I pointed out last week, the cleansing received by lepers was symbolic of the cleansing that believers receive when they come to Christ by faith. Just as a healed leper was cleansed of his ceremonial defilement by the shed blood of a clean bird, believers are cleansed of the spiritual defilement of our sins by being sprinkled with the blood of Christ. That cleansing is given in connection with the renewal of our spiritual nature, a renewal typified by the healing of the leper. Just as God intervened in the life of some lepers to heal them of their deadly disease, so He intervenes in the lives of His elect to heal them of the leprosy of sin. He causes us to be born again, and in so doing, He permanently alters the basic orientation of our spiritual lives.

Before we are born again, we are "dead in our trespasses and sins," as the apostle Paul explains in Ephesians 2. Our lives are characterized by unbelief, rebellion against God, and continual indulgence of sinful desires. When we are born again, however, our life takes a turn. Although we still find within ourselves sinful desires, we also find in our hearts a brand new desire to pursue the righteousness of God's kingdom. We no longer want to wallow in the unclean things in which the world delights; rather, we want to walk in holiness and purity and fellowship with the Lord. That is because our spiritual nature has been fundamentally cleansed in a way that changes the direction of our lives.

This cleansing of our spiritual nature-- which was typified by the leper's healing and his initial cleansing by the priest, is described in various passages of the New Testament. For example, in Acts 15, when Peter addresses the Jerusalem Council to urge the full inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian community without requiring them to be circumcised, Peter gives this reason for their inclusion: "God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8). Notice that Peter here affirms that the distinctive mark of every Christian is not only that he has been justified legally, but that he has also been purified spiritually through faith in Christ. His heart has undergone a radical cleansing. The stain of sin has been washed away from his conscience and a love for holiness has been instilled in him at the level of desire and motivation through the application of Christ's cleansing blood to his mind and heart. His basic direction in life has been radically changed.

A similar statement is found in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 11. After describing in lurid detail the sins that characterized the pre-Christian life of the Corinthians-- fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, sodomy, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness, etc.-- Paul goes on to make this amazing affirmation: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God." We see once again the dramatic cleansing that takes

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place when a person comes to Christ for salvation. It is dramatic enough to effect a change in his identity and basic lifestyle orientation. The stain of sin is removed from their conscience; he is renewed at the level of motivation and desire, and the sins which formerly dominated him no longer define who he is in Christ.

In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul calls this initial cleansing the "washing of regeneration" and affirm that God saved us "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Titus 3:3, 5).

It is a joyful thing to know that once a person has received "the washing of regeneration," he will never go back to being the person he once was before he came to Christ. Because the new birth is irreversible in its effects, it guarantees our eventual entry in heaven. What we need to understand, however, is that between our new birth and our final entrance into glory, there is a process of ongoing renewal that must take place. That process is called "sanctification;" and it involves a progressive renewal that brings to completion the work God began when he cleansed our hearts through faith. It is that progressive renewal that we see typified in the ceremonies prescribed in Leviticus 14 which the healed leper had to perform after his initial cleansing by the priest. Let's consider now the things that had to take place after the leper's initial cleansing by God.

II. Consecration--The first thing that had to occur was an act of personal consecration to God. Having been sprinkled with the blood of the slain bird and pronounced clean by the priest, the cleansed leper had to wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and wash his body in water (v. 8). This same procedure had to be repeated a week later. Verse 9 goes into great detail spelling out just how thoroughly the cleansed leper had to shave himself. Not only the hair of his head, but also his beard and his eyebrows needed to be shaved off. The ancient rabbis understood this to imply that even the hair on the feet, arms,, legs, and torso, had to be shaved off, as well.

What we have here is a picture of personal consecration to the Lord. The leper had to respond to the cleansing that God had wrought in his life by cleansing thoroughly every part of his flesh to which any possible trace of his leprosy might cling. By cleansing his garments and removing every follicle of hair from his body, he showed that he was serious about putting away every vestige of his past condition.

