

Washed to Greater Foulness

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true spiritual cleansing and salvation come only through recognizing one's sinfulness and relying solely on God's grace, as human efforts to purify oneself are futile and lead to greater despair.

Scripture: Job 9:30-31, Romans 7:24, John 3:8

Topics: "Conviction of Sin", "Salvation by Grace", "Spiritual Cleansing"

Description

In 'Washed to Greater Foulness,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound spiritual truth that human efforts to cleanse oneself from sin are futile and only deepen despair. Drawing from Job's lament, Spurgeon vividly portrays the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit brings to the soul, leading to true repentance and reliance on God's grace. This sermon challenges listeners to abandon self-righteousness and embrace salvation through Christ alone, highlighting the transformative power of divine grace.

Transcript

"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me."—Job 9:30, 31.

I FEEL certain that I am sent on a special errand at this time. Before my mind's eye I see a soul whose awful reflections are hurrying him to despair. He refuses counsel, and will not listen to direction, for dread has made him desperate. I would have a word in the ear of that worried and wearied one. See ye not the man? He has battled long against a dark temptation, but at last he is beaten. He feels that he can hold out no longer. He can scarcely take breath; the air grows hot and stifling around him, as he faces the question—what next? Accustomed as I am to look down on these crowded aisles and up at these closely-packed galleries, I feel a strange curiosity as I gaze into the mass; for I know that there is one man among all of you to whom I have a private message. I carry despatches from the King of kings to one who is grievously troubled, and is become as a woman forsaken and despised. My Lord and Master described himself in parable as leaving the ninety-and-nine to seek for one lost sheep: I must now copy his example. You will not grudge me for this service, I am sure. I quit the throng that I may find the bewildered one, and bring him safe and sound to the fold.

Turning to my text, let me say, that as one is startled by a shriek, or saddened by a groan, so these sharp utterances of Job astonish us at first, and then awake our pity. How much are we troubled with brotherly compassion as we read the words,—"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so

clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me!" The sense of misery couched in this passage baffles description. Yet this is but one of a series, in which sentence after sentence reveals a fresh chamber of horrors. The similitudes of grief are here piled up in heaps, with what an old author has spoken of as the "rhetoric of sorrow." Physical sufferings had produced a strain on Job's mind, and he sought relief by expressing his anguish. Like some solitary prisoner in the gloomy keep of an old castle, he graves on the walls pictures of the abject despondencies which haunt him. His afflictions are aggravated by vain efforts to alleviate them: he wounds his hand with the rough hammer and nail with which he is engraving his griefs. Of such tortures many of us have had a taste.

From my experience, as a patient myself, smitten down with soul-sickness; and from my observation as a pastor, into whose ears the woes of awakened sinners are constantly poured, I have somewhat learned to understand the imagery of Job. The sufferer is in double straits. While he is tossed about by Satan, his friends are discharging their arrows at him, and the Almighty troubleth him. To help such a sufferer we must be careful to distinguish between the causes of his sorrow, and divide between his affliction itself and the further sorrows which he has brought upon himself by his unwise efforts to escape from it.

Such, then, is the line of thought we will pursue. I shall make four divisions; three of them are to be found in the text, and the fourth will follow on, as an important consequence. First, we shall notice that a quickened soul becomes conscious of guilt; secondly, the soul that is quickened makes ineffectual attempts to rid itself of the stain of guilt; thirdly, to deter his people from self-righteousness it pleases God to plunge deeper into the mire those who attempt to cleanse themselves; the fourth point is, that only by severe training are men led to look alone to God for salvation,—it needs omnipotence to teach us that salvation is of the Lord.

I. At the outset, then, we observe that QUICKENED SOULS ARE CONSCIOUS OF GUILT. They see it; they know it; they feel it; and they blush to find that they are without excuse for it. All men are sinners: to most men, however, sin appears to be a fashion or the times, a necessity of nature, a folly of youth, or an infirmity of age, which a slight apology will suffice to remove. You will scarcely meet with an Englishman who will not acknowledge that he is a sinner. Is it not the General Confession stereotyped in the book of Common Prayer? But it is one thing to call yourself a sinner, and quite another thing to feel it. I have heard of a lady who owned to her minister that she was a great sinner. He questioned her kindly as to which of the ten commands she had broken. Beginning with the first, he asked her, "Did you ever break this?" to which enquiry she indignantly answered, "No." In like manner he dealt with the second, and right through the whole ten. She professed in detail to have observed each one, and yet pretended to confess that she had broken them all. By such equivocations multitudes of men and women deceive themselves; and it is unhappily the custom of many a preacher to address his congregation as if they were all good people, and every one of them knew the Lord, from the least even to the greatest. This is pleasing to the flesh, and clattering to pride; but it is most pernicious. How many are being deceived by this want of marking a difference where a vital difference exists!

