

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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DEFILED AND DEFILING.

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## A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 1896,

DELIVERED BY

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“Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.”—  
Haggai ii. 13, 14.

THE prophet Haggai very wisely drew out from the priests a definite answer to certain questions which he put to them. Then, upon their authority, he could say to the people, “This is what your own priests say; and this is what you yourselves believe.” This was taking them by a kind of sacred guile, and it was a powerful means of forcing home the truth to their heart and conscience.

According to the twelfth verse, Haggai first put to the priests this question, “If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered, and said, No.” Here is a man who is holy—I mean, ceremonially holy,—and he is carrying in his skirts part of a holy sacrifice. Now, if he touches anything, will he make it holy by that touch? The priests said, “No,” they could not say otherwise. So, if a man be himself holy, however holy he may be, can he make another man holy simply by touching him? If he speaks of good things, or does good actions, will it be certain that he will thereby affect others by his good words and good works? Oh, no! There does not seem to be that spreading power in holy things that there is in unholy things; at any rate, not in those that are merely ceremonially holy. Here, then, is a man who is, in a legal sense, clean before God, and he is carrying a holy thing in his skirts, but he does not therefore make that which he touches to be clean or holy.

Then the Spirit of God, having by the mouth of the prophet put the truth in that way, suggested to him to ask the priests another

question. "Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean." There is such a terrible contagion about uncleanness that he who is affected by it spreads it wherever he goes. Whatever he puts his foot upon, or touches with his hand, becomes thereby defiled. We cannot communicate holiness, but we can communicate unholiness. It will cause us labour and agony and anguish of spirit to impart to another even one right idea, and then when it is imparted it is not fully fixed in the hearer's heart till the Spirit of God comes and works a miracle of grace; but it is easy enough to communicate evil. A lewd song may have but one auditor, and yet never be forgotten. A wrong action may never be chronicled by the public press, yet some little eye that saw it shall have learned from the ill example something that shall never be unlearned. The horribly contagious and infectious power of sin, wherever it is displayed, is terrible.

But the thing to which I want specially to call your attention is this. See what a picture is before us. Here is an unclean man; he has touched a dead body, and so become unclean, therefore whatever he touches also becomes unclean. There is a loaf of bread; he has cut a slice off it, and all that loaf has become unclean. Here is a mess of pottage on the table; he has taken a portion from it, and so made it all unclean. There is a cup of wine; he has sipped it, or he may have only touched the vessel that contains it, but the whole of the wine is unclean. Here is oil, which one would think would be medicinally useful without being at all harmful; but this unclean person has put his finger to it, and it is unclean. Here is meat, or vegetable food of any kind; he has touched it, so it is all unclean. I should not like to be that man;—to make unclean even a chair that I might touch, to pollute the very house in which I dwelt, to be unable to shake hands with a friend without making him defiled through contact with me because I was myself unclean. I say again, that is a dreadful picture; and you must bear with me when I tell you my fear that it is not only the portrait of the erring people in Haggai's day, but also a life-like representation of some who are now present, and of multitudes who pass for very good people in these our days. It can still be said with utmost truthfulness, "So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean."

I. So this is my subject. First, THE TERRIBLE UNCLEANNESS. And here I will keep to my text.

If you want fully to understand the text, or to have it put into New Testament language, you must look at Paul's Epistle to his son Titus; for there, in the fifteenth verse of the first chapter, you get this same picture in other colours: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." They are themselves so impure that everything becomes impure to them. Every man whose heart is not renewed by grace is in this sad and terrible condition.

Here note, first, that *common things are polluted by men of unclean nature*. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, says, "I know, and

am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." Nothing that God has made, and that sin has not marred, is common or unclean of itself, "for every creature of God is good." From that day when Peter, at Joppa, saw the great sheet let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air, he was taught a lesson that he needed to learn, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." In and of itself, there is nothing that God has made which ought to be described as common. To the pure heart, everything is pure, but unclean men may make unclean every common or everyday thing of life. They can not only make wine to be unclean, as, alas! is all but universally the case; but even bread, pottage, oil, meat, or anything that is in itself harmless, can be rendered impure when it comes to be touched by impure men, and used wrongfully.

