

“What God hath cleansed ...”

In terms of our eligibility for salvation in Christ Jesus, there is no difference based upon social status, or racial descent. So the Apostle of the Lord declares:

“For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then ye are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:27-29).

This point of how in terms of the scope of salvation there is no difference between Jew or Gentile, was made known to Peter in a most striking and unusual way. Whilst he was praying upon the housetop, a vision was shown to him. He saw:

“heaven opened and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things., and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again, the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and straitway the vessel was received up again into heaven” (Acts 10:11-16).

This vision, Peter informs us, was designed to teach him “God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean ...” (Acts 10:28). The beasts then, were representative of men, and the invitation to eat them was representative of how fellowship can be extended to those who were naturally derived from another nation than that of Israel. He was to call no man whom God had cleansed common, or unclean. To understand how that was so, we need to consider the difference between clean and unclean beasts as it is presented in the Old Testament.

The first reference to beasts clean and unclean occurs in Genesis chapter 7. The context here, is of the Flood that was going to engulf the earth, and the way of Salvation presented in the form of the Ark that Noah built. In addition to the members of his immediate family, Noah was to bring into the ark both clean and unclean beasts:

“of every **clean** beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of the beasts **that are not clean** two, the male and his female ...” (Gen. 7:2).

Notice that here, the distinction between clean and unclean animals had nothing to do with eating: before the Flood, man ate only plants, and not meat (Cp. Gen. 9:3). The distinction was rather to do with what could be offered in sacrifice to Yahweh. So it was, that when Noah emerged from the ark once the waters had subsided, he offered Sacrifice to Yahweh:

“And Noah builded an altar unto Yahweh; and took of every **clean** beast, and of every **clean** fowl, and offered burnt offerings upon the altar. And Yahweh smelled the sweet savour; and Yahweh said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake ...” (Gen. 8:20-21).

Only those animals and fowls deemed to be clean could be offered as burnt offerings in sacrifice – but notice also, that in terms of their salvation from the flood waters, both clean and unclean animals were saved.

Deuteronomy chapter 14 demonstrates that once men were allowed to eat animal flesh, they had to observe this distinction in what they fed upon:

“Ye are the children of Yahweh your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art a holy people unto Yahweh your God, and Yahweh hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the face of the earth. ***Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing ...***” (Deut. 14:1-3).

Then the chapter proceeds to describe what the people could or could not eat. But notice the way in which not eating abominable things is associated with Israel being a holy people unto Yahweh. Acts chapter 10 helps us to understand this connection: the unclean animals represented unclean men, who needed to be cleansed by God. The word “abominable” is a strong word to use, and demonstrates the seriousness of Yahweh’s people mingling themselves with the nations which are devoted to destruction. The food laws reminded them of this principle: that which was “unclean” and “abominable” before Yahweh could not be used for sacrifice, or for food.

As we saw above, Acts chapter 10 describes how that men were not to be considered unclean based upon their fleshly genealogy. But the cleansing process that the individual (such as Cornelius) is subjected to, is directly from Yahweh: “What God hath cleansed ...”. Notice, Cornelius was already “cleansed” – before he was baptised for the remission of his sins. God had cleansed him! The language takes us back to the example of King David, following his infamous sin with Bath-sheba, and the murder by proxy of her husband, slain at the hand of Israel’s enemies:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, ***blot out*** my transgressions. ***Wash me*** thoroughly from mine iniquity, and ***cleanse me*** from my sin”.

And again, a few verses later:

“***Purge me*** with hyssop, and I shall be clean: ***wash me***, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psa. 51:1-2, 7).

David’s sin with Bath-sheba began when he saw her washing herself – but when he repented of what he had done, he recognised the need for his own inward washing. Again, the temptation was brought about by him seeing her nakedness – but when he repented, he recognised his own need for a covering for sin, for his spiritual nakedness, as it is written:

“... Even as David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and ***whose sins are covered***. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin ...” (Rom. 4:6-8, cited from Psa. 32:1-2 – see whole Psalm for context).

In Leviticus chapter 8, we read of the consecration of the priests, and what had to take place before they could minister in Divine service. The interesting point for our present considerations, is that priests were washed into their ministry by Moses:

“... and Moses said unto the congregation, this is the thing which Yahweh commanded to be done. And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, ***and washed them with water ...***” (Lev. 8:5-6).