Not till men are quickened by divine grace do they truly know that they are sinners. How is this? Some diseases are so insidious that the sufferers fancy that they are getting better, while in very truth they are hastening to the grave. After such manner does sin deceive the sons of men: they think they are saved when they are still unrenewed. How often have I seen a poor girl, whose pale face, sunken eyes, shadowy hand, and languid step have clearly betokened that she was on the brink of death, yet she mistook the flush of consumption for the ruddiness of health. Slowly she waned; but within a day of her departure she planned cheerful projects which proved that she looked for life. Consumption is not, however, so deceitful

as sin. Where it has full power over the soul, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" If sin were not so deceitful it would not be half so destructive as it is.

How is this, you ask again? Few give themselves the trouble to think about these matters at all. Ours is an age in which men's thoughts are keen upon politics and merchandize, practical science and economic inventions, financial schemes and Home Rule, and I know not what beside; but sound doctrine and sincere piety are out of vogue. Few people trouble themselves to think about their souls' everlasting welfare. Men die at the same rate as of yore, but the mortality is reckoned by a percentage; and as for the life hereafter it is ignored. Friend, have you ever dedicated ten minutes of your time to a consideration of your destiny? Days to your ledger; hours to your amusements; years to your commercial engagements; would it not be wise to reserve some moments for your soul's outlook beyond the grave? You have made your last will and testament for the world that is fading away, but you have laid up no treasure for the world to come. Is this consistent with your usual prudence? I should have good hope for some of you if I could make you sit for one hour alone, and think of nothing but your souls, your God, and the final judgment. Alas! alas! as the horse rusheth to the battle, so men rush to the heated competition of the hour. They cannot be persuaded to consider. Poor mortals! They concern themselves about everything that does not concern them, but they persistently neglect everything that is needful to their eternal well-being.

How is this? we enquire once more. To natural ignorance we may attribute much of the ordinary indifference of men to their own sinfulness. They live in a benighted age. In vain you boast the enlightenment of this nineteenth century: the nineteenth century is not one whit more enlightened as to the depravity of human nature than the first century. Men are as ignorant of the plague of their own hearts to-day as they were when Paul addressed them. I know that almost every man you meet with talks as if he were qualified to set up for a doctor of divinity; but is not this the confidence of ignorance? "Vain man would be wise"—or read it, if you please, "vain man is void of understanding—though man be born like a wild ass's colt." Until God the Holy Ghost takes him in hand no spiritual light enters the man's soul. Preaching is an effective means of instructing the mind, arousing the conscience, and impressing the hearts of the people; and faithful preachers are scattered up and down the country within measurable reach of most of your homes. Why, then, is the doctrine of human sinfulness so little understood, and so seldom accepted as an undeniable fact? Many persons seem startled, and try to think that they misunderstand us when we say plainly that in the very best man in the world there is no virtue or grace that can be pleasing to God, unless he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. Let me put the truth before you as plainly as I can by speaking of your body in order to describe your soul. You probably imagine that your physical constitution is sound and healthy. I grant you all you ask on that score; yet you are but flesh and blood, like the rest of our mortal race, and therefore you are exposed to every disease which waylays your fellow creatures. Even so, your deceitful heart is capable of as desperate crimes as the vilest of sinners ever committed. The evil propensity lurks within, it needs only the contagion of society, or the temptation of Satan to bring it out. Does not this alarm you? It ought to do so.

