

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3)

The Laver

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 24-Oct-09; Sermon #961

Truth be told, human beings are a pretty filthy race. Even though as a whole we have improved in our hygiene (I am talking in terms of hygiene right now, rather than sin) over the past several centuries, we are far from being universally fastidious when it comes to cleanliness. This has really come into sharp focus recently with all the hyperbole regarding the swine flu "pandemic." Of course, we have a national emergency. But, from everything we have heard, even though there have been some deaths, it is not any worse than normal for any other flu season. As matter of fact, it has mostly affected children, and not the elderly as they had expected. But, the number of deaths is far lower than what they would expect in a normal flu season, although they are earlier in the year than usual.

Even so, the government felt a need to inform us all about our hygiene, and make sure that we all wash our hands properly, and so they had to teach us how to do that so that you could avoid spreading this highly contagious influenza. And that is all well and good. Use warm water, use soap, rub your hands together for forty seconds. And, if you do not know how long forty seconds are, just sing a song or something—that is what we taught out kids, because we knew that if we told a certain one to go wash his hands, it would have been a one-second thing where he just ran his hands under there, and that would be all. So, he had to sing the whole song. (He probably should have done it twice!)

Of course, we are all children again in the eyes of the government, who had to teach us all how to do this. Now we are all told that doctors are not washing their hands between patients, and there was quite an outcry about this, because here we are in the midst of a "pandemic," but the doctors are not washing their hands. I heard that maybe ten percent of them were, and you know the people that they had to deal with!

Anyway, this lack of cleanliness has been around for a while. Here is an August 2005 survey conducted by the Harris Polling Organization, and they found that 91% of people who responded said they wash their hands after using the bathroom facilities. Then, the pollsters decided to go and check public restrooms to see if the actual practice matched their respondent's remarks.

So, when they put their hidden cameras near the sinks, they found that 82% actually washed up. That is not very bad at all. But it was 9% under their respondent's remarks.

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

They also found out that 90% of women, and 75% of men washed their hands after using the facilities.

This study was done again in 2007 and it showed similar figures, but lower ones—88% of women, and 67% of the men were washing after using the facilities. So, if you see a man coming out of the bathroom, there is a one-in-three chance that the guy did not wash his hands before coming back out the door.

In other situations, fewer than half of adults said they washed their hands after touching their pets, sneezing, or handling money. Only 64% of men, and 82% of women reported they washed their hands after changing a baby's diaper. (Pew!)

Most people wash up before handling food, but 23% adults said that they regularly handled food without first washing. No wonder there are so many contagions going around.

And I have noticed also that you go to the store, and you see these kids with their mothers, pulling stuff off the shelves, while others are sucking on the handle bar, and those are among the dirtiest things that there are in the entire world. Not because people put their hands on them, but because the kids have been sucking on them too. (So, you might want to take a wet-wipe with you the next time you visit your favorite store.)

Of course, what we have here in America (and other western countries) is actually wonderful compared to historical times. During the Dark Ages many people believed that water would make them sick, because it would penetrate the body through the pores of their skin. So, during the times of the plague they felt it was better to have a layer of filth all over their bodies to give them some protection from the illness going around. Talk about being totally opposite of what we know to be true today. However, by 1600 AD Queen Elizabeth was bathing once a month! That was a great leap forward! But can you imagine (depending on the day of the month) how it must have smelled at Shakespeare's plays!

Most people when they did wash cleaned only their hands, and face, and perhaps under their arms. So, even though they may have washed it was not very thorough.

Later, bathing did become more accepted as we got into the 19th century. Yet even then, because a tub of water was so difficult to fill, and to heat—a lot of water to be carried and then heated over a fire, and then put into some sort of tub or barrel—whole families from eldest to youngest would use the same tub of water for each one of them to bath.

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

This might be the origin of the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater!" because it was so dark and dirty that a little one might actually be missed in it—doubtful, but interesting.

Now with scientific advances hygiene has become more emphasized especially in Europe and America. Now it is no problem for most people in the western world to take a bath or shower every day. Public restrooms are usually available if you really need one. Soap and detergent manufacturing accounts for 30 billion dollars of our economy alone. We have wet-wipes, hand sanitizers we can carry around with us so that at least our hands can be clean at any time we need.