Perhaps someone asks, "How can that be?" Well, common things can be rendered unclean when you make gods of them. If the most important questions of your life are, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?"—if you seek first of all in this life merely these things, though they are not in themselves evil, they will become idols, and so will be unclean, for every idol is a defiling thing to those who bow down before it. Anything which takes your attention away from your God, is an idol; it is another god, a rival god, and so it is the most unclean thing possible. I mean just this, that, although your ordinary pursuits may be in themselves perfectly innocent, and may be commendable if they are followed out to the glory of God, yet if your first object in life be yourself and what you can get out of the common things of this life, you defile them by putting them into the place which belongs alone to God.

Next, common things may be defiled by an excess in the use of them. This may be done by gluttony. What a defilement it is of bread, the staff of life, and of those comforts which God gives to us for food, when a man makes his own belly into a god, whose temple is his kitchen. I know not that the worst of the heathen can possibly degrade themselves more than epicures and drunkards do when they make those things, which in themselves are not evil, to become their gods, and indulge in them until, by their excess, they sink below the level of the beasts that perish. You can go to this excess with all kinds of things. The commonest and most apparent case is that of the man who indulges in strong drink; but all other common things are capable of being polluted in the same way, and they are continually being so polluted.

Others pollute common things by excess in the keeping of them. The miser's gold is cankered by his avarice. He who must ever be getting more land, even if he has to banish everybody from the range of his windows, defiles his possessions. He who in trade is exacting towards those who labour for him, demanding more and giving less than is their due, defiles his trade; he makes a dunghill of his shop, and turns his traffic into treason against God. I need not go into particulars, because the thing is apparent to all men, and you can see how a defiled man, coming into a business which in itself is perfectly

right, nevertheless defiles it by excess in the keeping of the goods which God has entrusted to him as a steward to use for the good of others.

I am sure that we can also defile the common mercies of this life by ingratitude in the enjoyment of them. Are there not many, who eat and drink, yet never bless God for what they have; or who abound in riches, and yet out of all their wealth there never comes from their hearts any thanksgiving to God? They are, as good old Rowland Hill used to say, like the hogs under the oak, which eat the acorns that fall on the ground, but never lift up their thoughts to the tree from which the acorns come. These ungrateful people are willing to receive all the good things which God may give them, and they are greedy to get more; but the Lord never receives from them even the peppercorn rent of a word of thanksgiving. Their hearts are set upon the gifts of God, and they care nothing for the gracious Giver. O sirs, when you sit down without thanksgiving to your meats and to your drinks, your tables are defiled, your platters and your cups are defiled, and every mouthful that goes down your throats is defiled, because you do not eat and drink to the glory of God!

See, then, in how many ways common things may be polluted by men of unclean nature.

But, even worse than that, *holy things are polluted by men of unclean nature*. It is a very sad thing to see how the most sacred things can be spoiled by the touch of unholy hands. You have all heard of Voltaire, and you know something of the character of the man. I should think that nobody ever excelled Voltaire in a clever kind of blasphemy; yet I find him writing to a lady,—a lady of whose character the less said the better,—“My friends say everywhere that I am not a Christian. I have just given them the lie direct by performing my Easter devotions (*mes pâques*) publicly, thus proving to all my lively desire to terminate my long career in the religion in which I was born.” Only fancy a man like Voltaire, after blasphemously saying of Christ that he would “crush the wretch,” then going to eat “the sacrament,” as some call it; and I am afraid that, every Easter, there are many people of that sort, who have no respect for the Lord’s day, but because their “priests” choose to call the day “Good Friday,” they have great respect for that day, and they will come then to the communion table, though all the year long they have never had a thought concerning him whose death they profess to celebrate. It is a terrible thing that the innermost mysteries of the Church of Christ are often polluted by a godless, thoughtless man, who, nevertheless, for some hypocritical or formalistic reason, will come even to the table of the Lord, not hesitating to break through that guard of fire, “he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

Brethren, it is not merely the Lord’s table that an unclean man defiles, but he pollutes the gospel by using it as an excuse for sin. Listen to him. He says, “the preacher proclaimed the mercy of God, so I am going to live in sin.” Brute beast art thou to talk like that! Another says, “the minister told us that salvation is all of grace, and

that a great sinner glorifies God when he is converted; so why should not I be a great sinner?" O horrible wretch, art not thou accursed indeed, when thou canst turn the very grace of God into an excuse for thy wantonness and sin? "Oh, but!" says a third, "you say that salvation is all of the sovereignty of God; therefore I cannot do anything in the matter." I know you, sir; you are in your own heart so defiled that you use the blessed gospel itself as the instrument of your rebellion against God. Such people are, alas! all too common; they touch with defiled hands the holiest thing, and so pollute it.

