

## “God’s Grace Filled Wash Tub”

Revelation 7:9-17

([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=revelation+7:9-17](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=revelation+7:9-17))

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“NO ONE IS IN CHARGE OF YOUR HAPPINESS BUT YOU.”

“WHO ARE THESE DRESSED IN WHITE ROBES, AND WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?”

(REVELATION 7:13) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=revelation+7:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=revelation+7:13))

The encounter between the Apostle John and one of the elders in this revelation from God is a good question for us.

- What about these white robes?
- What does it take to get a pure white robe? Can I have one?
- How can I know I am serving God faithfully and purifying my robe?
- Where can I find the joy that overflows in my life no matter what is happening around me or to me?
- Where can I find the cleansing peace of God that passes all understanding?  
Clean white robes have a long Biblical history.
- After God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, Moses ordered the people of God to wash their robes and to sanctify themselves in order to be able to receive the commands of God (**Exodus 19:10,14**) . ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+19:10;14](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+19:10;14))
- The Psalmist David asks God’s forgiveness for his great sins of adultery and murder by praying to God to cleanse him completely, to purge him with hyssop, and to wash him until he is whiter than snow (**Psalm 51: 1-7**) . ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+51:1-7](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+51:1-7))
- The Prophet Isaiah hears God’s promise for the people of Israel that though their sins are red as scarlet, God will wash them whiter than snow (**Isaiah 1:18**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+1:18](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+1:18)).
- The Apostle Paul reminds the people of Corinth that through the power of Jesus Christ they are washed and sanctified. (**I Corinthians 6:11**). ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+6:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+6:11))

The white robe is a symbol of purity before God! What makes that so important as to be included in this heavenly vision? The answer to this question is quite simple. Scripture teaches us that God is holy and completely pure (**Leviticus 19:2**). ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=leviticus+19:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=leviticus+19:2)) The Prophet Isaiah tells us that God is high and lifted up whose name is Holy (**Isaiah 57:15**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+57:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+57:15)). The word “holy” means separated, set apart, and completely pure. God is described as Pure Light without any shadow. No one can come into the Holy God’s presence with a blemish, blight, or shadow in themselves. Before you can be in the presence of the Holy God, you must be washed, cleansed, and sanctified. The judgment of God is that you must be wrapped in a white robe, you must be cleansed of all sin, all shadow of sin, every blight of sin, every mistake, and every negative act, whether known or unknown, must be wiped out of you so that you can stand before the throne of our Holy God!

The vision and the weight of the message of Holy Scripture is clear -- you must be cleansed before you can stand before God! The symbol of the white robe is the symbol of your life! I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to stand before God without being cleansed! But, how do I get my black, dingy, soiled, ragged robe washed?

“***THEN ONE OF THE ELDERS TOLD ME, ‘THESE ARE THOSE WHO COME FROM THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND THEY’VE WASHED THEIR ROBES, SCRUBBED THEM CLEAN IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB,’***” (REVELATION 7:14) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=revelation+7:14](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=revelation+7:14))

I urge you not to go running off into questions about the tribulation, when it might be, or what might be included in it. Let's forget the fanciful novels of the *Left Behind* series and focus on what the Bible actually says. The word tribulation literally means a time of multiple afflictions and great suffering. There's no question but that at the time of the Apostle John's writing the Christians were undergoing Roman persecutions and felt themselves to be living at the end of time. This entire vision is pointing beyond the present suffering to a time of great glory with the Holy God.

Christians, since the time of Jesus, have rightly felt themselves to be living in the great tribulation that Jesus referred to in **Mark 13:19** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+13:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+13:19)) and the Apostle John reports in this heavenly vision. Since Jesus, all humanity has been living on the edge of a great precipice in the age of tribulation and suffering. We know the power of God. We know the Holiness of God. We know the love of God. Yet, we live in this fallen world. We are assaulted on every side. We are tempted in all ways. Jesus' challenge to us is not to attempt to figure out when God will close the age of Earth. That kind of speculation is fruitless "*because the day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father....*" (**Mark 13:32**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+13:32](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+13:32)) Jesus encourages us to be prepared for Christ's return at any point! Work on getting clean is Jesus' message. So being clean, wearing a white robe is important -- but, how do you get your robe clean?

To wear one of God's white robes is not to be some kind of religious nut; rather it's to be an authentic person who is daily living within the circle of God's grace and growing in that grace on a daily basis. The theological words for this kind of living are justification and sanctification. In this passage of Scripture we see both.

### **Justification: Washed clean by the "blood of the Lamb".**

Justification means that there is the blood of the Lamb that is used to clean up our dirty lives. This symbolic language refers to more than the death of Jesus. The life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus are captured in the Biblical phrase "*blood of the Lamb.*" It's through the cleansing blood of Jesus that we are forgiven from all sin (**I John 1:7**). ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+john+1:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+john+1:7)) The blood of the Lamb provides for our redemption and adoption into the family of God (**Ephesians 1:7**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+1:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+1:7)). The blood of the Lamb is necessary for your entrance into the Holy of Holy's in order to praise and worship God. The word justification refers to what God does for us. The Holy God provides for each one a large washtub of grace! You can't earn it. You don't deserve it. You can't manufacture it on your own. It's through the blood of Jesus that you are justified to God (**Romans 5:9**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+5:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+5:9)). God's demonstration of costly love in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus is pure grace. The great miracle of all time is that the Holy Spirit prepares your heart to receive grace -- as well as offering grace to you.