So, we know the way that it has been talked about, and the ways that we have been taught, "That cleanliness is a public and private virtue." And we have the means to be clean. Certainly in this country we do. It is just the matter of taking the time and effort to do so. And I encourage you all to do so.

As you probably have figured out by now, cleanliness is the theme of the next piece of furniture found in the tabernacle, and that is the laver.

Spiritual cleanliness is a vital element in approaching God through Christ. Just as physical cleanliness enhances physical health, so also spiritual cleanliness enhances spiritual health—we must be spiritually clean to ensure spiritual health and progress.

Let us start today in Psalm 24. This passage sounds very similar to Psalm 15, but I thought that this one was better for our use today.

Psalm 24:3-5 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place [who has this opportunity]? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

These verses show just how important being clean is in our trek toward the Kingdom of God. If we want to stand before God we have to be clean. So, what kind of person can approach God? The answer is one who has clean hands and a pure heart.

The words clean, and pure, are essentially synonymous here. We could probably dither about their meanings, but overall their meaning is the same. They both mean undefiled, untainted, unblemished, uncontaminated, and wholesome. They are clean—pure. They

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

do not have anything defiling them.

You have to understand Hebrew thought—clean hands implies righteous actions, because it is the hands that did things. That is how we do our work. I mean, even in doing something cerebral like writing, we still have to use our hands to do that work. So, it is our work that we do that has to be clean. That is, our *actions* must be righteous, and pure, and undefiled, and uncontaminated, and wholesome.

Pure of heart suggests a similar thing, but this one's focus is on the heart, which to the people of the time implies more inner things like character, and thoughts.

So, David is showing that the one who comes before God has to be clean and pure both in his actions, and in his internal ideas, beliefs, and thoughts, which are often expressed in words as well. So, it encompasses the whole person.

What he is saying here is that a person who is going to appear before God or approach God with something has to be clean and pure inside and out—internally and externally—in his private moments, and in his public works. Everything he does, everything he thinks, everything he says—his whole being—has to be clean and pure, because one is approaching before a clean and pure God. If He will not allow sin to be in His presence, then He will not allow one who is unclean into His presence, because sin and uncleanness is the same thing.

So, in His children, God is looking for not just right belief; we might think that if it had said a pure heart only. But, it says to have clean hands too. So, He is looking not only for right belief, but godly conduct and works—the things that we do have to be pure and clean too.

Now we know from the things that we have studied in the past that these two things cannot really exist separately. We cannot have good works without right belief. Nor can you have right belief without it being expressed through right works. They exist together, and they have to be there together.

It is this idea of being both clean inside and out in our thoughts and our works and our beliefs and our actions that the laver is given a prominent place in the tabernacle courtyard because we need both of these things—the cleanliness inside and out—to be able to approach God.

Turn to Exodus 30 and let us see the laver.

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Exodus 30:17-21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations."

This was spoken concerning Aaron and his sons after him.

So, here God gives instructions concerning the making of this bronze laver. Actually, if you notice here there is not much detail given. He says to make a laver, and its base, and then put water in it. That is essentially what it says.

What we can see is that a laver is like a big sink. They are a caldron shaped vessel, and in this case, it was made of bronze. If you will remember my last sermon, bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. We have probably all seen bronze statues, or some other sort of bronze work, and have an idea of what we are talking about.

Perhaps this was made of brass. Remember that brass is not the same as bronze. Brass is copper and zinc. Now the problem here is that zinc was not used very much in ancient times. It was known. There were things made of brass. But it was more difficult to work with. However please notice Exodus 38 in the chapter explaining more about how it was made.

Exodus 38:8 He made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the bronze mirrors of the serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

What this shows is that the laver was made of bronze mirrors. Remember that the Hebrew word for bronze could mean anything from pure copper to brass to bronze. So it could have been any one of those things. But it was probably a high-quality alloy whatever it was. It could be highly polished, and therefore highly reflective. It was probably quite a stunning thing, this laver.

So, it is possible that these women having brought out their mirrors from Egypt, this

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

original metal could have been smelted and manufactured in Egypt beforehand, so it might have been with a higher copper content, or may have been brass.

Either of these would have changed the color from what we think about with bronze. Bronze tends to be reddish, whereas brass tends to be more golden colored. So, it is hard to say what the laver looked like—either yellowish, or reddish.

