

A sterile environment is one in which all disease-carrying microbes (bacteria, fungi, viruses, etc.) have been killed and the area sealed so that nothing toxic can enter. It's necessary to have a sterile environment in a place like a hospital's surgery room so that a patient's bloodstream isn't contaminated with sickness. And since human hands can transmit millions of microbes from one person to another with just a simple handshake, a person entering a sterile environment has to either thoroughly wash their hands or cover them with gloves. The least little contamination will ruin that controlled environment.

In Scripture God tells us that he maintains a sterile environment in his heavenly kingdom. King David asks a rhetorical question in Psalm 24 and supplies the answer as well: "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (3,4a).

Because it is completely against his nature, sin is not tolerated by God at all. He does not operate with a sliding scale, allowing those who commit little sins to stay in his presence while excluding only those who commit really big sins. He forbids all sin. Just as you can't have an environment that is "semi-sterile," you cannot be "semi-holy." Either a place is sterile or it isn't. Either we are holy or we are not.

That's a problem for us. We don't come into this world with the "clean hands" necessary to enter God's presence. Though we probably don't think about it every day, each of us is a sinner. Each of us does things God forbids. We are faced with this difficulty: we cannot enter God's presence unless we are completely free of sin, but we need to enter God's presence to ask him to forgive us our sin.

Thankfully, God didn't wait for us to come to the realization that our hands are filthy with sin. He didn't sit back waiting for sinners to clean themselves and then come to him. He went out and got us himself.

Jesus, our Savior, left his perfect home in heaven and came down to this sinful earth. He got his holy hands dirty ministering to people who needed his help. He did so to give us the only cleaning solution that covers all our sins: his innocent blood. His death on the cross covered all our sins, so that we can now go to our Father in heaven with clean hands - not hands we have cleaned ourselves, but hands that have been washed clean in Jesus' blood.

Think of that the next time you are washing your hands. Your sins ought to stain your hands like permanent ink. Instead, Jesus has washed your hands clean and now invites you to come into God's presence today and every day. Your guilt and punishment have been washed away. Let us fold our clean hands and give thanks to our loving God!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you died so that I might live. Thank you for washing me clean of sin in your blood. Now put my hands to work for you, that they may be useful in your kingdom. In your name I pray, Amen.

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