

THE RED HEIFER
NO. 1481

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 29, 1879
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”
Hebrews 9:13-14

BELOVED brethren in Christ, you dwell in great nearness to God. He calls you “a people near unto him.” His grace has made you His sons and daughters, and He is a Father unto you. In you is His word fulfilled, “I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Remember that your favored position as children of God has placed you under a peculiar discipline, for now God deals with you as with sons—and sons are under household law. The Lord will be sanctified in them that come near to Him. Special favor involves special rule. There were no strict laws made as to the behavior of the Amalekites, Amorites, and Egyptians, because they were far off from God, and the times of their ignorance He winked at.

But the Lord set Israel apart to be His people, and He came and dwelt in the midst of the congregation. The sacred tent wherein He displayed His presence was pitched in the center of the camp, and there the great King uplifted His banner of fire and cloud. Hence, as the Lord brought the people so near to Himself, He put them under special laws, such as belong to His palace rather than to the outskirts of His dominion.

They were bound to keep themselves very pure, for they bore the vessels of the Lord, and were a nation of priests before Him. They ought to have been holy spiritually, and being in their childhood, they were taught this by laws referring to external cleanliness. Read the laws laid down in Leviticus, and see what care was required of the favored nation, and how jealously they were to keep themselves from defilement.

Just as the children of Israel in the wilderness were put under stringent regulations, so do those who live near to God come under a holy discipline in the house of the Lord. “Even our God is a consuming fire.” We are not now speaking of our salvation, or of our justification as sinners, but of the Lord’s dealings towards us as saints.

In that respect we must walk carefully with Him, and watch our steps that we offend not. Our earnest desire is so to behave ourselves in His house that He may always permit us to have access with boldness to His presence, and may never be compelled to reject our prayers, because we have been falling into sin.

Our heart’s desire and inward longing is that we may never lose our Father’s smile. If we have lost fellowship with Him, even for an hour, our cry is, “Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat.” For when we are in fellowship with God we are happy, we are strong, we are full of heavenly aspirations and emotions.

Beneath the sky there is no joy like that of communion with God—it is incomparable and inexpressible, and therefore when we lose the presence of God, even for a little, we are like a dove bereaved of its mate, which ceases not to grieve. Our heart and our flesh cry out for God, for the living God. When shall we come and appear before God?

Now, beloved, in order that we may learn how to renew our fellowship with God whenever we lose it by a sense of sin, I have selected the subject of this morning. If the Holy Spirit will graciously enlighten us, we shall see how the conscience can be kept clean, that so the heart may be able to dwell with God.

We shall see our danger of defilement, and the way by which our uncleanness can be put away—may we have grace given to avoid the pollutions which would hinder fellowship—and grace to seek the purification by which uncleanness is removed and fellowship restored.

I shall first endeavor to *describe the type* which is alluded to by the apostle in the words, “The ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean.” And then, secondly, we shall *magnify the Antitype*, dwelling upon the words, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

I. LET US DESCRIBE THE TYPE.

In the nineteenth chapter of Numbers you will find the type. Be so good as to open your Bibles, and refresh your memories.

First, the type mentions ceremonial defilements, which were the symbols of the uncleanness caused by sin. The Israelites could very readily render themselves unclean, so as to be unfit to go up to the tabernacle of God. There were uncleannesses connected both with birth and with death, with meats and with drinks, with garments and with houses.

The rules were very minute and all-pervading, so that a man could scarcely move abroad, or even remain within his own tent, without incurring uncleanness in one way or another, and becoming unfit to enter the courts of the Lord, or to be an accepted member of the congregation.

In the passage in Numbers which is now before us, the one source of defilement dealt with is death. “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.”

Now, death is peculiarly the symbol of sin, as well as the fruit of sin. Sin, like death, defaces the image of God in man. As soon as death grasps the body of a man, it destroys the bloom of beauty and the dignity of strength, and drives forth from the human form that mysterious something which is the token of life within.

However comely a corpse may appear for a time, yet it is defaced—the excellence of life has departed, and alas, in a few hours, or at longest in a few days, the image of God begins utterly to pass away—corruption and the worm commence their desolating work, and horror follows in their train.