Now it has been said that the laver could have actually been so highly polished that it could have been used as a mirror itself. Many commentators tend to pooh-pooh that idea because they were just washing their hands and their feet, and there was no need for a mirror to be there in the courtyard. Perhaps, the more fastidious of them would have used it as a mirror to make sure that they were of proper dress for their duties before God.

Now, another detail mentioned here, and in Exodus 30, was that it was a laver, and its base. It was not just the laver. It had to sit on something.

Remember, we do not know what it actually looked like. So we have to guess. We do know that it was in two pieces. It could have simply been just a big caldron thing sitting on a very strong pedestal. This is the simplest way of looking at it. Others feel that the base itself was formed into a lower basin, making an upper basin over a lower basin. The idea here is that the water could have been drawn from the top portion where it was being held, and then it was poured over the hands and feet into the lower basin—the lower catching the refuse water.

Another suggestion is that the top part—the basin—was essentially a tank, which was covered to keep it clean. And that in this tank were taps or spigots so that the water could flow from the top basin and into the lower basin, where they could do their washing.

Like I said, though, no one really knows for sure how this was all set up.

We do know that in the temple, Solomon made a bronze sea. That huge bowl that was ten cubits across (about 15 feet), which was supported by 12 cast oxen. So it was a huge thing. It was big enough to swim in almost. It says someplace that it held 2000 baths, while another said it held 3000 baths of water—maybe 10,000 gallons of water. And this was for the priests to wash in. It was a huge thing in the courtyard of the temple.

Solomon also made 10 lavers, putting five on each side, which were not used for

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

washings by the priests, but rather the washing of the sacrifices before they were put up on the altar. So, we do know that they were a bit more advanced, since they were settled, and they could do more things there. They did not have to carry the temple on their backs as they moved from place to place. So, it was very probable that Solomon had plumbing pipes in the sea so that they could get water into it, and take away the refuse. This shows a difference between a portable tabernacle and a permanent temple.

What we are dealing with here is the furniture, the smaller laver, in the tabernacle.

The final thing we are told here in Exodus 30 is that they placed the laver midway between the altar, and the entrance to the sanctuary. The Jews say that it was not exactly in a straight line between them, but it was somewhat to the south. Remember that the temple door faced eastward, which means that the laver was slightly on your left (south) as you look across from the door toward the curtain (westward).

Nevertheless, it was convenient to both. If a priest had to go into the sanctuary and officiate in some thing, it was close by. And it was equally close by if he had to go to the altar of sacrifice to make offerings there.

I get the impression that the laver was a busy place throughout the day, especially around the times of the morning and evening sacrifices with the priests washing up preparing for their duties.

Please turn to Exodus 40. Now, this is when everything is set up, and the services begin to happen in the tabernacle, and we will see that,

Exodus 40:30-32 He [Moses] set the laver between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, and put water there for washing; and Moses, Aaron, and his sons would wash their hands and their feet with water from it. Whenever they went into the tabernacle of meeting, and when they came near the altar, they washed, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

So, they started off doing things right.

Now it is not clear *how* the priests washed. That is something that we really do not have. We have understanding how they may have done it in the second temple period, but we do not know exactly how they did it with this laver way back in 1400 BC and the tabernacle. They had to wash their hands and feet in water *from* the laver, rather than *in* the laver.

They did not just go up there, and stick their hands in the top, and take some water, or put a foot up, or anything like that. There were no steps leading up to it so that they could dangle them over the side. Obviously there must have been a way that they got water out of the laver to wash their hands and feet with.

It is likely that there was a big ceremony for them to do. You know how the Jews tend to be. It does not tell us here, but there may have been prayers said as they did this, there may have been a certain way that they needed to wash, such as right hand first, then left, and so on. It is hard to know. We just do not know all the ritual of how it was done that they may have had. There were probably, if there were not taps or spigots, ladles or pitchers that they had to use to draw water from the top, and then pour it over hands and feet, and maybe caught in the lower basin, or if that was not the case, if it was literally just a pedestal, then they had to have other basins that needed to be used to catch the refuse water.

It could have been as simple as opening the tap and putting their hands under the water to wash their hands and feet. Again, we do not know.

