

INTRODUCTION

This message is the first in a series I’m calling “No, that’s NOT in the Bible.” There are dozens of popular sayings floating around that people think are from the Bible and they’re not. There is a great deal of biblical illiteracy in the pews of our churches. Here is a top ten list of signs that you may not be reading your Bible enough:

10. You think the “epistles” were the wives of the “apostles.”
9. You think the Minor Prophets worked underground extracting coal.
8. You think Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.
7. Your favorite Old Testament hero is Hercules.
6. You think Abraham, Isaac & Jacob were a rock group from the 1960s.
5. You find the book of Micah and a WWII savings bond falls out.
4. You’re frustrated when you can’t find Charlton Heston in the Concordance.
3. You catch your teenager reading the Song of Solomon and demand, “Who gave you that trash?”
2. You tell your kids the story of “Jonah the shepherd boy and his ark of many colors.”
1. You think the verse “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” is found in the book of 1 Impressions.

Since this is the title of the first message in this series you probably realize the expression “cleanliness is next to godliness” doesn’t appear in the Bible at all. Over the next few weeks, I’ll be looking at several more of these aphorisms mistakenly attributed to the Bible. For instance, next week, we’ll learn the Bible doesn’t say, “Spare the rod; spoil the child.”

The phrase “Cleanliness is next to godliness” was probably a Hebrew proverb that had been around for many centuries, but it first appeared in a printed sermon entitled “On Dress” by John Wesley in 1769. Wesley said, “Slovenliness is no part of religion...Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness.”

My wife, Cindy, is so obsessed with cleanliness that the only parts of our home that don’t stay clean are my desk and my side of the bathroom! She is so clean-minded that before we can leave on a trip, she has to make sure everything is left spotlessly clean. That’s in case if we are killed on the trip she doesn’t want people to come over to our home and find it dirty. I’ve often said she is so clean-conscious I once got up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom and when I came back the bed was made! Not really—but she believes “cleanliness is next to godliness” *should* be in the Bible.

Today, studies have shown the majority of Americans believe this phrase is in the Bible—and it isn’t. Every time I hear it I think of the man who came to me years ago to tell me he was divorcing his wife. One of the reasons he was leaving her was because she was a messy housekeeper. To justify his decision he said to me, “Like the Bible says, ‘Cleanliness is godliness,’ and my wife is a slob.” He didn’t like it very much when I told him the phrase wasn’t in the Bible! He left her anyway. What you don’t know in the Bible *can* hurt you, so let’s see what the Bible says about “being clean.” First let’s notice that:

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT TAUGHT THAT ONE MUST AVOID DEFILEMENT

In the books of Leviticus and Numbers, God gave the Jews many laws about the importance of being both ceremonially and physically clean. To be unclean was to be “defiled.” God gave them directions about certain foods that were clean and unclean. Many of these rules were precautions God gave to keep the Hebrews from getting sick. For instance, God told the Jews not to eat pork. We know today pigs are susceptible to bacteria like trichinosis, and undercooked pork can be dangerous to consume. Another example of this is found in God’s prohibition about touching dead bodies. Today, we know infectious diseases can sometimes be spread from corpses, so God gave them some clear directions about hygiene. Numbers 19:17-19 says, “For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were here. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death. The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean.”

The Jews were also told to take the ashes from a red heifer, which would include the animal fat and the ashes from the wood used to burn it and to add water. We read that today and say, “Wow, God sure gave them some mysterious, weird instructions!” It may sound strange to us today, but does anyone know enough chemistry to tell me what you get when you mix animal fat, wood ashes, and water? Soap. God was simply saying, “Do yourself a favor, use soap and water and you’ll be healthier.”

Leviticus reads like a sanitary manual. There are instructions about how a woman should clean herself after childbirth, and after her menstrual cycle. There several chapters that read like a dermatology textbook, giving detailed instructions about diagnosing and treating skin diseases. In the last few years we’ve heard about the problem with getting rid of mold in houses—that’s nothing new, God devoted over a hundred verses in Leviticus about getting rid of mold and mildew!

Another example is found in Leviticus 11:24 where God warns them about the danger of touching animal carcasses. Before people knew anything about the spread of germs, God warned bad germs could be spread to all kinds of surfaces and materials. The Bible says, “You will make yourselves unclean by these...Whoever picks up one of these carcasses must wash his clothes... when one of them dies and falls on something, that article, whatever its use will be unclean whether it is made of wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth. Put it in water; it will be unclean till evening, and then it will be clean.”