But what happens if these defiled people pray? Oh, how many prayers there are which only insult the Most High God! If you sit down, or stand up, or kneel, and call yourself "a miserable sinner," when you neither believe that you are a sinner, nor suffer any misery because of your sin, what are you doing but provoking the Lord to anger by virtually lying in his presence? Is not much so-called praying just of that sort? It is an awful thing to repeat a form of prayer when your heart does not mean it. What is it but a direct insult to the Lord? Yet how can men who are defiled pray such a prayer as God will accept? They must be themselves cleansed first before their prayers can be accepted. There is nothing so holy, in earth or in heaven, but a man of defiled heart and conscience will pollute it if he can but lay his hand upon it.

Further, *even good works are polluted when they come from evil men.* See what it says in the text: "So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands." Here is a charitable man, he has been giving away a great deal of money; yet see how he has defiled his liberality. He sounded a trumpet before him, he was ostentatious, he desired to be thought very generous; and thus, every penny that he has given to the poor has been defiled. "Take heed," says our Lord, "that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." There is no reward reserved for them at the resurrection of the just, for they have had their reward already.

Here is another man, and though he is not renewed and regenerate, he is in his way a very religious man. But why is he religious? Partly, out of fear; still more, from custom; possibly, just to please his friends, or to stand well with his neighbours. Is not all that simply defiling religion?

I have also known some men appear very humble just to gain their own ends; and when an unrenewed man puts on humility merely as a cloak, I was going to say that he is devilish, for the very humble man who aims at making some gain by it—the Uriah Heep of the novelist,—is one of the most despicable of all people beneath the sky. When even that precious grace of humility is touched by his hand, does he not defile it till it appears loathsome in the eyes of men?

I have seen that same man become sternly righteous in order to be revenged upon his enemy. "I must do the right thing," he says;

and he speaks as if it was most painful to him to have to do it; but all the while there is somebody whom he hates, and he is determined to crush him. He will have his pound of flesh, or the uttermost farthing of his debt, and he tries to excuse his malice by saying, "You know, we must sometimes make an example of wrongdoers." Yes, other people have been very foolishly charitable, and have passed by wrongs done to them; but he is going to be a defender of everything that is upright, yet he does it merely to gratify his desire for vengeance. Is he not defiling holy things and good works by touching them? Yet is not this often the case with bad men? They defile to the last degree even things that appear to be good.

And, dear friends, the text adds that *even sacrifices are polluted when offered by unclean men*: "that which they offer there is unclean." Their lamb, their bullock, their fine flour, their oil that they pour out at the foot of God's altar,—all becomes defiled. There is what professes to be a public thanksgiving to God; and it is turned into a show to the glory of men. Whenever the unregenerate world brings anything to God as a sacrifice, what a wretched mess it makes of it! It becomes only another occasion for sinning against the Most High. Supposing a heathen should come in, on Christmas night, when professedly Christian people are supposed to be celebrating the birth of Christ, and all their cups are full of wine, they can scarcely stand for staggering, what would he think the Christ must be whose birthday they are celebrating? An unrenewed man cannot touch anything without spoiling it; wherever he goes, he is a spoiler. The sea has often been strewn with wrecks which have been occasioned by the cupidity of merchants, and the world is full of the tombs of men who have been hurried to their graves by other men. Truly did the poet sing,—

"Every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile."

It is a mercy that unrenewed men cannot enter heaven; if they could, heaven would not last as heaven for even five minutes. There would be another hell created if unrenewed men could walk among the palms and harps of the glorified. You may do what you like with a man, but as long as he is unclean he communicates his defilement wherever he may lay his hand.