What this symbolizes is the need for believers who have received the gift of salvation to respond to God's saving work by putting away every remnant of uncleanness from their lives. The initial cleansing that we have received from the Lord

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should move us to cleanse ourselves of all remaining filthiness that clings to our flesh. Before we were saved, we could not do that; but now that God has saved us and given us His Holy Spirit, He expects us to put away sin from our lives through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

This duty is taught explicitly the New Testament. Take, for example, the words of the apostle Paul to the believers in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 7:1: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Notice those words "let us cleanse ourselves." God is talking about the removal of defiling influences from our lives. Once we are saved, God expects to us take inventory of our lives to see if there is anything in our lives that is having a negative spiritual impact on us. There could be certain television programs that we are watching, or books or magazines we are reading, or bad habits that we are indulging, that are having a defiling or polluting effect on our lives. What are we to do about that? Well, we must cleanse ourselves of those influences. We are to cleanse both "flesh and spirit"-- that is, the outward and the inward man. Both our outward conduct, and our inner thought life must be cleansed. How so?

1) First, we must remove all obvious stumbling blocks to holiness, especially sinful things associated with our past that could be a hindrance to us. We read in the book of Acts about a group of Christians in the city of Ephesus who resolved to do that very thing. When Paul was preaching in Ephesus, we read in Acts 19:18 "many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all." These Christians were so serious about cleansing themselves of negative influences from their past, they took action to remove obvious stumbling blocks. So should we. We mustn't think, "Because God has cleansed me of sin through the blood of Christ, I don't need to cleanse myself of anything." That way of thinking is not biblical. Rather, we should think, "Because God has graciously cleansed me, I must now cleanse myself of any remaining filth that is clinging to my flesh or my spirit.

2) Second, we should keep a distance from people who are likely to have a corrupting influence on us-- Paul chided the Corinthians for taking as their bosom companions skeptical unbelievers who scoffed at biblical truth and denied the resurrection of the dead "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Cor. 15:33). Earlier in this epistle, he warned the Corinthians "not to keep company with anyone named a believer who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-- not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor. 5:11). In other words, to keep our own lives clean, we are to separate ourselves from those who live in uncleanness. Paul is talking, about course, of those whom we take to

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be our bosom companions, our intimate associates-- not the unbelieving acquaintances with whom we rub shoulders on a daily basis as a necessary consequence of living in this world.

3) Third, we should fill our hearts with the Word of God-- This is fundamental. On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). Christ wanted His disciples to know that He had already wrought a fundamental cleansing of their lives through the Word of God; but for the Word to have a continual cleansing effect on their lives, they needed to abide in Christ's word, receiving it in regularly, meditating on it, memorizing it, and obeying it.

Of course, we cannot expect the Word of God to cleanse us if we refuse to keep its precepts. The Psalmist asked, "How can a young man cleanse his way?" and he answered, "By taking heed to according to *your* word." The NIV says, "By living according to your word." We cannot expect the word to have a cleansing effect on our lives us if we refuse to receive it with love and obedience.

So here is our calling as those who have been cleansed by God of the fundamental defilement of our spiritual nature. We must diligently cleanse ourselves of all remaining filth of flesh and spirit; and this was pictured by the act of the cleansed leper washing himself and shaving himself after he had been cleansed by the priest.

After this initial act of consecration, the cleansed leper was permitted to enter the camp of Israel, from which he had formerly been exiled; but he was still not permitted to enter his own tent for another week. For seven days, he had to keep at a distance for his own dwelling place, waiting patiently for that day when the process of restoration would be consummated and he could return to his own home and family.

Why did he have to wait seven days? Well, remember that the number seven is the number of perfection or completion. What this period of delay is telling us is something very important. Even after we have been by been declared clean by God and have consecrated our lives to Him, we still have to wait for God's perfect timing before we can enter into the fullness of divine blessing. That was true of the leper. Although he had been cleansed and consecrated to the Lord, he still had to wait for God's perfect timing for his restoration to be complete. In the meantime, he had to go through more cleansing rituals to prepare him for his home going. By a series of steps or stages, he was made fit to enjoy the full blessings of fellowship with God and his fellow men.

III. Consummation

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Finally, on the eighth day, the long awaited consummation arrived. I should point out that the number "8" in Scripture is associated with new beginnings. That's because the eighth day comes after God's day of rest from the first creation. It represents the first day of a new week, which suggests the beginning of new creation. That is why Jesus rose on the eighth day, because his resurrection represents the dawn of a new creation. Throughout the Scriptures, the eighth day is the day of new creation. It was most fitting, therefore, that the cleansed leper should be permitted to enter his own home on the eighth day, for it meant for him the beginning of a new life.

The first thing that had to happen on that day was that the cleansed leper had to present himself to the priest at the door of the tabernacle bringing with him an offering for the Lord. That offering consisted of three animals-- a male lamb for a trespass offering; another male lamb for a burnt offering; a ewe lamb for a sin offering; and a grain offering consisting of fine flour mixed with oil, along with an additional "log" of oil (a log was a Hebrew measurement that was roughly equivalent to pint). These offerings all had a spiritual significance.