Because of this emphasis on cleansing, the Jews became one of the most health-conscious groups of people in history. They became the “clean-freaks” of the ancient world. Their rules made them different from other people groups. God intended they would be different, so they could be a blessing to all nations. But they missed the point. They used their rules and regulations to make themselves feel good about their religion. It created spiritual pride. That led to a problem existing during Jesus’ time:

II. THE JEWS BECAME MORE CONCERNED WITH OUTWARD PURITY THAN INNER PURITY (Mark 7)

Through the centuries, these purity regulations gradually degenerated into empty rituals that became substitutes for a personal relationship with God. By the time Jesus was ministering in Israel, these clean and unclean laws expanded to include trivial details bordering on religious paranoia. In Mark 7, Jesus and His disciples collide with these purity rules. (Mark 7:1-4) The Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with “unclean” hands. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

Kids, when your mother tells you to wash your hands before you come to the table, don’t you dare say, “Jesus’ disciples didn’t wash their hands before they ate, why do I have to?” Kids and dirt just seem to be attracted to each other—especially little boys. I used to hate it when my mother licked her hand or a handkerchief to wipe dirt off my face! I heard about two little boys comparing how dirty they were. One boy bragged, “Hah! Look, my hands are dirtier than yours!” The other kid said, “Yeah, that’s because you’re a year older than I am!”

Today, we know there are invisible germs, so it’s important to wash your hands before you eat because you don’t want to get germs on your food and into your mouth. Jesus’ disciples’ hands weren’t dirty; they just didn’t observe the “tradition” of washing their hands in a ceremonial fashion, so the religious leaders were appalled. Notice:

1. The conviction of the Jews: Cleanliness IS godliness!

God taught the Jews that cleanliness was a *means* to holiness and godliness. But the Jews took it to the extreme until these regulations became the *end* of godliness instead of one of the way to holiness. They didn’t throw the baby out with the bath water; they climbed in the bath and kicked the baby out! They mistook physical cleanliness with holiness. To them cleanliness was not next to godliness—it *was* godliness! That’s why we see:

2. The correction of Jesus:

Jesus was extremely disturbed that the Jews substituted all these rules and traditions for God’s Word. In Mark 7: 6 He described these hyper-religious clean-freaks this way, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” That’s the definition of a tradition: “a rule taught by man.” Some traditions are good because they don’t violate scripture. But when we elevate a manmade rule above God’s word, then we are guilty of what Jesus said in verse 13. He said, “Thus you nullify 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. He said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.” This was revolutionary!

Jesus taught the real problem with have is a dirty heart, not dirty hands. In verse 21 He explained it more clearly: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean." That's the problem with most religion—it focuses on cleaning up the exterior of a person without really touching their heart.

3. The creed of false religion: Appearance and performance is better than knowing God

The Jewish leaders thought they were cleaner than Jesus and His disciples because they washed their hands a certain way before they touched food. It made them feel good about themselves and better than others. Religious ritual allows you feel good about yourself and better than others. That's what false religion does—it appeals to the flesh. It gives one a sense of outer respectability and seldom addresses matters of the heart. Every religion has its rituals.

I've been in the Middle East when the Muslim call to prayer is issued and the men stop their activity and face Mecca and recite their memorized prayer—it makes them feel good about themselves—they call the rest of us infidels. But does it change their lives to live in peace and to love others? I've been on a 747 over the mid-Atlantic when Orthodox Jewish men wearing all black crowded into the back of the airplane to be nearer Jerusalem. They tied on their phylacteries and bobbed up and down reading the Torah. But does it make them love all their neighbors? I've been in churches where people make signs with their hands and repeat certain words and eat a wafer and they're set for another week—but does it clean their hearts?