Abraham, however much he may love his Sarah, soon becomes anxious to bury his beloved dead out of his sight. Now, what death does for the “human face divine,” that sin does for the spiritual image of God upon us. It utterly defaces it. Human nature in perfection is a coin of the realm of God, minted by the great King. But by sin it is battered and defaced—to the great dishonor of the King whose image and superscription it bears. Hence sin is most obnoxious to God, and death is obnoxious as the type of sin.

The defilements which came to the Israelite by death must have been very frequent. As a whole generation died in the wilderness, most of the inhabitants must again and again have come under the law of uncleanness on account of the death of parents or friends. In the field, a man might dig up human remains, or plough over a grave, or find a body slain by accident, and he was at once unclean. How frequent, therefore, were the occasions of defilement!

But ah, my brethren, not so frequent as the occasions of pollution to our consciences in such a world as this, for in a thousand ways we err and transgress.

*“Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,”*

where never sin might reach my soul again! But it is in vain to sigh in this fashion, even if we could escape from the throng of men, we should not thereby escape from sin. The Israelite might meet with defilement even in his tent.

I have already reminded you that these statutes about the dead present to us only a part of the occasions of defilement which surrounded the people of Israel—they were much more numerous than this. A man might become unclean even in his sleep, so closely did the law track him into his most secret places, and surround his most unguarded hours.

Even thus does sin beset us. Like a dog at one's heels, it is always with us! Like our shadow, it follows us, go where we may. Yea, and when the sun shines not, and shadows are gone, sin is still there. Whither shall we flee from its presence, and where shall we hide from its power? When we would do good, evil is present with us. How humbled we ought to be at the recollection of this!

The Israelite became unclean even in the act of doing good, for assuredly it was a good deed to bury the dead. A man would be defiled if out of charity he helped to inter the poor, or the slain, or the poor relics of mortality which might be exposed upon the plain—and yet this was a praiseworthy action. Alas, there is sin even in our holy things.

A morality so pure that no human eye can detect a flaw may yet be faulty to the eye of God. Brethren, sin stains our piety and pollutes our devotion. We do not even pray without needing to ask God to forgive the prayer. Our acts of faith have a measure of unbelief in them, for the faith is never so strong as it ought to be.

Our penitential tears have some grit of impenitence in them, and our heavenly aspirations have a measure of carnality to degrade them. The evil of our nature clings to all that we do. Who shall bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. One way or another defilement will come upon us.

We have been once washed in the blood of Jesus, and we are clean before the bar of God, and yet in the divine family we need that our feet be washed after walking awhile in this dusty world, and there is not one disciple who is above the need of this washing. To one and all our Lord says, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me."

The touching of the dead not only made the man unclean, but he became a fountain of defilement. "And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until evening." While a man was unclean he might not go up to the worship of God, and he was in danger of being cut off from among the congregation, "Because," says the law, "he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD." Pollution went forth from the polluted.

Do you and I sufficiently remember how much of evil we are spreading when we are out of communion with God? Every ungenerous temper creates the like in others. We never cast a proud look without exciting resentment and bad feelings in others. Somebody or other will follow our example if we are slothful—and thus we may be doing great mischief even when we are doing nothing.

You cannot even bury your talent in a napkin without setting an example to others to do the like, and were that example followed by all, how dreadful would be the consequences! Observe that I am not now speaking of outside sinners, but of the saints of God. As the ordinances in the chapter before us were for Israel, so these things are spoken to those in whom the Spirit of the Lord is. My soul's longing is that we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, and may not become unfit for communion with Him.

This uncleanness prevented the man from going up to the worship of God, and it separated him from that great, permanent congregation which was called to dwell in God's house by residing all around the holy place. He was, so to speak, excommunicated, suspended—at any rate, in his communion. He could bring no offering—he could not stand among the multitude and view the solemn worship. He was unclean and must regard himself so.

Do children of God ever get here? Ah, dear friends, so far as our consciences are concerned, we too often come among the unclean. We are not polluted as the heathen, nor condemned with the world, but as children of God we feel that we have erred, and our conscience smites us. Sin is already put away

from us, as we are criminals tried before a judge, but it comes upon the conscience even as a child's faults cause him to grieve.

