

BAPTISM

Chapter Five

The Metaphorical Use of “Wash” in Baptism

As is well established from an inductive evaluation of all Bible texts regarding water baptism, water has no cleansing capabilities when it comes to sin. Any person with a basic understanding of Scripture ought to plainly understand the metaphorical use of physical washing in water. People fail to understand metaphors, similes, and types because authoritarian spiritual leaders have exchanged the reality of what metaphors, similes, and types are intended to portray by making the metaphors, similes, and types the reality.

Judaism did this with the Sabbath Day, the Holy Days like Passover, the various sacrifices, and the ritual washings. Liturgical Christianity does the same with various false views of Sabbatarianism, Holy Days such as Lent, and by making water baptism and the Lord’s Supper into *sacraments* through which a participant receives the grace of God. Liturgical Christianity, like apostate Judaism, replaces the spiritual reality with the type thereby making the typical efficacious. This is the purest form of Legalism and is, in fact, what defines Legalism in varying degrees of its existence.

The book of Hebrews gives us thirteen chapters of inspired Scriptures detailing the superiority of the realities of the New Covenant over the shadows or types of the Old Covenant (the Mosaic Covenant). We can never understand the metaphorical use of words like “wash” and “sprinkled” unless we understand them from their use in their Old Covenant types. As we see these metaphorical terms used in transitioning from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, we must also see that the typical is realized in the actual. The Old Covenant ritual washings *typified* the cleansing of sin for sanctification, not salvation. This was equally true of the references to “sprinkling.” Sanctification is always the context of baptisms in the Old Covenant. Salvation is never in view.

“¹ Now of the things which we have spoken *this is* the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; ² A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. ³ For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore *it is* of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. ⁴ For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: ⁵ Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount” (Hebrews 8:1-5).

A text that is often very confusing for many Christians is the statement in Acts 22:16 - "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." This lays in the context where the Apostle Paul is giving the testimony of his salvation and his calling to be an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than offering confusion, the statement actually provides clarification for God's intent in water baptism. Just like in the Old Covenant, ritual washings were connected with purification or sanctification for service. Old Covenant baptisms were NEVER connected with salvation.

The account of Paul's testimony in Acts chapter twenty-two involves his testimony of salvation AND his consecration as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. It is important to understand that this event took place in Jerusalem. Paul spoke in Hebrew to Jews (Acts 21:40). Unless we understand the *Jewishness* of the emphasis of Paul's testimony to these Jews, we will miss the significance of the distinctions within his testimony.

¹ Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence *which I make* now unto you. ² (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them {*signifying that he was not a Hellenized Jew*}, they kept the more silence {*they listen to him speak in Hebrews because this gave him immediate credibility*}: and he saith,) ³ I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city in Cilicia*, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel {*one of the most prominent celebrated doctors of Jewish Law giving greater credibility to Paul's education*}, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. ⁴ And I persecuted this way {*the Christian way; John 14:6*} unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women {*Christians or followers of Christ; 'the way'*}. ⁵ As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders {*the Sanhedrin*}: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished {*his commission from the Sanhedrin to act in this official capacity*}. ⁶ And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. ⁷ And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? ⁸ And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. ⁹ And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. ¹⁰ And I said, What shall I do, Lord {*believing and acknowledging Jesus to be 'Lord'*}? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do {*his*

calling as an Apostle}.¹¹ And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.¹² And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,¹³ Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother {now already saved} Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.¹⁴ And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth {qualifying Paul to be Apostle}.¹⁵ For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.¹⁶ And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized {consecration to his Apostleship}, and wash away thy sins {the typical ritual purgation of the Old Covenant involved in consecration}, calling on the name of the Lord {invoking the Name of the Lord}.¹⁷ And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;¹⁸ And saw him {Jesus} saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they {the Jews that Paul was previously connected with in the persecution of the Christians} will not receive thy testimony concerning me.¹⁹ And I said, Lord, they {the Jewish Christians} know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:²⁰ And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.²¹ And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:1-21).

The significance of the baptism mentioned in Acts 22:16 is the common thread that runs throughout Scripture. It identifies the already saved believer with an understanding of both positional sanctification “in Christ” and the need for practical sanctification to serve Christ.

“⁹ Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,¹⁰ Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you: but ye are washed {aorist, middle, indicative}, but ye are sanctified {aorist, passive, indicative}, but ye are justified {aorist, passive, indicative} in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

The use of the middle voice in the phrase “ye are washed” is significant to our understanding of this as a reference to water baptism. Robertson gives us considerable insight into this significance:

“**But ye were washed** (*apelousasthe*). First aorist middle indicative, not passive, of *apolouô*. Either direct middle, ye washed yourselves, or indirect middle, as in Ac 22:16, ye washed your sins away (force of *apo*). This was their own voluntary act in baptism which was the outward expression of the previous act of God in cleansing (*hêgiasthête*, ye were sanctified or cleansed before the baptism) and justified (*edikaiôthête*, ye were put right with God before the act of baptism).”¹

There are three commonly promoted significances regarding water baptism. We should understand each of them and then determine which of the three finds biblical support in practice.