The Hebrew text suggests that the water poured over their hands and feet. There is no indication of rubbing or scrubbing. They were probably already clean before they started, so they maybe only needed to have the water poured over them to do the ritual and prepare them for the next thing.

I really do not think that they were in there with soap, scrubbing their hands and feet at the tabernacle. They would not have come there needing a bath. They would have already been clean before arriving. But, they had this ritual to go through using this water from the laver in the tabernacle to become clean ceremonially.

I have heard in the past that they did not use a towel to wipe their hands with, but rather that they dripped dry as it were. It kind of reminds me of a doctor going into surgery from the scrubbing room, dripping from the elbows. Perhaps they thought that the towels were not sanctified in any way, so that they would not defile their hands with a towel. I do not know.

Regardless, it was a capital crime for the priest not to wash before entering the sanctuary, or for offering a sacrifice on the altar. There was a pretty stiff penalty. It was equal to using common fire on the altar of sacrifice or altar of incense. We know that from Nadab and Abihu's story in Leviticus 10 where they did use common fire. So, the same sort of thing would have happened if they did not wash from the laver first.

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Obviously, God is stressing the point that those who approach Him, and serve Him, must be clean—completely clean. Turn to Proverbs 10. Here we will look at the symbols of the hands and the feet.

Proverbs 10:4 He who has [deals with] a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes [one] rich.

Obviously, the hand is performing work. If you do not work, you will be poor. If you do work with your hand, you are going to be rich. So, obviously, the hand has something to do with our activities. Please turn to Job 23.

Job 23:10 But He [God] knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

That is another thing: Gold is a highly refined purified metal. It is that idea.

Job 23:11-12 My foot has held fast to His [God's] steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.

What Job is saying is that his foot was symbolic of his way of life, of his traveling, of his trek of his walking through life according to the way that God had taught him to walk and life.

So now, we have hands having to do with work, and feet having to do with their daily walk through this present evil world.

What we can see here in terms of the priests having to have their hands and feet washed is that we see the life of a person who is trying to approach before God, broken down into specific acts, symbolized by the hands, and general course of life by the feet. Do we understand the difference, here? We are talking about specific to general. The hands are what we do specifically in our work, while the feet represent what we generally do in the conduct of our daily life. So, God is interested in *both* being clean. He is not just interested in us being generally good, but rather He wants us to be specifically righteous as well in all the little things that we do.

And this is also true *visa versa*. He is not just interested in the little things, but he is also

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

interested in that the general course of our lives is straight toward His Kingdom. They both must be clean.

We could say that He is covering every aspect of life from micro (in our hands) to macro (in our feet).

This is just one way of looking at this.

It could also be seen as public, and private acts. Look up at me here. If you will notice, I have been using my hands while speaking. But have you seen my feet? No.

Think of this in general terms in how we conduct ourselves at anything we choose to do. Our hands are what is out front. People see our hands. We communicate with our hands. We do things with our hands. It draws attention to what we do.

Normally, though, our feet are out of the way, and covered up. Our feet, though, are necessary in many of the things that we have to do. Even standing here, my feet are helping me give this message, but they are hidden. They are supplying my foundation for my body, and letting my hands do all the "talking". They, my hands, are very prominent and expressive. They get all the attention.

But the feet basically go unnoticed. We think of our feet as uncomely. Many people think that their own feet are sad, atrocious, and ugly; therefore they keep them covered, not wanting others to see them. People cover their feet. They would rather cover them with nice leather rather than to let others see all the corns and bunions.

Do you understand what I am getting at here?

Despite being ugly, and uncomely, they are very important in whatever we need to do. If we have to get somewhere, our feet have to take us part or all the way. If we have to stand up and do something, they have to support us. They give us balance. They are very important in a lot of things. Even if you drive a car, you have to have your feet down there on the pedals to help control yourself, going and stopping.

The hands represent our public, visible works, while the feet represent our private acts—the ones we keep covered up, that no one sees. But both have to be clean. The private acts and the public works have to be clean. Otherwise, we are hypocrites, especially if our private acts are sinful while our public acts seem righteous.

Does that remind you of anybody? Please turn to Luke 11. There was a group of people

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

in Jesus' time that He specifically marked out for having a specific problem. They were called the Pharisees. We will just note only one of their problems. And it has to do with this washing aspect.