It is from the conscience that this uncleanness is to be purged, and our whole sermon is upon that matter. I speak not of the actual taking away of sin before God, but the removal of its defilement from the conscience, so that communion with God may be possible. Remember the word of the Lord, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear."

When sin is on your conscience it wants no law to prevent your communion with God, for you cannot approach Him—you are afraid to do so, and you have a distaste for it. Until the pardoning blood speaks peace within your spirit, you cannot draw near unto God. The apostle says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." It is the washing which enables us to draw near. We shrink, we tremble, we find communion impossible until we are made clean.

This much about the defilements described in the chapter. Now concerning the cleansing which it mentions.

The defilement was frequent, but the cleansing was always ready. At a certain time, all the people of Israel brought a red heifer to be used in the expiation. It was not at the expense of one person, or tribe, but the whole congregation brought the red cow to be slain. It was to be their sacrifice, and it was brought for them all.

It was not led, however, up to the holy place for sacrifice, but it was brought forth outside the camp, and there it was slaughtered in the presence of the priest, and wholly burnt with fire, not as a sacrifice upon the altar, but as a polluted thing which was to be made an end of outside the camp. It was not a regular sacrifice or we should have found it described in Leviticus. It was an ordinance entirely by itself, as setting forth quite another side of truth.

To return to the chapter. The red heifer was killed before the uncleanness was committed, just as our Lord Jesus Christ was made a curse for sin long, long ago. Before you and I had lived to commit the uncleanness, there was a sacrifice provided for us. For the easing of our conscience we shall be wise to view this sacrifice as that of a substitute for sin, and consider the results of that expiation. Sin on the conscience needs for its remedy the result of the Redeemer's substitution.

The red heifer was slain—the victim fell beneath the butcher's axe. It was then all taken up—skin, flesh, blood, dung, everything. No trace of it must be left, and it was all burnt with fire, together with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool, which I suppose had been used in the previous sprinkling of the heifer's blood, and so must be consumed with it.

The whole was destroyed outside the camp! Even as our Lord, though in Himself without spot, was made sin for us, and suffered without the camp, feeling the withdrawings of God, while He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Ah, what it cost our Lord to come into our place and to bear the iniquities of men!

Then the ashes were collected and laid in a clean place accessible to the camp. Everybody knew where the ashes were, and whenever there was any uncleanness, they went to this ash heap and took away a small portion. Whenever the ashes were spent, they brought another red heifer, and did the same as they had done before—that always there might be this purification for the unclean.

But while this red cow was slaughtered for all, and the blood was sprinkled towards the holy place for all, no one derived any personal benefit from it in reference to his own uncleanness unless he made a personal use of it.

When a man became unclean he procured a clean person to go on his behalf to take a little of the ashes, and to put them in a cup with running water, and then he had the clean person sprinkle this water of purification upon him, upon his tent, and all the vessels therein. By that sprinkling, at the end of seven days, the unclean person was purified. There was no other method of purification from his uncleanness but this.

It is so with us. Today the living water of the divine Spirit's sacred influences must take up the result of our Lord's substitution, and this must be applied to our consciences. That which remains of Christ after the fire has passed upon Him, even the eternal merits—the enduring virtue of our great sacrifice—must be sprinkled upon us through the Spirit of our God. Then are we clean in conscience, but not till then.

We have two degrees of purification by this means, as in the type. Our Lord rose again on the third day—and blessed are they who receive the third day justification by the resurrection of the Lord. Thus is sin removed from the conscience. But yet as long as we are here in this body there will be some tremblings, some measure of unrest, because of sin within.

But blessed be God, there is a seventh day purification coming, which will complete the cleansing. When the eternal Sabbath breaks, then shall be the last sprinkling with the hyssop, and we shall be clean, and we shall enter into the rest which remains for the people of God, clean every whit. We shall come before God at last without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, and be as able to commune with Him as if we had never transgressed, being presented faultless before His presence with exceedingly great joy.

Thus much concerning the type, with which we have already mingled some degree of exposition.