The trespass offering and the sin offering both concerned the removal of sin. The burnt offering symbolized the complete consecration of the worshipper before God. The grain offering was intended to express the cleansed leper's recognition of God's goodness and the devotion of his heart toward God. It was an offering of praise to the Lord.

The fact that these sacrifices had to be offered before the leper could enter into his tent points to our own need as Christians for further cleansing and further consecration as preparation for our entrance into glory. What we should learn from the experience of this leper is that cleansing and consecration are not realities associated only with the beginning of our Christian life. They are ongoing features of the Christian life. Throughout our earthly pilgrimage, we are called to renew continually the consecration of our hearts to the Lord and to receive continually from God His ongoing cleansing. This is a part of our daily experience of walking with God; for as long as we are in this mortal body, we have to deal with sin in our lives. Not one of us can claim to be sinlessly perfect. As John affirms in his first epistle. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). So it is by continually confessing our sins and continually renewing our consecration to God, that we are being prepared for the life of heaven. Although we never have to receive the washing of regeneration again, we do have to be cleansed of the defilement that occurs daily as a result of living in this world.

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Now, I should point out here that if the leper was a very poor man who could not afford to bring the three animals mentioned here-- two male lambs and a ewe lamb, provision is made in verses 21-32 for a less expensive offering that substitutes birds for the two lambs used in the sin offering and burnt offering. This was so that everybody, regardless of their economic status, could enter into a state of restoration. This underscores God's character as a God who is no respecter of persons; whose grace is poured out in abundance on all who come without regard to who or what they are "in the flesh." No one is excluded from enjoying God's mercies because of His economic status. He does not favor people because they are wealthy or powerful or wise in terms of worldly knowledge. He dwells with the poor and the humble of heart. In fact, James tells us that He has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him? That is so that no one may boast of entering His kingdom by virtue of their superior wealth, or status, or learning.

One further thing was required of the leper before he could enter his tent, and that was, that he had to be anointed with blood and oil (read vs. 14-18). We have here one further picture of complete consecration to the Lord, for we see now the cleansed leper presenting the members of his body to be both cleansed and sanctified to God-- cleansed by the application of the atoning blood, and sanctified by the application of holy oil. The particular members presented were to be the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot. Why these members?

The anointing of the ear emphasizes the importance of the faculty of hearing. It is through the channel of hearing that we are brought to faith in the Lord. Romans 10:17 says "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God?" We become Christians when the gospel comes to us, we hear it with ears, and believe in the Lord with all our hearts. Then, after we have come to faith, our growth in holiness depends on our continued hearing of the Word of God. In order to hear the Word, however, our ears need to be cleansed and anointed. The blood symbolizes the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the oil symbolizes the quickening presence of the Holy Spirit, who is often symbolized in Scripture by oil. No one can hear the Word truly but the one whose hearing has been cleansed by the blood of Christ and opened by the Holy Spirit. We read of the Thessalonians that they received the Word of the gospel that was preached to them, because that word came to them "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." Regarding Lydia, we read that "the Lord opened her heart to receive the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). That is, the Spirit of God opened her ears to hear the word.

The second member anointed by the priest was the thumb of the right hand. This points to the fact that when we surrender our lives to the Lord, we must yield our

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hands to Him for cleansing and for consecration. The hands that stole from others must now work diligently to benefit others. The hands that have been used to hurt others must now be used to heal them. The hands that have grasped covetously after riches must now give generously to those in need. The hands that have raised a clenched fist to heaven must now be lifted in praise to God.

Finally, the big toe of the right foot had also to be anointed. This points to the cleansing of our ways by God. The unbeliever uses his feet to conduct himself to places where no one should go. He walks in the counsel of the ungodly and stands in the path of sinners, which leads him finally to sit in the seat of scoffers. But when a man surrenders his life to the Lord, his feet are cleansed and consecrated to God. He walks now in paths that are pleasing to God. That doesn't mean that he never stumbles or slips. On the contrary, Jesus spoke about our need to have our feet cleansed continually, and that is because, as we walk through this world, we tend get contaminated by the environment through which we are walking. We pick up grime and soot, and so need to cleanse our feet daily, by taking inventory of our lives and confessing our sins to God.