What's grace? Grace is God's unconditional acceptance and love of each one of you. The character of John Newton in the incredible movie *Amazing Grace* says that he is haunted by 20,000 ghosts of those slaves who died on the Middle Passage under his watch as a slave ship captain. Newton says that only God's grace makes his sin and those 20,000 ghosts bearable. When you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you accept God's grace. When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, you know God's grace because your sins are forgiven. You are justified by God through the blood of the Lamb!

### **(VIDEO CLIP OF AMAZING GRACE AT 10:30)**

While we live on this troubled planet, we are justified, but we also need to be sanctified.

### **Sanctification: Living and growing within the circle of God's grace.**

Sanctification is growing up into the mature person God created you to be. You are saved by grace. You are justified and you must be sanctified. Let me return to the vision of washing. The "*blood of the Lamb*" is provided by God, but you must do the work of washing. The hard work of growing into a fully mature child of the Living God is the work of sanctification. God's Holy Spirit is with us to help in the work, but the work is ours to do!

***BUT EACH OF US WAS GIVEN GRACE ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF CHRIST'S GIFT,... TO EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY, FOR BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNTIL ALL OF US COME TO THE UNITY OF THE FAITH AND OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON OF GOD, TO MATURITY, TO THE MEASURE OF THE FULL STATURE OF CHRIST.*** (EPHESIANS 4:7A, 12-13) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+4:7a:12-13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+4:7a:12-13))

My friends, if we want to wear the white robes of heaven then we have some sanctifying work to do here on earth! We have to get our hands wet. We have to use some elbow grease! We have to work on our own robes. God provides the grace and expects us to grow in that grace until we are fully alive, fully graced, and fully mature like Jesus.

To do our washing requires that we continually learn new and healthier habits and practice living Christ-like love. We don't have to be great martyrs or foreign missionaries. We don't have to be known far and wide as heroes of the faith. What God requires of us is that we daily grow in grace while living in our families, neighborhoods, church, and place of business.

Let me give you a specific example. Edwin Freedman spent years studying Christian and Jewish congregational life. In his monumental book, *Generation to Generation*, he points out that people live and act in a congregation using the same patterns of behavior they learned in their family of origin. If an individual was used to getting their own way through manipulating their parents at home, they will follow that same destructive pattern in church. We see these people as people who ignore Jesus' **Matthew 18** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+18](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+18)) process of dealing with disagreements. They would rather get on the phone; meet people for dinner, or stop people and gossip in Wal-Mart, Meijer's, or VG's. They will blame, whine, make excuses, play the victim, or whatever else they need to do hoping that at some point they can get their way in the congregation like they always did in their families. If these people are to grow in God's grace, then they must set aside childish ways and follow Jesus' way described in Matthew 18. You can help people caught in this negative pattern by not listening to their issues and urging them to follow Jesus' plan that requires them to go directly to the person with whom they have a problem.

Allow me to give another example. Parents are often hurt by the decisions of their children. The folklore about parenting is that parents become really stupid about the time their children reach age 16 and then by some miracle of God become really intelligent when their children reach 25 to 30 years of age. During that period of conflict parents are often tempted to withdraw and do nothing or to become enraged, threaten, fume, and fuss. A lot of family damage can happen when the parents act upon their emotions rather than live out God's wisdom. The model for parents in the midst of a storm is the father in Jesus' story found in **Luke 15:11-32** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+15:11-32](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+15:11-32)) We call this story the parable of the prodigal son, but it's actually the parable of the loving father. When parents can let go of their emotions and can accept the role of this father as their role, then God's grace can grow and healing can happen in the family.

God's washtub takes daily work. I'm not talking about building up a church of religious nut cases. I'm taking seriously the vision of God given to the Apostle John for each person to grow in grace until we are wrapped in the white robes of heaven. If we are to grow up then:

- We must let go of our negative life patterns and embrace the relationship standards of Jesus;
- We must let go of our need for revenge, and allow God's forgiveness to grow in our lives;
- We must let go of our past hurts and pains and allow God's grace to heal us;
- We must let go of destructive habits and allow God's grace to empower us to do good.
- We must turn over the control of our life to God. God is the captain of our souls when we are in the process of being sanctified. God is the pilot of our lives when we are growing toward spiritual maturity.

This Scriptural vision from God challenges us to accept God's grace and to grow in God's grace. The vision challenges us to grow a church made up of soul and spirit, flesh and bone, with Jesus as the sure foundation.

Friends, every one of us has a washtub filled with the "*blood of the Lamb*". You can take God's grace for granted or you can commit yourself to growing in the grace becoming cleaner and cleaner. What color is your robe? Remember you need a pure white, unstained, unblemished, robe to appear before God.