I. LET US MAGNIFY THE GREAT ANTI-TYPE.

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purification of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ?” How much more? He does not give us the measure, but leaves it with a note of interrogation.

We shall never be able to tell how much more, for the difference between the blood of bulls and of goats and the blood of Christ—the difference between the ashes of a red cow and the eternal merits of the Lord Jesus must be infinite. Let us help your judgments while we set forth the exceeding greatness of our mighty Expiator, by whom we are reconciled to God.

First, then, *our defilement is much greater*, for the defilement spoken of in the text is on the conscience. Now, I believe that the Israelite, when he was rendered unclean by touching a corpse by necessity, or a piece of a bone by accident, felt nothing on his conscience, for there was no sin in the matter—he was only ceremonially unclean, and that was all.

His ceremonial disability troubled him, for he would be glad to go up to the tabernacle of the Lord and hold fellowship with the hosts of Israel, but there was nothing on his conscience. If there had been, the blood of bulls and goats could not have helped him.

Beloved, you and I know what it is at times to have defilement upon the conscience, and to go mourning because we have erred from the Lord's commands. The ungodly do not thus sorrow—their conscience by fits and starts accuses them, but they never listen to its accusations so as to feel their inability to draw nigh to God.

Nay, they will even go with a guilty conscience to their knees, and pretend to offer to God the sacrifice of prayer and praise, while still they are unforgiven, alienated, and rebellious. You and I, if we are indeed the Lord's people, cannot do this. Guilt on our conscience is to us a horrible thing.

There are no pains of body—there are no tortures inflicted by the Inquisition which are at all comparable to the whips of burning wire which lash the guilty conscience. You hear persons speak about the horrible figures of medieval ages with regard to hell, and the strong metaphors sometimes used by the orthodox to this day. Let them remember that they are only figures, and then let any man who has felt the agonies of a guilty conscience judge whether the figures can possibly be overdrawn.

It is an awful thing to feel yourself guilty, and the better a man you are, the more will it grieve you to be consciously in a wrong state. I ask any truly regenerate man here, who at bottom has an assurance that his sin is already forgiven before God, whether he can do wrong without smarting? Whenever you have transgressed, and you are conscious of it, though you do not doubt the love of God to you, are you not like one who has all his bones broken?

I know you are, and the better a man you are the more intense will have been the terror of your spirit while guilt has been upon your conscience in any degree. Well, now, that which can take guilt off the conscience must be infinitely greater than that which can merely put away a ceremonial defilement.

Brethren, guilt on the conscience is a most effectual bar to drawing near to God. The Lord bids His people come near to Him, and there is a way of access always open. But as long as you are conscious of sin you cannot use that way of access. We can come to God as sinners to seek pardon, but we cannot come before the Lord as dear children while there is any quarrel between us and our great Father. No, we must be clean, or we cannot approach our God.

See how the priests washed their feet at the laver before they offered incense unto the Lord. We cannot have fellowship with God while there is a sense of unconfessed and unforgiven sin upon us. "Be ye reconciled to God" is a text for saints as well as for sinners. Children may quarrel with a father as well as rebels with a king. There must be oneness of heart with God, or there is an end to communion, and therefore must the conscience be purged.

The man who was unclean *could* have come up to the tabernacle if there had been no law to prevent it, and it is possible that he could have worshipped God in spirit, notwithstanding his ceremonial disqualification. The defilement was no barrier in itself except so far as it was typical—but sin on the conscience is a natural wall between God and the soul. You cannot get into loving communion until the conscience is at ease. Therefore, I charge you, fly at once to Jesus for peace.

Beloved, if our consciences were more fully developed than they are, we should have as great a sense of the frequency of our uncleanness as ever the thoughtful Israelite had of his danger of ceremonial uncleanness.

I tell you solemnly that the talk which we have heard lately about perfection in the flesh comes of ignorance of the law and of self. When I have read expressions which seem to claim that the utterers were free from sin in thought and word and deed, I have been sorry for the deluded victims of self-conceit, and shuddered at their spirit. The sooner this boasting is purged out of the church of God the better.