Again, Numbers 8 describes how the Levites were to wash their garments:

“... And Moses and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites according to all that Yahweh commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did the children of Israel unto them. And the Levites were purified, **and they washed their clothes;** and Aaron offered them as an offering before Yahweh; and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them. And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation before Aaron and before his sons: as Yahweh had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did they unto them” (Num. 8:21-22)

In these testimonies, we have several principles:

- The Priests, the Sons of Aaron had to have their bodies washed with water.
- The Levites were offered “as an offering before Yahweh”, which commenced their service.
- They had to wash their garments before they could service in the Tabernacle/Temple

These principles are all drawn upon in the New Testament, concerning our walk and service before Yahweh.

Romans chapter 12 describes how that, just like the Levites, the believers have a “service” to perform, being a living sacrifice:

“I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies **a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is **your reasonable service**” (Rom. 12:1).

Notice, that many saints are one offering: “present your **bodies**” – plural, “**a** living sacrifice” – singular. The offering up of our labours before Yahweh is our “reasonable service”, just like the service of the Levites under the Mosaic constitution. We also must engage in a washing, like that of the priesthood:

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and **our bodies washed with pure water ...**” (Heb. 10:22).

We find then, that the qualifications for drawing near to Yahweh are to have our hearts sprinkled, and our bodies washed. But this isn’t speaking of taking a bath, or a shower: it is a spiritual cleansing. Hence the Apostle listed some of the works of those who live in a state of sin, and said to the Corinthians: “and such were some of you: **but ye are washed**, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11). Through the waters of Baptism, we wash away our sins. Hence Saul the persecutor was told by Ananias:

“and now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptised, and **wash away thy sins**, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

But we noted earlier, that Cornelius was considered as being “cleansed” before he was baptised: “... what God **hath** cleansed ...” (Acts 10:15). There is another cleansing that we must also be subject to. Alluding back to the way in which the sacrifices and priests were to be washed before acceptable use, the Apostle Paul describes how Christ loves his ecclesia as a bridegroom loving his bride:

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the ecclesia, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify **and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word**, that he might present it to himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

Just as the priests and sacrifices were to be washed before acceptable use, even so we must also be subjected to a spiritual “washing” with the water of the Word. The inspired Word of Yahweh itself has a cleansing effect upon our hearts, as it becomes the dominant force in our minds. Becoming “spiritually minded” (see Rom. 8), our thoughts and behaviour are brought more into line with the

requirements of our heavenly father. As the Psalmist wrote: "Wherewithal shall a young man **cleanse** his way? **By taking heed thereto according to thy Word**" (Psa. 119:9). So it was that Cornelius had his heart cleansed by the influence of the Word, and then his sins were washed away by his baptism into Christ.

The Jews at the time of our Master's mortal ministry had developed a whole system of washing and cleansing:

"... For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they was themselves, they eat not, and many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups and pots, and brazen vessels and tables" (Mark 7:3-5).

But this washing was only an outward show. It was not the internal cleansing that David, for example, asked for in Psalm 51. It was a keeping of ascetic tradition only, and was not a reflection of a spirit-dominated mind. Hence, the Lord rebuked them:

"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, **but within they are full of extortion and excess**. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and the platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but **are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness**. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but **within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity**" (Mat. 23:25-28).

Within, they were "full of ... all uncleanness", even though they considered themselves to be washed and clean. As the Proverb has it, "there is a generation that are pure in their own eye, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12).

We come then to consider our own situation in relation to the cleansing effect of the Sacrifice of Messiah. Just as the Priests had to wash their garments (see above), even so we must wash ours, in the blood of the Lamb. As the Apostle John had explained to him:

"What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and **have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them" (Rev. 7:13-15).

This is what we look forward to: like the priests of old, having their flesh and their garments washed in order that they could officiate in the tabernacle/temple. We desire to serve Him day and night in the Temple of the Age to come, and so we must prepare ourselves with an inward cleansing that can only come from an application of the revealed Word in our hearts. But what are the qualifications required to serve in the Holy Place of that temple? We conclude with the words of the Psalmist:

"Who shall ascend into the hill of Yahweh? And who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and **a pure heart; Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, and hath not sworn deceitfully**, He shall receive the blessing from Yahweh, and righteousness from the God of His Salvation" (Psa. 24:2-5).

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