Luke 11:37-41 And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.

Ritual purity was so important to the Pharisees that—now get this!—they would wash their eating and drinking items and utensils as well as themselves in the ritual baths, called mikvot. They took their cups, plates, and saucers, and whatnot down into these mikva to wash them there in this supposedly ritually pure place, so that they then could take them back home and eat from them, and they would then feel that they were clean.

Please turn to Mark 7, which also talks about this. Mark thought that he needed to give some background explanation for this.

Mark 7:1-4 Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things, which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

What happened was that if anybody who was supposedly unclean or defiled—a woman in her menstrual period, or a man who had touched a dead body, or whatever—would sit on your couch, or chair, they would then feel obliged to have it dunked in the ritual bath in order to cleanse it. That is what they are talking about—even couches. But especially, anything having to do with their eating a meal. It may have been okay if it was a couch not used for a meal, but when it came to eating, all things were supposed to be especially clean. So, if they were using this particular couch around the table, and that is often how they ate at the time, reclining upon couches, then they would have to

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

clean this thing ritually. So, the host that asked Jesus to dinner was shocked, and perhaps offended that Jesus had not gone through the ritual washing before eating.

Now, I am sure the Jesus' hands were clean. As the Son of God, I am sure that he was not dirty. He knew the laws of hygiene and He kept clean. But, He did not go through the proscribed ceremonial ablutions. That is all that this means, here. He was clean, but He just did not go through all the little things that had been added to the Jewish lifestyle in this manner. Nor did His disciples.

So this really offended them. But we also need to understand why.

At this time, there were two competing schools of pharisaic thinking. There was the school of Shemai, the majority school, who held that the outside of a cup could be clean even if the inside was not. That was the ruling that the rabbis had made. Why? Who knows. But they did.

The other was the school of Hillel, who held that the inside of the cup must be cleansed first, and then the outside.

Here, Jesus shows that both schools had missed the boat on this question entirely. He called them "foolish ones." "You stupid idiots!" is basically how we might say it today. "You didn't get it at all! You missed everything! God wasn't talking about clean vessels. That wasn't what was important. God doesn't care very much about cups and plates."

The cleansing that God is looking for is the cleansing in people. First, inward, and then the outward portions of a person's life will also be clean. If you are clean on the inside you will be eventually clean on the outside. That is, if your beliefs are right and you are clean on the inside, it is going to begin working out in good conduct and good works.

So, what does He tell the Pharisees to do? He gives them an object lesson. He gives them some advice to show just how this all works. Now, back in Luke 11:39 He had told them that their inward part was full of greed and wickedness. He told them that was their problem. "Your inward parts are not clean. Your inward parts are full of sin so I'll give you an assignment," He says in verse 41, "Rather give alms of such things as you have, and then you will be clean."

See? He told them that if they could get to the point where they were actually giving alms out of the goodness of their heart, then they would have turned a corner, and cleaned up a portion of their lives. What He wanted to see was a good work that had come from a good heart. And so He said, "If you clean up this rapacious greed that you

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

have on the inside of you, this wickedness, and you begin flowing out with good things for others, then you will have overcome—you will have become clean in at least one area of your life. That is how it is done."

"Overcome" is an important word in designating the type of work to be done.

So, we see here a clear shift between the Old Testament and the New Testament; from the physical and ritualistic, to the spiritual and the practical. God wants to see changed lives—from the filthiness of sin to the purity of holiness.

Turn to I John 1. I am coming to this passage because there are actually a few spiritual cleansings in the Bible, and I want to show you the major one first—it is the most important.

I John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

We could say this in other words, "God is clean, and there is no impurity in Him."

I John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Let us turn this one also into clean, and unclean. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, but we are unclean, our works are unclean, our feet run to evil, we are lying—this is not what God is looking for.

I John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is the major cleansing that is done for us. And, all other cleansings you find in the Bible flow from this one here. This one has to be first. Any kind of spiritual cleansing is predicated on the shed blood of Jesus Christ, which forgives us our sins, and erases the record of our sin and our guilt before God. This is the foundation of any kind of cleansing. It starts with Christ's cleansing us of sin by His shed blood.

And David says in his prayer found in Psalm 51 that when He cleans us, we are whiter than snow. Let us see this and how effective this is. I am sure that you have heard and/or read this a hundred times, but it is always good to hear it again.