That is a picture of every man who has not been born again; it is not a pretty picture, is it? Did you come here expecting me to say pretty things to you? I have not learnt the art of doing that; but in the name of God I assure you that this is true, and I pray his Spirit to convince every unregenerate person that it is true. In your present condition you cannot do any good works, you cannot serve God; what have you to do to declare his statutes? You cannot do anything but what will displease him until you are born again. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;"—he cannot even *see* it;—and further, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." He will have to stand shivering outside its walls, but of that kingdom he cannot be a subject until he has passed from death unto life, and has been made a new

creature in Christ Jesus, and so has been cleansed from his sinful defilement.

II. Thus I have kept to my text; but now I am going to run right away from it, to speak upon THE ALL-SUFFICIENT REMEDY.

Where can we find a better type and figure of that remedy than in the chapter which I read to you just now from the Book of Numbers? In Numbers xix. we have a type of the great remedy, and a striking account of the uncleanness which it removed. I shall not attempt a full exposition of the rites used for purifying the unclean; but I would have you notice that, first of all, in order to the removal of uncleanness, *there was a sacrifice*. There was a red heifer, without spot, which had to be slain. There could be no sort of purification except through death; and there can be no cleansing of thy defilement, my brother, except through the sacrifice of the Son of God. The red heifer and the lambs and the bulls under the old covenant died to teach people that the punishment of sin was the forfeiture of life, and these creatures died in the stead of the offender, that he might live. They were all types pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God who, in the fulness of time, came and took upon himself his people's sin, and stood in his people's place, that he might die "the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God." There is no hope of your ever being made clean except through the blood of him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin. Kick not at this doctrine, I pray you; for why should Jesus die at all, if you could be saved without his death? And if there be not everything in that death that is necessary for your cleansing, what do you propose to add to it? It seems to me to be sheer blasphemy to think that anything you can feel, or do, or give, can be worthy to be added to the great sacrifice of Christ. I wish you would say, "If this be the way of salvation, by a sacrifice offered in my stead to be accepted by me, I will gladly and joyfully accept it." This is the great truth: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." There is no other cleansing, and there is no need of any other; just listen to this text, and believe what it says: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Is not that enough for you?

Turning again to this Book of Numbers, you will notice that *there was a burning*; for this heifer, after being killed, was burned outside the camp. This burning signified that sin was very hateful to God, that he could not bear to have it where his people lived. Sin must be put outside the camp, and then as a dead thing it must be burned with fire; and the heifer which was supposed to bear that sin must suffer that doom. Jesus also, when he took our sin, suffered without the gate. I want you, dear friends, to feel that sin is a hateful thing; you can never be purged from it while you love it. Shut it out from your heart; as much as possible, shut it out from your thoughts. Since it put Christ without the camp, you must put it without the camp. There is no cleansing a man from sin while he lives in sin; and there is no possibility of forgiveness while sin is indulged in and delighted in. You must quit it; it must be burnt as offal, over the wall there

among the filth and refuse of the city, and be put away altogether from you; in type of which you see your Lord thus slain upon a cross, as if he, too, had been a felon, "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

Looking again at the type, you will see that *there was a water of separation*. The ashes of this red heifer were to be put into running water;—not stagnant, but lively, running water; and a mixture being made therewith, it was to be sprinkled upon the people as a water of separation, or purification. And, dear friends, you and I must have the Holy Spirit pouring in upon us the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ to make us clean. There is no purification for you, my friend, except by the Holy Ghost. There must be the water as well as the blood; they must both come to purge the conscience from dead works that we may be clean, like the priests of old, and go into the holy place, to present acceptable sacrifices unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. You must have the blood to take away the guilt of sin; and you must also have the water to wash you from the pollution of sin, that you may be sanctified and set apart unto the living God.