God's true people have the spirit of truth within them, convincing them of sin, and not the proud and lying spirit which leads men to say they have no sin. True saints abide in the place of penitence, and constant faith in the atoning blood, and dare not exalt themselves as the Pharisee who cried, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

"There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not" (Ecc 7:20). Why, beloved, according to my own experience, we are constantly being defiled by being in this polluted world, and going up and down in it. As a man could not take a walk without stumbling over a grave, nor could he shut himself up in his house without the danger of death entering there, so are we everywhere liable to sin.

It seems all but inevitable so long as we are in this body and in this sinful world that we should come into contact with sin in some form or other—and any contact with sin is defiling. Our Lord could live among sinners and remain undefiled, because there was no evil in His hear. But in our case sin without awakes the echoes from within, and so causes a measure of consent and defilement.

The will more or less yields the temptation, and when the will does not yield, the imagination plays the traitor, and the affections parley, and so betray the soul. Although it may be accompanied with a resolve not to fall into evil, the very thought of evil is sin. Sin does not cross over the sensitive plate of our soul as it is exposed in its daily camera without leaving, even if we do not see it ourselves, some trace and stain which God sees.

Our fellow men are a terrible source of defilement to us. Did you not notice in the chapter which we read (Numbers 19) that he who touched the dead body of a man was unclean seven days? Now, if you look in Leviticus 11:22, you will see that whosoever touched the carcass of an unclean beast was only unclean until the evening. Thus a dead man was seven times more defiling than a dead beast.

Such is God's estimate of fallen, unregenerate man, and it is a just one, for wicked men do many things which brute beasts never do. All ungodly men defile us, and I am not sure that I may end there. The truth is wider still. I do not care how you pick your company—and you ought to pick it with great choiceness—but even if you associate with none but saints, they will be an occasion of sin to you at some time or other.

There will be something about them, ay, even about their holiness which may raise your idolatry of them, or envy them, and in some way or other cause you to sin. You cannot, as you are a man of unclean lips, and dwell among a people of unclean lips, be altogether without uncleanness, and therefore you will always have need to use the way of cleansing which the Lord has prepared and revealed.

Remember that in the type the least touch defiled—if they only picked up a bone, the Israelites were unclean. If they only walked over a grave, they were unclean. My brethren, the best of you can hardly read in the newspaper an account of a crime without some taint clinging to you. You cannot see sin in another without standing in fearful jeopardy of being in some degree infected thereby.

Sin is of so subtle and penetrating a nature that long before we are aware, it tarnishes our brightness and eats into our spirit. The pure and holy God alone is undefiled. But as for the best of His saints, they need to veil their faces in His presence and cry, "Unclean, unclean."

Under the old law men might be unclean who did not know it. A man might have touched a bone and not be aware of it, yet the law operated just as much. He might walk across a grave and not know it, but he was unclean. I fear that our proud sense of what we think to be our inward cleanness is simply the stupidity of our conscience. If our conscience were more sensitive and tender, it would perceive sin where now we congratulate ourselves that everything is pure.

My brethren, this teaching of mine puts us into a very lowly place, but the lowlier our position, the better and the safer for us, and the more we shall be able to prize the expiation by which we draw near to God.

Since the stain is upon the conscience, its removal is a far greater work than is the removal of a mere ritual uncleanness.

Secondly upon this head, *our sacrifice is greater in itself*. I will not dwell upon each point of its greatness lest I weary you, but just notice that in the slaughter of the heifer, blood was presented and sprinkled towards the holy place seven times, though it came not actually into it.

So in the atonement through which we find peace of conscience there is blood, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." That is a settled decree of the Eternal Government, and the conscience will never get peace till it understands the mystery of the blood. We need not only the sufferings of Christ, but the death of Christ, which is set forth by His blood. The substitute must die. Death was our doom, and death for death did Christ render unto the eternal God. It is by a sense of our Lord's substitutionary death that the conscience becomes purged from dead works.

Furthermore, the heifer itself was offered. After the blood was sprinkled towards the tabernacle by the priestly hand, the victim itself was utterly consumed. Read now our text, "Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered up himself without spot unto God." Our Lord Jesus Christ gave not merely His death, but His whole person, with all that appertained unto it, to be our substitutionary sacrifice.