Psalm 51:1-9 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

I am sure that we have all plead this way before God, and we have experienced the wonderful relief and clean feeling in the knowledge of God's forgiveness, because we know that His blood is highly effective.

However, in terms of today's topic, the cleansing by the blood of Christ is primarily pictured in the altar and the sacrifice upon it in the bronze altar, not the laver. That is why I told you, it must start there. That was the first thing that we see as we approach God through the tabernacle complex and its furnishings.

First you see is the altar of sacrifice. That is the one that is important. It starts the whole ball rolling. It is the most effective thing in cleansing us from sin. So what we have here in the altar of sacrifice is the cleansing of justification that occurred at our baptism. That is when the blood of Christ cleansed us from all sin.

A different kind of cleansing is suggested by the laver, which is the cleansing by the process of sanctification—our being molded in the image and fashion of Jesus Christ via growth in righteousness and holy character.

Now, we can start to see this in John 13. If you remember your chapters, this is the foot-

washing ceremony. For now, I want us to ignore Jesus' teachings regarding service to one another. That comes in the later things He says here. That is certainly a big part of our sanctification, but instead I want to focus on that conversation between Jesus and Peter.

John 13:1-10 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

So now, let us concentrate on the conversation between Jesus and Peter. He was a big fisherman, and you remember how blustery he was, and how he went from pillar to post, but at this point, he was ashamed, and indignant, that Jesus was doing this menial task. He was mostly ashamed, probably, because he had not thought to do it first, or that it had not been provided for during the preparations. So, he refused Jesus doing this. It was below Jesus. He should not be doing this. He is the Master. The Master does not wash feet! It is the disciples' or the servant's job to do that. But Jesus insisted, saying that if Peter continued to refuse, he could not be His disciple. This was very significant. And knowing Peter, he did not want to get thrown out, and so he went right away to the other extreme and said, "Okay Jesus! Here's my feet, here's my hands, and do my head too! I want this complete cleansing that You're doing here!"

But Jesus said that those who have had a bath (or in theological terms, have been baptized) need only to have their feet washed to become completely clean. What Christ was referring to was what normally occurred during their current times. People would bath at home, but then they might have some errand to run, or some appointment to

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

keep, and so they would put their sandals on, and they would walk to where they had to go, whether across the street or across town, it did not matter. Just by making the trip their feet would become dusty or dirty again, since Judea is a dusty arid place outside their rainy season, so their feet could become dirty very quickly. But really, they were still clean because they just had a bath. So when they reached their destination, a kindly host would provide a servant, or himself to wash the person's feet so that when they came to conduct their business, meeting, or whatever, they were clean again.

And so, this is what Jesus is referring to, this idea that if you have bathed, but then you have gone on a quick trip someplace, you do not need to bathe again, but just need to have your feet washed.

Let us see this in Hebrews 9. This, in a way, is Paul's explanation of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

Hebrews 9:11-14 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 9:24-26 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

And then, this is repeated in verse 28.

This passage describes the greatness of Christ's sacrifice. It was the sacrifice of the Creator God. His blood is so precious that it can redeem all humanity for all time for all sin—forever. It only needed to be done just once it was so effective.

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

His life is worth more than every other human life ever will be. Once He shed His blood for us, it covered us—it covered *all* of our sins. It purged us. It cleansed us. It was more than adequate to do all these things. That is how precious He is!

So, the cleansing that we received through the blood of Christ is so thorough that it purges and cleanses us completely of our past sin.

Yet after our baptism, we still sin. In the symbolism as we walk through this sinful world in newness of life, and our feet get dirty, we need to have them washed occasionally to be completely clean again. This is what Jesus was trying to get across to Peter. He had been forgiven, but he needed to be occasionally cleansed of sin to remain in the relationship with God. That was the important point.

Yes, Christ's sacrifice cleanses us from all our sin, but we continue to sin. And so, in order to remain in the relationship, we need to continually be forgiven. We need to continue to grow because God's plan does not stop with the forgiveness of our sins. There is more to it than that. There is a relationship between the disciple and Jesus Christ and God the Father that must be maintained. But sin, when we come across it, when it defiles us can keep us apart from God. So there must a continual cleansing of us all through our lives. That is why Jesus told Peter, "If I don't do this for you, then you don't have any part with Me, because though your sins may have been forgiven, if you quit growing, and you remain sinful after this point, we're going to be further and further apart, and eventually you could fall away all together."