You will notice, too, that *there was an application of all this with hyssop*. Hence David says, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." Faith is, as it were, that little bunch of hyssop. Hyssop was a small plant, as I suppose, insignificant enough in itself, and of no use except for use in sprinkling. It was dipped into the blood, and then the guilty one was sprinkled; or into the water with the ashes, and with it the unclean one was sprinkled, and made clean. You must have this faith if you would be saved. The blood of the paschal lamb would not have saved the Israelites in Egypt if it had not been smeared on the lintel and the two side posts. The scarlet line would not have saved Rahab if she had not fastened it in the window, to be the mark that her house, with its inmates, was to be spared. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is all thou hast to do, and this he enables thee to do. Just simply believe that Christ is able to save thee, and repose thyself on that dear heart which was pierced for thee. Put thyself into those blessed hands that were fastened to the cross, and thou art saved. The moment thou believest in Jesus, thy sins are gone,—all of them, for there is no halving sin. There is a solidarity in sin, it is one great mass; so that, the moment a sinner believes in Christ, all his sins, past, present, and to come, are gone, and gone for ever. "To come," say you, "how can that be before they are committed?" Did not Christ die, not only before we committed any sin, but before we had any existence, and yet even then, in his death, he put away the sin of his people? If thou believest, thy transgression is forgiven; thou art "accepted in the Beloved;" and, as surely as thou livest, thou shalt one day stand before yon burning throne, "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," and thou shalt have no fear.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who aught to my charge shall lay?  
While through thy blood absolved I am  
From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

See, beloved, how simple is this deliverance from impurity. If the impurity was terrible, yet the remedy is so perfect, so complete, so available, that my heart dances while I talk of it to you.

Finally, *this remedy must be applied to our whole nature.* Remember that nineteenth verse that we read: "And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even." If thou, dear friend, wouldst be clean in God's sight, thou must be washed from head to foot; not merely with the washing of water, but with the washing of the Holy Spirit. "What is holiness?" said a clergyman to a poor Irish boy. "Please, your reverence," he said, "it is having a clean inside." And so it is, and you have to be washed that way,—washed inside, washed in your very nature. The fountain of your being has to be cleansed, the source of all the pollution is to be made white; and how can this be done by any man for himself? This great purification can only be wrought by a wonderful work of grace, by the power of the Holy Ghost; but then the Holy Ghost is pledged to do this to everyone who believes in Jesus. It is a part of the covenant: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."

"Oh!" says one, "that would be delightful; but I am afraid that I should fall away, after all." That you shall not, for here is another covenant promise: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." O glorious promise! That crowns it all. I want you, dear friends, to have a faith that can believe God, and say, "I have given myself over to Christ to save me to the end, and he will do it; and I commit to him my soul, not for this next year only, but for all years and all times; and I give myself up never to have any claim to myself again, to be his for ever and ever." What does he say to that? He answers, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." You see the double picture; Christ has his people in his hand, and then his Father comes, and puts his hand over the top of Christ's; and all who believe in Christ are in that double hand of the Son and of the Father, and who shall pluck them thence? We defy earth, and heaven, and hell, ever to tear away any soul that is once in the grip of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who would not have such a glorious salvation as this?

O ye defiled ones, come ye to him who alone can cleanse you! And when he has once cleansed you, remember that you will have need daily to wash your feet, and you shall find him waiting to wash them; but you shall never need such a complete cleansing as he gave you at the first. There shall never be a repetition of that, for "he that is bathed, needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." May the Lord give you that cleansing if you have not had it; and, if you have had it, rejoice in it with all your hearts. Amen and Amen.

## Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

NUMBERS XIX. ; AND PSALM LI.

Numbers xix. Verse 1. *And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,—*

This ordinance was not given to Moses on Mount Sinai, but in the wilderness of Paran, after the people had broken their covenant with God, and were condemned to die. You know that the 90th Psalm—that dolorous dirge which we read at funerals,—is called, “a prayer of Moses the man of God.” Well might he write that Psalm, for he lived among a generation of people who were all doomed to die within a short time, and to die in the wilderness. This ordinance was especially appointed to meet the cases of those who were rendered unclean by the frequent deaths which occurred. There was to be a simple and easy way of purification for them; and the teaching of this chapter to us is that, inasmuch as we dwell in a sinful world, there needs to be some simple and ready method of cleansing us, that we may be able to draw near to God.

2, 3. *This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke: and ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face:*

This was not a usual sacrifice, for the beasts offered were as a rule males; but this was to be a special sacrifice. It was not to be killed by the priest, as other sacrificial offerings were; but the Lord said, “One shall slay her before his face.”