He offered Himself, His person, His glory, His holiness, His life, His very self, in our stead. But brethren, if a poor heifer when it was offered and consumed made the unclean man clean, how much more shall we be cleansed by Jesus, since He gave Himself, His glorious self, in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily? Oh what a sacrifice is this!

It is added that our Lord did this "by the eternal Spirit." The heifer was not a spiritual but a carnal offering. The creature knew nothing of what was being done, it was the involuntary victim. But Christ was under the impulses of the Holy Ghost, which was poured upon Him, and He was moved by Him to render up Himself a sacrifice for sin.

Hence somewhat of the greater efficacy of His death, for the willingness of the sacrifice greatly enhanced its value. To give you another, and probably a better, interpretation of the words, there was the

eternal Spirit linked with the manhood of Christ our Lord, and by it He gave Himself unto God. He was God as well as man, and that eternal Godhead of His lent an infinite value to the sufferings of His human frame, so that He offered Himself as a whole Christ, in the energy of His eternal power and Godhead.

Oh, what a sacrifice is that on Calvary! It is by the blood of the man Christ that you are saved, and yet it is written, “The church of God which he”—that is God—“hath redeemed with his own blood.” One who is both God and man has given Himself as a sacrifice for us. Is not the sacrifice inconceivably greater in the fact than it is in the type? Ought it not most effectually to purge our conscience?

After they had burnt the heifer, they swept up the ashes. All that could be burnt had been consumed. Our Lord was made a sacrifice for sin, what remains of Him? Not a few ashes, but the whole Christ, which still remains, to die no more, but to abide forever unchanged. He came uninjured through the fires, and now He ever lives to make intercession for us. It is the application of His eternal merit which makes us clean, and is not that eternal merit inconceivably greater than the ashes of a heifer ever can be?

Now, my brethren, I want you for a moment to recollect that our Lord Himself was spotless, pure and perfect, and yet—speak it with bated breath—God “hath made him to be sin for us,” even Him who knew no sin. Whisper it with still greater awe, “He was made a curse for us”—yes, a curse, as it is written, “Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.”

That red heifer, though without spot and never having borne a yoke, was regarded as a polluted thing. Take it out of the camp. It must not live. Kill it. It is a polluted thing, burn it right up, for God cannot endure it. Behold, and wonder that God’s own ever blessed, adorable Son in inconceivable condescension of unutterable love, took the place of sin, the place of the sinner—and was numbered with the transgressors.

He must die. Hang Him up on a cross. He must be forsaken of men, and even deserted of God. “It pleased the Father to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; he shall make his soul an offering for sin.” “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”—not the punishment merely, but the iniquity, the very sin itself was laid upon the Ever Blessed.

The wise men of our age say it is impossible that sin should be lawfully imputed to the innocent. That is what the philosophers say, but God declares that it was done. “He hath made him to be sin who knew no sin.” Therefore, it was possible. Yea, it is done. It is finished. The sacrifice then is much greater. “How much more,” we may cry exultingly as we think of it, “shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Now we will take a step further. As the defilement and the sacrifice were greater, *so the purging is much greater*. The purifying power of the blood of Christ must be much greater than the purging power of the water mixed with the ashes of the heifer. For, first, that could not purge conscience from sin, but the application of the atonement can do it, and does do it.

I am not going to speak this morning about doctrine at all, but about fact. Did you ever feel the atonement of Christ applied by the Holy Ghost to your conscience? Then I am certain of it that the change upon your mind has been as sudden and glorious as if the darkness of midnight had glowed into the brightness of noonday.

I remember well its effects upon my soul at the first—how it broke my bonds and made my heart dance with delight. But I have found it equally powerful since then, for when I am examining myself before God, it sometimes comes to pass that I fix my eye upon some one evil which I have done, and I turn it over until the memory of it eats into my very soul like caustic acid, or like a gnawing worm, or like coals of fire.

I have tried to argue that the fault was excusable in me, or that there were certain circumstances which rendered it almost impossible that I could do otherwise, but I have never succeeded in quieting my conscience in that fashion. Yet I am soon at rest when I come before the Lord and cry, “Lord, though

I am Your own dear child, I am unclean by reason of this sin. Apply, again, the merit of my Lord's atoning sacrifice, for have You not said, If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous? Lord, hear His advocacy, and pardon my offenses."