Probably the worst religion on earth is the Baptist religion. The Baptist religion teaches "once saved always saved" so thousands and thousands of Baptists got dunked, got their name on a church role, and haven't been seen or heard from since. But they think they're going to heaven because of some ritual of walking an aisle or filling out a card two dozen years ago. Ask them if they know the Lord and they'll answer, "Why, I've been a Baptist for forty years!" False religion focuses on how you look outwardly: Is your hair cut to the proper length? Are you wearing a coat and tie, or a dress? Are you carrying a big Bible? Let's face it; doesn't it make you feel good about yourself sometime because you made the colossal effort to attend church while all the infidels are out at the lake or on the golf course? God doesn't want you to embrace a religion, He wants your heart to be clean, and that can only happen when you know Him. What the Pharisees didn't understand was that:

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

Even in Old Testament times God was trying to teach people there is a big difference between outward purity and inner purity. The Jews kept lathering up, washing up and cleaning up thinking they were presentable to God. But through the prophet Jeremiah, God said, "Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign Lord." (Jeremiah 2:22)

God's desire is that we be holy and pure. Soap is good for cleansing the outside of the body, but doesn't get below the skin into the heart. In 1837 a chemist named James Gamble and a candle maker named William Proctor started a little company in Cincinnati, Ohio to produce a better

soap. Until that time, soap was harsh and smelly. They came up with a formula to make a pure white soap. For years the brand name was "White Soap." In 1870 a worker accidentally left the machine mixing the ingredients on too long and an excessive amount of air got into the mixture. Not wanting to waste the ingredients, they poured it into the molds and sold it. They started getting letters from people saying they liked the "floating soap." The company figured out the batch with too much air produced the first floating bar of soap! So, they changed the process to make White Soap float. William's son Harley was running the company and he didn't like the brand name "White Soap." One Sunday in church he heard his pastor read from Psalm 45:8 that says, "From palaces of ivory the music of strings makes you glad." From that verse he renamed his soap Ivory Soap.

For marketing purposes Proctor and Gamble asked independent chemists to analyze the ingredients of Ivory Soap. The result was only .56 % of impurities were discovered. So, Harley Proctor proudly proclaimed Ivory Soap was 99.44% pure—he even had the phrase copyrighted. But truthfully, 99.44 pure isn't pure at all—it's impure. The meaning of the word pure means "unmixed." And 99.44% means mixed. It's *almost* pure.

God's requirement is that we be pure and holy—not *almost* pure. What if my wife asked me, "David have you been faithful to me?" and if I replied, "Honey, I've been faithful to you 95% of the time." Would she be pleased? Don't count on it.

How clean are you today? I'm not talking about your skin. How clean is your heart today? You may say, "Pretty clean, pastor. I'm better than a lot of people." Let me ask it a different way: Is your heart pure today? Is it totally pure? Do you think God would be pleased if your heart was 80% clean? or 90% pure? Do you think God is pleased if your heart is 99.44% pure? It can be made pure. That's why God issued the great invitation found in Isaiah 1:18: "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."

Do you need this inner cleansing? There's only one way to be clean before God:

IV. JESUS CAN CLEAN YOU FROM THE INSIDE OUT

In Matthew 23 Jesus said to the hyper-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." (Matthew 23:25-26) Jesus offers the opportunity to come to Him to have your life cleaned from the inside out. Here's how:

1. His blood can make you clean

In the Old Testament, the Jews sacrificed thousands of bulls, goats, and lambs in atonement for their sins. These rituals made them ceremonially clean—this was the Old Covenant. But Jesus has established a New Covenant in His blood. The writer of Hebrews explains it this way: "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our

consciences from acts that lead to death!” (Hebrews 9:14-15) We are all sinners by nature and by choice. God has also equipped each one of us with an early sin warning system—it’s called a conscience. Later in this series I’ll be speaking on how the Bible doesn’t say, “Let your conscience be your guide.” Your conscience can’t always guide you, but your conscience *can* warn you of guilt and sin. Some of you are carrying guilty consciences today from something you did years ago. It makes you feel dirty inside. By trusting the finished work of Jesus on the cross, you can have your conscience washed squeaky clean.

2. His Word can keep you clean

In John 13, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet to teach them a lesson about spiritual cleansing. At first Simon Peter objected, “Lord, you shall *never* wash my feet!” Jesus said, “Unless I wash you, (not just your feet) you have no part with me.” Then Peter went overboard and said, “Then don’t just wash my feet, wash my hands and head, too! Give me the full bath!” Jesus said, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.” They already knew Jesus—they’d already had a bath. Then Jesus said in John 15: “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” (John 13:10; 15:3) Salvation is like a bath. What a bath does to your body, salvation does to your soul—it cleans you up on the inside. But as we walk in a dirty world, our spiritual feet get dirty, and we have to stay in His Word to stay pure and clean. The Bible says Jesus makes His church holy by “cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” (Ephesians 5:26) Keep those two pictures in mind—blood and water.

