

## John 13:4-12

## PRESENT CLEANSING FROM SIN

SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST'S PRESENT HIGH PRIESTLY MINISTRY

By Arlen L. Chirwood

Levitical priests in the Mosaic Economy were taken from the tribe of Levi, and these priests, upon their entrance into the priesthood to perform priestly functions, were given a bath. Their complete bodies were *bathed* at this time, an act never to be repeated (Ex. 29:4).

Then, once they had entered into their priestly ministry, *washings* of another type were to occur, which had to do with parts of the body, not with the whole body. And these washings were solely for those whose complete bodies had previously been bathed. These were washings occurring during the course of their ministry as priests.

Priests ministering between the brazen altar in the courtyard and the Holy Place of the tabernacle became defiled during the course of their ministry. They still lived in a world where sin and death were present, and they still possessed the old sin nature. Ministering under these conditions, this defilement was shown through their hands and feet becoming soiled, necessitating cleansing.

To provide this cleansing, there was a brazen laver in the courtyard of the tabernacle, located between the brazen altar and the Holy Place. This laver had upper and lower basins filled with water; and the priests, ministering between the brazen altar and the Holy Place, though their complete bodies had been bathed upon their entrance into the priesthood, had to stop and wash their hands and feet prior to entering into the Holy Place. They had to stop at the brazen laver and wash that which had become soiled prior to entering into the place where there was a seven-leafed candlestick, a table of shewbread, an altar of incense, and a veil separating them from God's presence in the Holy of Holies (Ex. 30:18-21).

It was these established truths pertaining to washings within the Mosaic Economy which Jesus drew from in John 13:4-12 when He washed the disciples' feet.

In this account, Jesus, following supper, arose, laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet. But when He came to Peter, there was an adverse reaction. Peter, in a very emphatic manner (a double negative appears in the Greek text), said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Jesus responded, "If I wash [Gk., *nipto*, referring to a part of the body] thee not, thou has no part with me" (v. 8).

This was near the end of Christ's earthly ministry, preceding His crucifixion. Christ's ministry (along with the ministry of the disciples whom He had called and sent out) had centered around one thing — an offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, conditioned upon the nation's repentance (Matt. 4:17-25; 10:1-8). And Christ's statement, within context, could only have been understood *one way* by the disciples. Unless they allowed Christ to wash their feet, as He was demonstrating and doing, they could have no part with Him in the kingdom being proclaimed and offered to Israel.

Peter, knowing that Christ was referring to a place in the kingdom with Him, and desiring one of these places above everything else, responded to Jesus' statement by saying, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (v. 9). As evident by Peter's response, if allowing Christ to wash his feet was a prerequisite to his having a part with Christ in the kingdom, then he wanted to go beyond allowing Christ to wash his feet. Peter wanted Christ to wash his complete body, making absolutely sure that he would have a part with Him in the kingdom.

But Jesus then stated, "He that is washed (Gk., *louo*, referring to the complete body) needeth not save to wash [Gk., *nipto*, referring to part of the body] his feet, but is clean every whit..." (v. 10a). Jesus could only have been alluding to washings of both the complete body and parts of the body experienced by the Levitical priests in the type (in the Septuagint translation [Greek translation] of the Book of Exodus, the words *louo* and *nipto* are used to show the same distinction seen in John 13:8-10 [cf. Ex. 29:4; 30:18-21;

40:12-15]). And Jesus' actions in this passage in John's gospel, pointing to a future high priestly ministry which He was to occupy following His resurrection and ascension, would have to be understood in the light of this overall Old Testament type.

(Note that this act of washing the disciples' feet, as the washings in the O.T. type, had no power in and of itself. This washing, as all washings seen in Scripture, was symbolic of something else; and the power lay in that to which the act pointed, that which it foreshadowed.)

The washings associated with the Levitical priests in the Old Testament (a washing of the complete body, followed by washings of parts of the body), in turn, pointed to, foreshadowed respectively, both *Christ's past work at Calvary* and *His present work in the heavenly sanctuary*. Christ died for our sins, providing a cleansing typified by the complete bath which the priests were given upon their entrance into the priesthood. And Christ presently ministers as our High Priest to provide subsequent cleansings, typified by the subsequent cleansings at the laver in the type.

Thus, Christ, through washing the disciples' feet in John chapter thirteen, was demonstrating truths typically seen through the Levitical priests washing their hands and feet at the laver in the courtyard of the tabernacle as they carried out their priestly ministry on behalf of those forming the nation of Israel.

Then, the allusion to a washing of the entire body which Christ made as He was about to wash Peter's feet, was a reference to the prior experience of the priests upon their entrance into the priesthood.

And, as in the type, Christ's present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is *solely for the saved*, for those who in the antitype of the experience of the Levitical priests at the time of their entrance into the priesthood have already had their complete bodies washed, never to be repeated. Christ's present ministry is for those forming *the one new man* "in Christ," for those who have been saved in past time and are now in a position to receive cleansing from present defilement through Christ's present ministry in the sanctuary.

Thus, as in the type, Christ's present ministry *has nothing to do with the unsaved*. The unsaved are dealt with solely on the basis of Christ's past work at Calvary — His death and shed blood. As previously stated,

from a typical standpoint, the unsaved being dealt with in this manner is connected with the Levitical priests receiving a complete bath upon their entrance into the priesthood, not with subsequent washing of the hands and feet. It is only after a person has been saved, has passed from death unto life, that he can be dealt with on the basis of Christ's present work in the sanctuary — performed by a living Christ, on the basis of His shed blood on the mercy seat.