My brethren, the peace which thus comes is very sweet. You cannot pray acceptably before that peace, and you may thank God that you cannot pray, for it is a dreadful thing to be able to go on with your devotions as well under a sense of guilt as when the conscience is at rest. It is an ill child that can be happy while its father is displeased. A true child can do nothing till he is forgiven.

Now, the sprinkling of the ashes of the heifer upon the unclean was not comprehensible as to its effect by anybody who received it. I mean that there was no obvious connection between the cause and the effect.

Supposing an Israelite had been unclean, and had been sprinkled with this water. He might now go up to the house of the Lord—but would he see any reason for the change? He would say, "I have received the water of separation and I am clean, but I do not know why the sprinkling of those ashes should make me clean except that God has so appointed."

Brethren, you and I do know how it is that God has made us clean, for we know that Christ has suffered in our stead. Substitution explains the mystery, and hence it has much more effect upon the conscience than an outward, ritualistic form which could not be explained. Conscience is the understanding exercised upon moral subjects, and that which convinces the understanding that all is right soon gives peace to the conscience.

Time presses, and therefore I will only just say that as the ashes of the heifer were for all the camp, so are Christ's merits for all His people. As they were put where they were accessible, so may you always come and partake of the cleansing power of Christ's precious atonement.

As a mere sprinkling made the unclean clean, even so may you come and be cleansed even though your faith be but little, and you seem to get but little of Christ. O brethren, the Lord God in His infinite mercy gives you to know the power of the great sacrifice to work peace in you—not after three or seven days, but at once, and peace not merely for a time, but forever.

One riddle I must explain to you. Solomon, according to the Jewish tradition, declared that he did not understand why the ashes of the heifer made everybody unclean except those who were unclean already. You saw in the reading that the priest, the man who killed the red cow, the person who swept up the ashes, and he who mixed the ashes with water and sprinkled them, were all rendered unclean by those acts—and yet the ashes purified the unclean.

Is not this analogous to the riddle of the bronze serpent? It was by a serpent that the people were bitten—and it was by a serpent of brass that they were healed. Christ's being regarded as unclean that we become clean, and the operation of His sacrifice is just like that of the ashes, for it both reveals uncleanness and removes it.

If you are clean, and you think of Christ's death, what a sense of sin it brings upon you! You judge of the sin by the atonement. If you are unclean, drawing near to Christ takes that sin away.

*"Thus while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too."*

If we think we are unclean, a sight of the atoning blood makes us see how unclean we are. And if we judge ourselves unclean, then the application of the atoning sacrifice gives our conscience rest.

Now, what is all this business about? This slain heifer—I understand that, for it admitted the unclean Israelites to the courts of the Lord. But this Christ of God offering Himself without spot by the eternal Spirit—what is that for? The object of it is *a service far higher*—it is that we may be purged from dead

works to serve the living God. The dead works are gone, God absolves you, you are clean, and you feel it.

What then? Will you not abhor dead works for the future? Sin is death. Labor to keep from it. Inasmuch as you are delivered from the yoke of sin, go forth and serve God. Since He is the living God, and evidently hates death, and makes it to be an uncleanness to Him, get you to living things. Offer to God living prayers, and living tears, love Him with living love, trust Him with living faith, serve Him with living obedience.

Be all alive with His life—not only have life—but have it more abundantly. He has purged you from the defilement of death, now live in the beauty and glory and excellency of the divine life, and pray the Holy Ghost to quicken you that you may abide in full fellowship with God.

If an unclean person had been made clean, and had then said, “I will not worship the Lord, neither will I serve Him,” we should account him a wretched being! And if any person here were to say, “My sin is forgiven and I know it, but I will do nothing for God,” we might well cry, “Ah, wretched man!” What a hypocrite and a deceiver such a person must be.

Where pardon is received at the hands of the Lord, the soul is sure to feel a love to God rising within itself. He who has had much forgiven is certain to love much, and to do much for Him by whom that forgiveness has been obtained.

The Lord bless you for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—NUMBERS 19

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