4. *And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times:*

This makes it a sacrifice; otherwise, it scarcely deserves the name.

5, 6. *And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn: and the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer.*

All was to be burnt, and then the ashes, the essence and product of it, were to be preserved to make the water of purification needed to remove those constant defilements which fell upon the people of the camp. So, the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are the very essence of him, are perpetually preserved for the removal of our daily pollution.

There was also the essence of cedar wood; that is, the emblem of a fragrant immortality, for cedar was an unrotting wood. “And hyssop, and scarlet.” There must be the humble hyssop used, yet there must be some degree of royalty about the sacrifice, as the scarlet colour imported; and all this is mixed with the blood and the flesh and the skin of the creature, to make the ashes of purification.

7. *Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even.*

What a strange sacrifice was this, for even when it was offered it seemed to make unclean all those who had anything to do with it!

8, 9. *And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water; and shall be unclean until the even. And a man that is clean—*

Now we come to the merit of Christ, for who is clean except Christ?

9. *Shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.*

This ceremonial does not represent the putting away of sin, that is typified in the slaying of the victims; but it represents that daily cleansing which the children of God need, the perpetual efficacy of the merit of Christ; for this red heifer was probably killed only once in the wilderness. According to Jewish tradition, there never have been more than six killed. I cannot tell whether that is true or not; but certainly the ashes of one single beast would last for a long time if they were only to be mixed with water, and then the water to be sprinkled upon the unclean. So this ordinance is meant to represent the standing merit, the perpetual purifying of believers by the sacrifice of Christ enabling them to come to the worship of God, and to mingle with holy men, and even with holy angels, without defiling them. In the fullest sense, it may be said of our Lord's atoning sacrifice, "It is a purification for sin."

10. *And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.*

That was the remedy ordained by the Lord for purifying the defiled; now notice what made this remedy so necessary.

11, 12. *He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean; but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean.*

I wonder whether that is a revelation of our being justified through the resurrection of Christ, which took place on the third day after his death, and then our being brought into perfect rest, which represents the seventh day, through the wondrous purifying of our great Sacrifice, the Lamb of God.

13, 14. *Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him. This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days.*

Think, dear friends, what a solemn and yet what an irksome ordinance this must have been! Why, according to this regulation, Joseph could not have gone to see his father Jacob, and to be present at his death, without being defiled. You could not have watched over your consumptive child, or have nursed your dying mother, without becoming defiled, if you had been subject to this law; and everything that was in the tent, or in the house, became defiled, too.

15, 16. *And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.*

This law was indeed a yoke of bondage which our fathers were not able to bear. It was meant to teach us how easily we can be defiled. Anywhere they went, these people might touch a bone or touch a grave, and then they were defiled; and you and I, watch as carefully as we may, will find ourselves touching some of the dead works of sin, and becoming defiled. It is a happy circumstance for us that there is the means of purification always at hand; we may ever go to the precious blood of Jesus, and may once again be washed clean, and be made fit to go up to the house of the Lord.

17—22. *And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel: and a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: and the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean. And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even. And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even.*

This ordinance was partly sanitary. The Egyptians were accustomed to keep their dead in their houses, preserved as mummies. No Jew could do that, for he would be defiled. Other nations were accustomed to bury their dead, as we once did, within the city walls, or round their own places of worship, as if to bring death as near as they could to themselves. No Jew could do this, for he was defiled if he even passed over a grave; so they were driven to what God intended they should have,—that is, extramural interments, and to keep the graveyard as far as they could away from the abodes of the living.

The spiritual meaning of this regulation is that we must watch with great care against every occasion for sin; and, inasmuch as there will be these occasions, and we shall be defiled, we must constantly go to the Lord with a prayer like that of David in the 51st Psalm, which we will now read.

Psalm li. Verse 1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

There may be some people who think themselves so holy that they cannot join in this Psalm. I can, for one, and I believe that there are many of you who can join with me. Just let us for the time being forget all others, and let us come, each one for himself or herself, with David's language on our lips or in our hearts so far as it applies to our individual case.

2—19. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*