Hardly a glimmer of the humbling truth of our natural depravity dawns on the dull apprehension of the worldly-wise, though souls taught from above know it and are appalled by it. In divers ways the discovery comes to those whom the Lord ordains to save. Sometimes a preacher sent of God lets in the dreadful light. Many men, like the false prophet Mokanna, hide their deformity. You may remember the story. Mokanna wore a silver veil upon his forehead: should he ever remove it the brightness of his countenance would blind the astonished world. In truth a foul disease had cankered his brow. God's faithful servants are sent to tear off these veils, and expose men to themselves. This duty demands courage. Men veil black

villainy with self-flattery! Like Jezebel, they paint their eyebrows, and tire their heads, till they think themselves beautiful. It is ours, like Jehu, to cry, "Throw her down." What have they to do with peace who are the servants of sin? How dare they pretend to comeliness whose hearts are not right with God?

How comes it to pass, then, that the best of saints on earth are prone to account themselves the chief of sinners? Their sincerity is unquestionable. This discovery is due to the Holy Spirit. He it is who convinces men of sin. By his mysterious but most blessed agency on the hearts of men, a sense of utter ruin is wrought in the chosen, and this prepares them to accept the full redemption provided by the sacrifice of the Redeemer. We cannot explain to you the mystery of the Spirit's operation. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." But this we do know—the Holy Spirit withers all merely human hope and righteousness, and thus makes room for trust in the work of our Lord Jesus. Man by nature is blindly proud, and proudly blind. The moment the Spirit of God comes into a man, the scales fall from his eyes, and he sees himself in quite a different light. To each saved soul it seems a strange miracle. I have heard the story from simple lips full many a time. The new self talks of the old self with a kind of vacant wonderment. Yesterday our friend was on good terms with himself as a virtuous citizen, an honest trader, a sound churchman; in moral worth all that his neighbors could wish. To-day he is vile in his own sight: his hands are filthy, his heart is foul, his thoughts are loathsome. He perceives that he has been walking in a vain show, and therefore he writes himself down a hypocrite. No name too base by which to surname himself.

Have I found you out, my friend? Wandering among the motley throng, I am in quest of a soul that seeks the mercy of the Lord. Am I not upon your track?

Mayhap I am at this moment addressing a person who has been the subject of a mysterious gloom for which he sees no reason whatever. I am right happy to have found him, for I trust I have met with a recruit for the army of truth. But why, you may enquire, do I make such a remark? I will tell you in a moment. There is a vital connection between soul-distress and sound doctrine. Sovereign grace is dear to those who have groaned deeply because they see what grievous sinners they are. Witness Joseph Hart and John Newton, whose hymns you have often sung, or David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, whose biographies many of you have read. You seldom hear much of God's everlasting covenant in these modern times, for few men feel that thorough conviction of sin which comes directly from the teaching of the Holy Spirit. In the economy of redemption the effectual operation of the Spirit in enlightening the heart concerning its own sinfulness is sure evidence of the Father's personal love to his chosen people, and of the special atonement that the Son of God made for their transgressions.

"Ne'er had ye felt the guilt of sin,

Or sweets of pardoning love,

Unless your worthless names had been

Enrolled to life above."

You may walk through a dark cellar without discerning by the eye that anything noisome is there concealed. Let the shutters be thrown open! Bid the light of day stream in! You soon perceive frogs upon the cold clammy pavement, filthy cobwebs hanging on the walls in long festoons, foul vermin creeping about everywhere. Startled, alarmed, horrified, who would not wish to flee away, and find a healthier

atmosphere? The rays of the sun are, however, but a faint image of that light divine shed by the Holy Spirit, which penetrates the thickest shades of human folly and infatuation, and exposes the treachery of the inmost heart. Then the soul cries out in agony, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" When brought to feel this, we think our doom is sealed, and everlasting destruction is close upon us. But it is not so. This is the way of hope. Through death to life every saved soul must pass. Ask us not to paint the sensations; nor blame us if we usually describe that experience which is most distinct. Sharp conviction, fainting heart, struggling hope, fear that haunts, terror that appalls,—an awful fight of fiercely strange emotions! This is the extreme measure of the life-change. In milder form, with one decisive pang the true heart is born again. The Slough of Despond lies across every pilgrim's pathway. The years or hours it takes to wade through it must be left an open question. Sudden death is an occasional fact, but more frequently the saints are peacefully welcomed to the realms above; so in the church on earth, sudden conversions happen, but as a rule men pass gradually into the kingdom of God. Between the sensual and the spiritual there is a great gulf, and it must be passed. Of the wind or weather in which you make the passage it is not for me to speak: the voyage may be long or short; but in some sort the gulf must be traversed. Conviction of sin is of the first importance: it cannot be dispensed with.