(Jesus' statement in John 13:10, 11 is often used in an effort to show that Judas was not among those viewed as having been washed completely, as the other disciples, placing him in an unsaved state. However, the passage can't be understood in this manner, for it would be out of line with both Jesus' actions in this chapter and other Scriptures dealing with the disciples and their ministry.

It appears clear from John 13:12 — "after he had washed their feet" — that Christ washed the feet of all twelve disciples, with no distinction made between Judas and the other eleven in this respect. And He could not have included Judas among those whose feet He had washed apart from having looked upon Judas in the antitype of previously having had his complete body washed.

Christ's act of washing the disciples' feet in John chapter thirteen foreshadowed His present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, which is for the saved alone. Thus, through this act of washing Judas' feet, Christ acknowledged something which is really not even an issue in the text [or any other text in Scripture for that matter] — that Judas was a saved individual, not unsaved as is so often believed and taught.

In this respect, John 13:10b, 11 would have to be understood in the sense of Judas' uncleanness being associated with Christ's present actions [washing a part of the body, following a complete bath]; and, as stated in the text, it had to do with Judas' future actions — betraying Christ [v. 11].

Judas' betrayal of Christ, mentioned in this verse, could, in no way, be a grounds for questioning his salvation. If it were, salvation would be brought over into the realm of works, where it can't exist [e.g., note that Peter denied Christ three times — a similar act in many respects (Matt. 26:58, 69-75); and his salvation can't be brought into question for this denial, for exactly the same reason that Judas' salvation can't be brought into question for his betrayal].

It would really make no sense to associate Judas'

actions with saved-unsaved issues [which have to be read into the text to do so]. On the other hand though, it would make perfect sense to associate his actions with *unfaithfulness* [as Peter's subsequent actions, also foretold by Jesus immediately before they occurred], which is really what the text deals with.

Then note Jesus' previous calling of Judas as one of the Twelve, to be numbered among those carrying the good news pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens to Israel. It would be completely untenable to believe that Jesus would call someone among the Twelve, who was spiritually dead, to carry a message necessitating spiritual life and understanding to a nation possessing spiritual life and capable of this type understanding.)

### I John 1:5-2:2

The opening part of I John deals specifically with the same thing seen in John's gospel — *cleansing provided through Christ's present ministry in the sanctuary, drawing from the typology of the tabernacle and the ministry of the Levitical priests*. And, with that being the case, the only way in which this section of Scripture can be properly understood and explained is through continual reference to the type, given to shed light upon the antitype.

This section of Scripture begins with a reference to *light* and *darkness* (1:5-7a). Individuals either walk *in light* or *in darkness*, and two things exist for those walking in light which do not exist for those walking in darkness:

- 1) They have fellowship with the Father and the Son.
- 2) They receive continuous cleansing from their sins.

Then, this section in I John goes on to explain this through dealing with *confession of sin* (1:7b-10) and *Christ's high priestly ministry* (2:1, 2).

(Note that both textually and contextually, I John 2:1, 2 has to do with *the saved*, not with the unsaved. The word "advocate" [v. 1] is a translation of *parakletos* in the Greek text [cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; ref. Chapters III, IV in the author's book, SEARCH FOR THE BRIDE], and the word "propitiation" [v. 2] is a translation of *hilasmos* in the Greek text.

*Hilasmos* is derived from the same root form as the

word for "mercy seat" [*hilasterion*] in Heb. 9:5. And Christ's high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary, on the basis of His shed blood on the mercy seat, is what is in view in I John 2:1, 2.

"The whole world" at the end of verse two would have to be understood contextually. Salvation by grace is not in view in the text or context, and the expression would have to be understood in the same sense as seen in Col. 1:6, 23, where salvation by grace is not in view either.)

Thus, this whole section in I John is about *keeping oneself clean* through confession of sin, allowing an individual to walk in the light and have fellowship with the Father and with His Son. And this is all made possible through Christ's present ministry in the sanctuary, on the basis of His shed blood on the mercy seat.

That seen in this section of Scripture can be properly understood and explained only through referring back to the layout of the tabernacle and the ministry of the Levitical priests as they carried out their priestly duties. *Light* existed only one place in the tabernacle (aside from the fact that *God is Light* and dwelt in the Holy of Holies). *The only light* in the tabernacle came from the seven-leafed golden candlestick in the Holy Place. And *the only way* a priest could enter into the Holy Place, where light existed, was to first wash his hands and feet at the laver in the courtyard.

*Only then* could he enter the place where light, a table of shewbread, an altar of incense, and a veil separating the person from God existed. Otherwise, if he did not wash his hands and feet, he would find himself *on the wrong side of the laver*, separated from the light, the table of shewbread, the altar of incense, and the veil in the Holy Place. He, in the words of I John 1:6, would be *walking in darkness, separated from fellowship with the Father and with His Son*.

In this respect, two types of Christians are seen in the opening section of I John — *faithful* and *unfaithful* — those who allow Christ to wash their feet, and those who do not. And teachings surrounding the matter, to aid in one's understanding, are drawn from Old Testament typology.

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