So, there needed to be occasional cleansing as we go down the road of life to keep us in this relationship with Jesus Christ.

So, the foot-washing ceremony is a yearly reminder of the continual work of Jesus Christ in us to cleanse us and prepare us for service. And that is the other part of the teaching that He goes into in verses 12-17.

And this part is very important: We must continually be cleansed as we go along. It is not enough to be justified. One must also be sanctified so that one becomes a fit servant for God, and that happens through this continued cleansing process that we go through after the baptism. After we have been cleansed.

If we do not allow God to do that to us, we will not be part of His Body, not part of His firstfruits, and not part of His Kingdom. That is what He was getting across to Peter.

But as we go through life we must continually hit the laver for cleansing.

It is interesting (as an aside) that Jesus said that He only had to wash the feet. But at the laver, they had to wash both the hands and the feet. I am not exactly sure why just the feet—I should also tell you that later the Jews added the head to the ritual washings, which might be why Peter thought to offer the washing of his head to Christ too.

What I think that Jesus is doing here in having us wash just the feet is that He is teaching us about the effectiveness of His sacrifice. It covers our hands and our head. His sacrifice covers our acts, and our thoughts, and our emotions, and our speech, and our belief. It covers everything.

Now, our walk through this world defiles us. That is where the feet come in. So, we need to have them—this defilement—washed from them from time to time, because we need to come into God's presence. So He is continually washing us, keeping us clean. His blood is washing us all the time. But we do walk through areas in this evil world where there is sin, and it affects us, and we become defiled, you might say. If we want to come before God again, we need to do so and ask for forgiveness. And so, we are cleansed again. God just continually does this for us.

So, we ask for forgiveness frequently because we do not want to be out of alignment with God. We always want to be able to come into His presence.

Now, this other part of this cleansing can be found in II Timothy 2.

II Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

II Timothy 2:19-21 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

This is where the laver really comes into focus. We are commanded to cleanse ourselves from the sins that we so easily commit!

Now we cannot forgive ourselves in the sense of our guilt being taken away through blood—we cannot do that. But, part of the sanctification process is overcoming sin, and

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 3) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

growing in righteousness, and thereby producing fruit that will glorify God. And so, what we have to do is that we must go to that laver and we have to cleanse ourselves from the sins—this is part of overcoming. We have a part to play in it.

Jesus does the most part. He gives us His Spirit, and He washes us, as we will see, "By the washing of water by the word." So, He gives us all the tools we need to overcome and grow, and He gives us the strength too to do it. But, it still takes out going up to the laver and washing ourselves. Wash yourself, and make yourself clean, it says in Isaiah the first chapter. There is a part we have to play in this, we cannot just say, "God cleanse me," and we will be cleansed for all time. No, but there is a part we must do, it is very clear here. If anyone cleanses himself from these iniquities, there is a part we must do, so that we will be clean.

Notice, too, how Paul concludes this section. He said that if we do this, we will be prepared for every good work. Is not that what happened with the priests? When they went up to the laver, that act was their last bit of preparation before they started their work.

So, we are preparing to be priests too, but our work is so much more important, and so much more spiritual in nature than theirs was. They heaved animals up on an altar, and kept fires going, and did various prayers and such. It is not that we do not do types of those things, we do. But right now, it says here in verse 22,

II Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Those are the pleasing works that we are to pursue—the works of righteousness, and faith, and love, and peace. Those are the things that are preparing us for the job that we have to do. It is with these things to be put into our character that we are being cleansed.

Turn to Ephesians 5. Here we will see the co-work, we might say, that we are doing here, because Christ does most of it. We can see what we are being prepared for here:

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

This is the goal that we are trying to reach.

In type, as we see here, Jesus Christ is the laver. He is the One cleaning us up, through the instruction given in His Word, and through the power of His Holy Spirit.

And as we respond to His washing, we are purged of any remaining sin, and set apart as His pure and undefiled Bride. He is doing this so that we will be prepared to assist Him in His great work of salvation for the whole world in His Kingdom.

Let us finish in II Corinthians 7.

II Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.