You will say, "Why?" Well, we might suggest many reasons. It will make mercy the more precious, it will excite horror of sin in the future—burnt children dread the fire, it will teach you patience, for no future trial will be so severe as this; and it will tend to keep you persevering in holiness. But be the reasons what they may, be you sure of this, that no soul is saved without being made conscious of its own sinfulness.

II. We pass on to notice that it often happens that AWAKENED SOULS USE MANY INEFFECTUAL MEANS TO OBTAIN CLEANSING. Job describes himself as washing in snow water, and making his hands never so clean. His expressions remind me of my own labor in vain. By how many experiments I tried to purify my own soul! Like all my fellows, I was always foiled in every attempt. See a squirrel in a cage; the poor thing is working away, trying to mount, yet he never rises one inch higher. In like case is the sinner who seeks to save himself by his own good works, or by any other means: he toils without result. It is astonishing what pains men will take in this useless drudgery. They prevent the dawn of day in their anxiety to attend matins or observe mass; they are austere in their fastings; they say prayers without stint and do penance to the full. We should be sorry to impugn their sincerity. With what exemplary zeal many in the Anglican Church go about to establish their own righteousness! They practice ceremonies, with a claim to catholicity which no Catholic will allow. Untiring is their diligence in one department or another of amateur office, they hope for a reward for doing what God never commanded. Without a Scriptural proof of being right in anything, they would fain be righteous overmuch in everything. The labor of the foolish in spinning a righteousness of their own, that is neither accredited by the divine law nor by the holy gospel is almost incredible: they would rather give their bodies to be buried and their goods to feed the poor, than submit to salvation by grace, though it is the only possible salvation.

In seeking to obtain absolution of their sins, to establish a righteousness of their own, and to secure peace of mind, men tax their ingenuity to the utmost. Job talks of washing himself with snow water. The imagery is, no doubt, meant to be instructive. Why is snow water selected? The reason probably was, first, because it was hard to get. Far easier, generally, to procure water from the running brooks than from melted snow. Men set a high value on that which is difficult to procure. Whence comes it that the great majority of the so-called Christian world prefer worship conducted with gorgeous ritual and stately ceremonial? Is it not the rarity of the thing which creates a sense of value? Enter a Popish cathedral, and

try, if you can, to understand the services. What are all these persons doing dressed in red and white, or those other persons in more sombre color? Manipulations, genuflexions, prostrations, waving of censers, and elevating of hosts—an array of symbolism which it took ages to conglomerate. What is the value of it all, unless it lies in its complications and expenses? Our Protestant friends have their milder predilections. Organs and orchestras serve them for snow water. In measured accents let me speak of music. For psalms and spiritual songs you all know I have an ardent passion. My spirit wings its way to the very portals of heaven in the words and tunes of our hymns. But for your instrumental melodies I have no mind, when you substitute mere sound for heartfelt prayer and praise. The obvious simplicity of the gospel is the only outward voucher I know of for its inward sincerity. Praise is none the better because of the difficulty of the music; say rather that the more simple and congregational it is the better by far. Forms of worship which are expensive and difficult are greatly affected by many, as snow water was thought in Job's day to be a bath for kings; but, after all, it is an idle fashion, likely to mislead.

Besides, snow water enjoyed a reputation for purity. If you would have a natural filtered water gather the newly-fallen snow and melt it. The figure represents the religiousness which is of the most rigid kind—the cream of the cream. Specimens yet remain among us of piety more than possible to men, religiousness above the range of mortals; which piety is, however, not of God's grace, and consequently is a vain show. Though we should use the purest ceremonies, multiply the best of good works, and add thereto the costliest of gifts, yet we should be unable to make ourselves clean before God. You may wash yourself till you deny the existence of a spot, and yet you may be unclean. You may make rigid rules, and find much content in keeping them, and yet remain in nature's filthiness. With all your shrewdness you have but practiced a human device, and in refusing to trust in the Lord Jesus you have failed to observe a divine ordinance; and therefore you will fail.

Once again, this snow water is probably extolled because it descends from the clouds of heaven, instead of bubbling up from the clods of earth. Religiousness which can color itself with an appearance of the supernatural is very taking with many. Some folks are fond of apostolical succession; it professes to come from heaven. No doubt the notion originated in cloudland. Others are fascinated by Popery. His holiness the Pope is accounted to be a great cistern, full of grace, which is distilled in streams, and runs through capacious pipes called cardinals, and then through smaller tubes, styled bishops. At length by the still smaller pipes of the priests it comes to the people. No pretext was ever more paltry than this, and yet many are deceived by it. There is no peace in it for thoughtful minds. For such your snow water has no solace, because they see no connection between outward acts and the purifying of the heart.

Not all the outward forms on earth,

Nor rites that God has given,

Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,

Can raise a soul to heaven."

If I "make my hands never so clean," is an expression peculiarly racy in the original. The Hebrew word has an allusion to soap or nitre. Such was the ordinary and obvious method any one would take to whiten his hands when they were grimy. Tradition tells that certain stains of blood cleave to the floor. The idea is that human blood, shed in murder, can never be scrubbed or scraped off the boards. Thus is it most certainly with the dye of sin. The blood of souls is in thy skirts, is the terrible language of Jeremiah (2:34). When ye think that baptism can begin, that confirmation can further, and that other sacraments can complete your

purification, ye are mere dupes of your own folly. "Though I wash myself in snow water, and make myself never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." There it stands, it is the testimony of one man, but yet it is true; the Almighty attests it, and all human experience affirms it. These worthless experiments to cleanse yourselves would be ended once for all if you would have regard to the great truth of the gospel: "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." God alone can remove sin, and he does so by the blood of Jesus.

III. But AS SURE AS EVER QUICKENED BOWLS TRY TO GET PURITY IN THE WRONG WAY, GOD WILL THRUST THEM DOWN INTO THE DITCH. This is a terrible predicament. I find, on looking at the passage closely, that it means "head over ears in the ditch." It is not merely some filthy puddle in which a man treads till he is splashed all over, it is a slough of despond into which he sinks. His eyes, his ears, and his mouth, are filled with pollution; and his very clothes are so foul that he utterly abhors himself. Old Master Caryl, a rare expositor of the Book of Job, says that the original can only be equalled in English by the expression—we would not touch such an one with a pair of tongs.

Often it happens with those who try to get better by their own good works, that their conscience is awakened by the effort, and they are more conscious of sin than ever. If a chosen man strives to save himself from his sins by his own righteousness the Lord permits him to see his own heart and he ceases from all glorying. The word here rendered "ditch" is elsewhere translated "corruption." So in the sixteenth Psalm: "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Language cannot paint abasement, reproach, or ignominy in stronger terms. "THOU shalt plunge me in the ditch." Is it not as though God himself would undertake the business of causing his people to know that by their vain ablutions they were making themselves yet more vile in his eyes? We read, in the second chapter of Jeremiah, of God's remonstrance with Judah: "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God. How canst thou say, I am not polluted?"

May we not regard this as the discipline of our Heavenly Father's love, albeit when passing through the trial we do not perceive it to be so? Thus, in the apocalyptic epistle to the church at Laodicea, exhortation more severe or more tender it would be hard to imagine—"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Mark the gentle words, "I counsel thee," addressed to a people whose lukewarmness excited nausea! Then follows a sentence of encouragement so sweet and enchanting that it almost sounds like an apology for the fierceness of the former censure. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." A revelation of wretched sinfulness ends in a declaration of love and a visit of grace; for the Lord goes on to say, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Anyhow, the Lord will end the conceit which is the source of the lukewarmness: he cannot permit his chosen to remain in self-righteous pride; for that his soul hateth.

Perhaps, my friend, the experience I am trying to describe will come to you through the preaching of the Word. This sermon may dishearten and distract you. Your hope was thriving like a plant. This sermon shrivels every leaf; and though, at the scent of water, the branch of self-righteousness will bud again, the next sermon you hear may wither even the stem of your confidence. If another sermon soon afterwards cuts it down to the very root, the ministry will be profitable to you; for the root of pride must be cut up. Believe me, this is mild treatment: I trust you may not be left to severer methods.

Frequently our great Lord leaves a poor wayward soul to eat the fruits of its own ways, and this is the severest form of plunging in the ditch. While striving after righteousness in a wrong way, the man stumbles into the very sin against which he struggled. The young man, of whom I am now thinking, resolved, by the help of God, that he would be different henceforth from what he ever had been. His vows kept pace with his devotions. He started them at early morn—

"And felt, good, easy man, full surely

His goodness was a-ripening."

To the shop he went, as was his wont; but his thoughts were no longer set on earthly things: he stood, as he supposed, on heavenly ground. Because he had taken snow-water and had washed his hands, he began to think that he was singularly clean. Towards evening a temptation suddenly crossed his path. At first he resisted, but it proved a feeble fight. The argument of another young man, that it was policy to yield, availed to break the covenant he had made with his own conscience. So he was led astray to a place of amusement, where the light of God's countenance never shines. The wretchedness of his reflections on the morrow could not easily be told. He felt that his feet were fast in the miry clay, and his garments foully soiled. His empty conceit might not have been dislodged from its secret lurking-place in his depraved nature without some such perilous downfall.

Mayhap, there sits out yonder a good sister who has grown familiar with spiritual straits. Did you ever happen to hear of Mary Huntington, wife of William Huntington, S.S., the famous Calvinistic preacher? When he prayed for her, which he did with much affection, he confessed before God—"O Lord, I beseech thee, hear me on her behalf. Thou knowest how warmly attached she has ever been to MOSES, and what narrow and vain searches she has made in order to find out his grave, which thou, in infinite wisdom and mercy, hast thought fit to conceal." That prayer, which was published about a century ago, is worth preserving in your memory. For that "Mary," like many worthy housewives of these days, was rather fond of collecting the rags and relics of self. If it had been possible, she would have worn at least an apron of the linsey-woolsey of self-righteousness. The Lord will not have his handmaids thus arranged: they must be quit of self altogether.

Our lives through various scenes are drawn and vexed with petty provocations. Paltry annoyances are the bane of our peace. Some of you, dear sisters, spend your years and your thoughts in a narrow circle, and I deeply sympathize with you therein. Without a wish to be great, or to enlarge your coast, you intensely desire to be good. To do your duty to the best of your ability, is your aim, and therein you are worthy of all honor. The lot of many of you is to pass much of your time in loneliness; your temptations are therefore peculiar. For many a quiet hour you have been busy with domestic employments, distracted by no acute anxiety, but cheered by much quiet meditation. At such seasons you are apt to get on good terms with yourselves. Presently the shades of evening begin to fall. Evening! of which Cowper sweetly sings:

"Come, evening, once again, season of peace,

Return, sweet evening, and continue long!"

You are prepared to welcome home the husband, brother, son, who will look for his repast, and seek his well-earned repose. Possibly, my sisters, this is your season of temptation. His rough word, his needless complaint, his vacant look, when you pine for sympathy puts you about. A sense of injustice stings you. It may be very natural, but all the same it is very fatal to your sense of superior goodness. What more

treacherous than one's temper? In a sudden gust of passion, you utter words of anger. How gladly would you recall them! but they are registered. Down into the ditch of despondency you sink. For days to come you feel that you cannot forgive yourself. Your rich mantle of righteousness after this tumble in the ditch looks mean enough to provoke your own ridicule.

Thus do we, in our different spheres, fly from this to that, and from that to the other. Some hope to cleanse away sin by a supreme effort of self-denial, or of miraculous faith. Men dream of being clean without the blood of Jesus, they even boast of it, and yet their sin remaineth. The eye of the judgment may be deceived till we half think we are clean; but no sooner does the scale grow thin, or the light grow strong, than the conscience perceives its error and learns the lesson that no human endeavor can wash out the accursed spot. Let us not play at purification, nor vainly hope to satisfy conscience with that which renders no satisfaction to God.

Persons of sensitive disposition, and sedentary habits, are prone to seek a righteousness of inward feeling. Let me describe these good folks to you. They aim at a righteousness that renounces every fault, and they cultivate such graces as are naturally lovely, watching from moment to moment their own feelings of joy or grief. Yet these be they who get to know, with the keenest anguish, the plague of their own hearts. How it happens is sufficiently clear. They try to live by their feelings and frames of mind; and what can be more deceitful than these sensations? Treacherous as the sea on which you sail so smoothly on sunny days, but which, at other times, wrecks your barque without mercy, your frames and feelings are not in the least to be depended on. One day you are all aglow, the flush of fervor is on your face, the next day you feel so dead and cold that prayer would freeze upon your lips. Your evidences are dark. You think you have none, and, seized with despondency, you lament that "there is no hope." Ah, me! the sin-sick soul, given to watch its own symptoms, is brought into perilous straits; trying one nostrum after another, sometimes feeling a little better, and anon feeling itself much worse. Oh, that it could turn from feeling to faith; and look steadily out of inward sensation to the work finished once for all by the Lord Jesus!

Poor Job was smitten with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. No doubt he sent for the doctor—though we are not actually told that he did so. It is likely enough that snow water was prescribed to him for a relief. His hands may not have seemed very sightly when he used it; there may, at least, have been some connection between his physician's prescription and his poetry, when he said, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean." Perfection in any one part of conduct would not secure cleanness for the rest. Washed hands would be a small matter if the boils remained over the rest of the body. This is another aspect of the same unsatisfactory expedient that I am wanting to point out to you. You are under bad treatment until you walk by faith in Jesus. Anything short of grace will prove a mere mockery of your malady. Asa, King of Judah, was diseased in his feet. He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. Asa never recovered; but the Lord restored Job to perfect, health. The gratuitous advice which the patriarch received in the time of his sore sickness was not worth his gratitude. Of his three friends, he said: "Ye are all physicians of no value." Then comes back the metaphor which I have repeated so often: "Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." After all is said and done by the wisest of men the poor sinner is worse off than when they undertook his case. All is vanity till God comes in.

Let us not forget that the man who thus described his own case "was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." Such a case is a puzzle to those who are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Although Job was renowned for righteousness in his generation, a gleam from God's countenance exposed the faultiness of his soul. Does this prove him to have been a hypocrite? By no means. His

friends supposed him to be so, though they had no ground whatever for the suspicion: it was their rough way of solving a hard problem. If the patriarch's integrity had not been so firm, if his refinement had not been so tender, if his piety towards God had not been so invariably accompanied by his pity for his brother men; if, in a word, his character had not been so complete, his trial and his deliverance could not have exhibited the extraordinary lesson which has interested and instructed every succeeding generation. He appears before us at first in the vigor of health, in the height of prosperity, and in the charm of good repute. But oh, the vanity of man! At a touch of God's finger, his flesh develops a festering mass of corruption; at a glance of God's eye, which searched him through and through, the total depravity of human nature at its best estate becomes apparent. "He abhors himself in dust and ashes." What next? Utter ruin? Nay, friend, it is full redemption.

IV. By such severe training THE AWAKENED ONE IS LED TO LOOK ALONE TO GOD FOR SALVATION, and to find the salvation he looks for. This is my last point, and I have no time left to enlarge upon it. What I want is that the truth may flash across your mind in a moment. There sits the man who is menaced with despair because every effort to extricate himself from the tangled web of his own strange experience has left him worse than before. Did I attempt to comfort him he would repel my kindest expressions. And why? He knows that it is God who condemns him. In a British court of justice, when the judge sums up against the prisoner, small cheer can he get from the honeyed words of his counsel. But hark—"It is God that justifieth." Whom does he justify? The ungodly. He first condemns them in their own consciences; and then he justifies them according to his grace. If I receive the sentence of death in myself it is the earnest of deliverance in my Redeemer. My brother, has light beamed on your soul? I hope I have found you, and that the Lord has visited you with his salvation.

I want you to notice a simple fact which seems to me to have escaped your observation. When the Almighty justified Job he commended him, and pronounced a high encomium on his conduct. Whatever mistakes he made about himself or his circumstances, in one matter he was clear as a bell; He has spoken right of me, saith the Lord. (Job 42:7.) Eliphaz and his friends transgressed in this respect. Harken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek it in yourselves, you are all on the wrong track. You begin below with the whole duty of man, and try to work upward: you are sure to fail. You should begin up yonder, with the righteousness of God; and then you could work downward to righteousness of daily life. God give you knowledge of salvation by grace, to the glory of his own name, and to your own sanctification, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job 9.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—556, 476, 602.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/washed-to-greater-foulness/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net