

Purification after Child Birth

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

Christ said, “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” Certainly this indicates that law still stands as written today. However, certain aspects of the law and the prophets were fulfilled by Jesus Christ when He accomplished His transcendent atonement for mankind, and this required a change in the administration of the law (Heb. 7:12).

For example, in the past the law required that the Holy of Holies could only be entered by the high priest once a year at which time he would make several animal sacrifices for himself and the people (Lev. 16). This is no longer required as the author of Hebrews stated:

The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:8-14).

We see that this aspect of the law continued until Christ fulfilled it at the time of reformation. It must be understood that this term “reformation” does not refer to the restitution of all things that will take place in the millennium. This word actually means “correction” or “rectification.” In other words, these aspects of the law stood until Christ fulfilled them, and by His doing so, a “course correction” was made.

For this reason, after Christ’s sacrifice and His ascension to the throne in heaven, He replaced the high priest (Heb. 3:1). His sacrifice the physical sacrifices no longer necessary, and did away with the Levitical temple, its priests, and the various washings for purification.

This does not mean that there is no longer any value in these ordinances. These statutes and judgments given to Israel, and recorded in the book of Leviticus, continue to be of great value. They outline physical and spiritual principles that give us a profound understanding of cleanliness and moral ethics in life—principles we should live by.

In this context, some married couples have asked the following question concerning the joyful, anticipated birth of a child. “Are we to abide by the laws of purification stated in Leviticus 12:1-8?” In answering this question, let’s review the account where God spoke directly to Moses:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall then continue in the blood of *her* purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled. ‘But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of *her* purification sixty-six days. When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This *is* the law for her who has borne a male or a female. And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean” (Leviticus 12:1-8).

As we examine the verses above, there are several aspects of this ordinance that do not, and cannot, apply to Christians living today. There are in fact six reasons that demonstrate why this purification ceremony is no longer applicable.

The first thing to understand is the context of this passage. These are ordinances directly connected with attending a temple service being performed under the Levitical priesthood—the environment in which the priests ministered to God. Therefore, this ordinance of women after giving birth specifically required them to refrain from attending the temple service until the allotted time had been fulfilled. This ordinance does not apply to attending meetings of any other kind.

A second point is that this ordinance is directly related to circumcision. Church leaders judged the act of circumcision as being no longer necessary (Acts 15). Since, this act is a direct part of the purification ritual, the rest of the ceremony is therefore also no longer necessary.

The third reason is that this ordinance is intimately connected to the sacrifice of animals which is no longer required at this time. Jesus is our sacrifice and we are not required to take the lives of animals in order to provide a means for forgiveness of sins and atonement to God. Christ did this for us and instead of an animal sacrifice, we are required to be a living sacrifice as we daily give up parts of our life to Him in obedience and service (Rom. 12:1-2).

A fourth point is that this ordinance is a ceremonial law having to do with physical cleanliness. We are clean through Christ’s sacrifice and washed from our sins through baptism and by His blood (Rev. 1:5). Therefore we no longer need this physical ceremony to make us clean.

The fifth reason is that there is a distinction made between a male and a female child in this ordinance. The statute indicates that the mother shall be unclean for 7 plus 33

days if the child is a male, and 14 plus 66 days if it is a female. In this Old Covenant ordinance, there seems to be a preference towards the male. However, the New Testament states that there is no longer a difference between male and female, Jew or Gentile, when coming to God:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26-29).

Christ has made it possible for all to come unto Him. There is no distinction between race and gender. If we are dedicated to Him, then spiritually, we are of Abraham's seed and will receive the promise made to Israel.

A sixth reason that this ordinance is not required today is that, it is a part of the washing and purification rites performed under the Levitical priesthood. Since we are not under the Levites, and Christ is now our High Priest, these purification rites are not required. This is spelled out in Hebrews chapter 9 as shown above.

The issue for Christians today is not purification of our flesh by ritual washings and sacrifices. We are to be washed by Christ's blood so that we have a pure conscience. This is the purification that God seeks, not physical purification.

These various laws of purification and animal sacrifices were never a part of God's intended meaning for us, or even for ancient Israel. Because physical Israel was to foreshadow spiritual Israel—the Church—God had planned that each head of the Israelite household was to be a type of priest (I Cor. 10:11; Exo. 19:6; I Pet. 2:9). After the people sinned with the golden calf, God instituted the Levitical system of priests as a constant reminder of sin to the people. Regarding the sacrificial law, Paul explained:

What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator (Galatians 3:19).

God gave the Israelites a sacrificial system and the laws of purification as learning tools. As Paul writes in the book of Galatians, they were a tutor to teach Israel the need for being clean and to demonstrate the terrible cost of sin:

Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Galatians 3:24-25).

By these verses we realize that the laws pertained to the Levitical system was a guide to lead us in understanding what was required of Christ, and ourselves, after He came. Now that Christ has come and fulfilled what these sacrificial purification laws portrayed, He has made them obsolete.

However, the fact that they are no longer directly applicable does not mean there is no value in them. There is always the enduring moral principle in all of God's laws. And while some may not be required of us today, there is an aspect of them that can, and should, be applied where appropriate.

We have been purified by Jesus Christ and we are to offer ourselves as a sacrifice daily—striving to become a Priest in His Kingdom. In addition, this Old Covenant Levitical ordinance helps us to understand the need for cleanliness. There is a need for separation when illness and disease is upon us, and when blood has been involved to prevent the spread of infection.

In this, there is also a need for the mother to stay home for a time in order to insure that she is healthy and has fully recuperated before any stressful or tiring activity is engaged. Thus, this ordinance, while not required as an official observance, reveals principles of health and safety that serve as an inspired guide for any new mother.