John tells us after Jesus was already dead a Roman soldier took a spear and thrust it up into the side of Jesus. It probably punctured His heart because the Bible says it produced a “sudden flow of blood and water.” (John 19:23). This is a beautiful picture of the forgiving power of His blood and the cleansing power of His Word.

The wonderful hymn “Rock of Ages” captures this powerful teaching: Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee; / Let the water and the blood, From Thy wounded side which flowed, / Be of sin the double cure, Save from wrath and make me pure. (Words by Augustus Toplady)

Do you need forgiveness today? Do you need cleansing? Sometimes when I come in from walking 18 holes of golf, I’m dirty and sweaty. Cindy wrinkles her nose at me and says, “Go get a shower before you sit down at my table!” I never say, “Why? I took a shower last year.” Instead I step into the shower, and turn on the hot water. I shampoo my hair, and lather up with the soap. It’s a refreshing experience to wash away all the dirt, sweat and grime. In the same way, we need to keep coming to Jesus for cleansing. You can’t be perfect, but you can be clean before the Lord.

CONCLUSION

I heard about hillbilly woman who had nine children. One of her boys fell into a tar barrel and she was working hard to scrub him clean. She said, “I declare I think it would be easier to get rid of you and just have another one than to clean you up!” In our sinful, stained condition, God could have said, “I’ll start over with another planet.” Instead He sent His Son to die for our sins

so we can be clean. That’s why He says to you, “Come on, let’s have a relationship. Though your sins be as scarlet, I can make them white as snow.”

One of the most famous lines in all of literature is from William Shakespeare’s “Macbeth.” In Act V, Scene 1 of “Macbeth”, Lady Macbeth directs her husband to murder Duncan. Later, she is consumed by her guilt. She awakes and washes her hands, but she can’t get rid of the stain. In those famous words she cries, “Out damned spot: out I say! Will these hands never be clean? Here’s the smell of blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.” You’re right, Lady Macbeth, soap, water and perfume won’t do it. But thank God, the Bible says, “The blood of Jesus, God’s son cleanses us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:7)

If you’re talking about dirt, then cleanliness is not next to godliness. But if you’re talking about sin, you need to know when the book of Revelation is describing 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)

You can’t approach God if you’re dirty. David asked an important question in Psalm 24:3 “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?” Then he answered the question in verse 4: “He who has clean hands and a pure heart.” David was the king—he had clean hands, but he soon learned he didn’t have a clean heart. When tempted, he gave in to his lust and committed adultery with Bathsheba. Then he lied and even committed murder by proxy. Later, when he came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit he realized his heart would never be clean by his own efforts, so he cried out, “Create in me a clean heart oh, God.” (Psalm 51:10) Do you need a cleansing from the inside out? Will you seek God and ask him to create a clean heart in you? You’ll discover cleanliness is not next to godliness, but a clean heart is the pathway to godliness!

OUTLINE

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT TAUGHT THAT ONE MUST AVOID DEFILEMENT

"You will make yourselves unclean by these...Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash his clothes...When one of them dies and falls on something, that article, whatever its use will be unclean whether it is made of wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth. Put it in water; it will be unclean till evening, and then it will be clean." *Leviticus 11:24, 25, 32*

II. THE JEWS BECAME MORE CONCERNED WITH OUTWARD PURITY THAN INNER PURITY (Mark 7)

1. The conviction of the Jews: Cleanliness IS godliness!

2. The correction of Jesus:

"Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean." *Mark 7:14-15*

3. The creed of false religion: Appearance and performance is better than knowing God

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

"Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign Lord." *Jeremiah 2:22*

IV. JESUS CAN CLEAN YOU FROM THE INSIDE OUT

1. His blood can make you clean

"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are OUTWARDLY CLEAN. How much more then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, CLEANSE OUR CONSCIENCES from acts that lead to death!" *Hebrews 9:14-15*

2. His Word can keep you clean

Jesus said, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." *John 13:10; 15:3*



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes