

Cleansing 3: No Substitutes

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It is amazing the amount of money that the American public spends each year on making their bodies appealing to others. Perfumes, soaps, deodorants, you name it, and we spend money on it. Advertising nowadays concentrates so much on what can give us outer beauty. You don't see much advertising in prime time on how to better our inner self. It is assumed that everybody is just fine on the outside; that if we could just get someone to desire us then we would be able to keep them because of our inner self.

Do we make such an effort to be presentable to God? There is a very interesting parallel here for us to study. In 2 Corinthians 2:15, Paul says that 'we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.' Have you ever smelled something such that you wanted to just breathe in forever? The gospel living in us should be like that to both God and those whom we want to teach about Christ.

Paul in Ephesians 5:2 calls Christ's sacrifice a 'fragrant offering.' He tells us that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, in Romans 12:1. Paul puts it all together for us in 2 Corinthians 11:2 when he says, 'I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.' We are to be before Christ and God as clean and fresh smelling, by our living sacrifice, as we know that a bride would be before her new husband, or vice versa. We probably all use deodorant and soap daily, whether we need it or not. But how many of us daily prepare our hearts to commune with the living God? Cleanliness is indeed next to Godliness. We must desire with all of our hearts to be spiritually cleansed.

Our thoughts should run now to the question, 'How do we get spiritually clean?' Before we investigate the process of cleaning, we need to point out a danger that we should be cautious of, and that is the attempted use of substitutes for cleaning. We can get away with this for a while at home. For instance we can sweep the dirt under the rug, repaint over crayon marks, wax over the old wax, burn scented candles, and spread out air fresheners over the cat litter box to try to overcome our uncleanness by adding beauty. But we have to remember that the old expression, 'Beauty is only skin deep' is very applicable here. In polishing the top of a table, we can cover the small scratches fairly well, but what about the deep ones?

There are many things in life which, though they are not really worth much, are given an attractive surface so that they might look valuable and be sold at a profit. Many things today are made from a cheap material and then plated with a precious metal to make them look expensive. Much of our furniture is only press-board with a veneer covering which imitates a particular woodgrain. The same sort of thing exists in the realm of human behavior. There are those who attempt to conceal their real character with a veneer of 'good works,' though their heart has not been touched by God's love. Theirs is only a 'surface religion': its beauty is only skin deep. For example, Proverbs 26:23 tells us that the wicked are like a clay pot with a silver coating on it."

Then Jesus warned in Matthew 7:15 of those who 'come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.' They may dazzle momentarily with 'flashy' works, but their real fruit will become obvious, for beneath the peel the core is rotten. In Ezekiel 13:10-15 we see that God's people whitewashed a flimsy wall, but under the torrential rain of the Lord the whitewash and the wall will be washed away. Jesus condemned those who cleaned the outside of the cup, but left the inside filthy with their selfishness (Matthew 23:25). He continues by saying that some are gaily whitewashed on the outside, but full of corruption and the decay of death within. This kind of person expects their 'shell' to protect even their soul from the eyes of God. Some people are the masters of disguise, and are like the chameleon, changing their appearance from church to the rest of the world. But in Jeremiah 17:10, God says, "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." We can not hide our hearts from the Lord. How can we escape being shallow and artificial? How do we keep our religion from being only skin deep? The key is to let the love of God penetrate deep within us, beyond our selfish surface, and be moved to action by the feelings which respond to that love. We must open our hearts, install our faith there, and act as sincerely as we can in obedience to his word.