So what we have in this final ceremony, says Douglas Kelly is "a picture of re-consecration of all the powers of body and personality back to the Lord." Such re-consecration is a necessary response to the work of God in healing us from sin's leprosy and declaring us clean in Christ. In light of His mercies to us, we must present our bodies to Him as a living sacrifice. Moreover, we must present the members of our body individually to Him, as Paul says in Romans 6:13-- "Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." God has given us new life in the Savior; he has raised us from the grave of our sins and filled us with His Holy Spirit; and now, in response to what He has done, we may and we must present the members of our present to God as instruments of righteousness to serve Him and the interests of His kingdom. If we were dead in our sins, we could not do that. But because we are alive in Christ we can; we can present our members to Him, but not through our merits or in our own strength, but through merits of Christ's shed blood and in the strength of His Holy Spirit. Our hearing, our doing, and our walking are all rendered acceptable now to God now through Christ.

As we give ourselves to God in this way, we may enjoy a well-grounded assurance of entering into heaven one day. If we habitually refuse to give ourselves to God in this way, however, we ought to fear, for we are told in the book of Hebrews that without holiness, no one shall see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14-- "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.")



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How important it is to affirm this truth, for we live in a day in which many people think of salvation as a one-time event that may never produce fruit in the life of those who receives it. I heard one preacher put it this bluntly: a man may be saved one day, live the rest of his life like the devil himself, then go to heaven at the end. But I ask you, brethren, is that what the Scripture teaches? Is that what we would glean about salvation from this passage in Leviticus? Does it not indicate the very opposite? Does it not suggest that those who are cleansed in the blood of Christ show forth the salvation they have received by undergoing a progressive cleansing of their lives from sin? The leper in this chapter, after being initially cleansed by the priest, consecrated himself to the Lord; and this was followed by further acts of consecration and cleansing until he was finally restored to the fullness of blessing. Do you think that this man would have been allowed to enter his own tent, had he refused to submit to the process that God had ordained for his complete restoration? No. Then how foolish it is for people to think that will enter into the heaven who know nothing of the sanctifying work that always follows cleansing in the blood of Christ.

As John Owen soberly observed, "There is no imagination wherewith man is besotted, more foolish, none so pernicious, as this – that persons not purified, not sanctified, not made holy in their life, should afterwards be taken into that state of blessedness which consists in the enjoyment of God. Neither can such persons enjoy God, nor would God be a reward to them. Holiness indeed is perfected in heaven: but the beginning of it is invariably confined to this world."

In the same manner, Jerry Bridges wisely admonishes us that, "The only safe evidence that we are in Christ is a holy life. John said everyone who has within him the hope of eternal life purifies himself just as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3). Paul said, "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). If we know nothing of holiness, we may flatter ourselves that we are Christians but we do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us."

If we do pursue holiness as a response of gratitude for God's cleansing grace, then we have every reason to anticipate joyfully the consummation of our hopes. Just as the leper looked forward to the eighth day, when he could enter into his own tent and be reunited with his family, so we too, look forward to the eighth day, the day of new creation, when at the return of Jesus Christ, we will be permitted to enter our eternal dwelling and live forever with the family of God.

What is the dwelling that we look forward to receiving with expectancy and longing? Well, on the one hand, our eternal dwelling is the body that we will receive when the Lord returns and transforms our lowly body into the likeness of His glorious

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body. Regarding that future body of glory in which we will dwell forever, Paul writes, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is in heaven." So our future resurrected body is the habitation with which we long to be clothed. But in an even deeper sense, God Himself is our habitation. What is it, after all, that will make heaven, heaven? It will be the presence of God. What an awesome privilege to dwell forever in the immediate, glorious presence of God. In this regard, I am reminded of the words of John in the book of Revelation as He describes the New Jerusalem where God's people will dwell forever. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people." What a glorious, happy reunion it will be in that day, when after a period of waiting, we are gathered into the immediate presence of our Lord, together with all those people who have loved the Lord through all the ages. How wonderful that will be, to be gathered altogether forever in our eternal home, worshipping the Lord.

Will you be in that company that enters at last into the eternal dwelling of the saints of God? Come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ask Him to cleanse you by the blood He shed on the cross. Ask Him to impart to you the grace of the Holy Spirit by giving you ears to hear and a heart to believe the glorious message of salvation. And having believed, ask Him to give you that sanctifying grace by which you may pursue a life that is pleasing to Him, a cleansed life, a life pleasing to the Lord, a life of perseverance in the path of holiness, a life of patient waiting for the consummation of all things, at the return of Christ. Amen.