1. Baptism is a cleansing of sin or a washing away of the sin of the soul.
2. Baptism is a confession of faith in Christ upon which God acts, regenerating the sinner. In this view, water baptism is the *means* of confessing faith in Christ through which we are “born again.” (Baptism is not found in Romans 10:1-13.)
3. Baptism is a commitment to become a disciple of Jesus involving death to a life of sin and a commitment to live a new life of righteousness in the resurrection power of the indwelling Christ. In this view, water baptism is the time of an individual’s acknowledgment of his vocational calling as a priest and his need of practical sanctification. This practical sanctification must be a reality before God can consecrate (empower) him for the “work of the ministry.” Therefore, water baptism is a beginning point of a moment-by-moment focus and emphasis in a believer’s life. Certainly, this is the biblical model we see repeated in Scripture and this is the model that should be repeated in the emphasis of water baptism practiced throughout the Church Age.

The command to baptize was intimately, intricately, and inseparably connected to Christ’s command to preach the gospel to all nations in generating a continuum of disciples through all generations until Jesus returns. Only saved people were baptized. A baptized disciple who continually fails to be involved in *evangelism* (soul winning, leading the saved to be baptized into a local church to be discipled, and live the teachings of Jesus) manifests an individual whose baptism was nothing more than *getting wet*. Either that individual did not understand the significance of water baptism, or his commitment in water baptism was a lie. Salvation is the *entrance level* of our Father/child relationship with God. Privileges and responsibilities come with the intimacy of any relationship. To claim the privileges of intimacy without accepting the responsibilities of intimacy

¹ Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 4* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House) page 120

is an abuse of the relationship and manifests the nonexistence of intimacy. Water baptism is the *entrance level* of our relationship with Jesus as His disciple. To claim to be a disciple of Jesus without death to the “old man” and a daily commitment to faithfulness to Christ is like saying your wedding vows to your wife while all along you know your mistress is waiting for you outside the church.

In the Old Testament, “washings” (referred to in Hebrews 9:10 using the Greek word *baptismos*) were ritual purgations that were typical of spiritual cleansing. Nowhere in the Old Testament is there any indication that these ritual “washings” were able actually to wash away sin. The very notion of such nonsense is to miss the typology of the Old Covenant rituals and sacrifices to make those rituals and sacrifices efficacious. They were not. Regarding Old Covenant “washings” being able to actually cleanse away sin, the idea is nothing but a silly notion that the *Magic Water* paganists continue to propagate. Yet, the apostate priesthood of Israel misled the people to believe that the commandments, the sacrifices, and the rituals were the means to their righteousness before God and means to their salvation. None of the “works of the law” had any merit outside of faith in the Promised Seed of Genesis 3:15 in the Protevangelium and in the Abrahamic Covenant (Galatians 3:16). Justification (the imputation of God’s righteousness) through faith in the Promised Seed ALWAYS preceded the issues of Law-keeping. God gave the commandments, the sacrifices, and the rituals *for saved* people, not *in order to save* people. None of the commandments, the sacrifices, and the rituals were given *to save* someone. This ought to be obvious to anyone who has read Isaiah, the Gospels, the epistle to the Romans, the epistle to the Hebrews, or the epistle to the Galatians.

Since it is obvious that the commandments, the sacrifices, and the rituals could not save anyone, why would we think that they could sanctify anyone? Ritual “washings” merely portrayed the necessity for spiritual cleanness before the Lord. Yes, I am confident that God is concerned about our external cleanliness (see Leviticus chapter fifteen) for health reasons and for the benefit of those around us, but this is not the spiritual significance of ritual “washings.” The Old Covenant “washing” were intent upon manifesting the need for spiritual cleanliness before the sacrifices could be acceptable to God. This was portrayed in a very simplistic manner of which we all can identify. We want the cook to wash his hands BEFORE he prepares our food. Every farm wife wants her husband to take off his barn-boots BEFORE he comes into her kitchen.

“¹⁷ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ¹⁸ Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot *also of* brass, to wash *withal*: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. ¹⁹ For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet

thereat: ²⁰ When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: ²¹ So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, *even* to him and to his seed throughout their generations” (Exodus 30:17-21).

The point of washing their hands and feet before preparing the meat for the sacrifices is the transfer of uncleanness from them to the sacrifices thereby defiling the sacrifices. Science did not understand the infectious nature of microbes until the mid to late 1800's. The most dangerous place to give birth was in a hospital where 20% to 50% of mothers were being infected and dying because of the unwashed hands of the doctors delivering their babies. During the Civil War, thousands of wounded soldiers died, not because of their wounds, but because of the unwashed hand of field medics and doctors who passed on Staph infection and Gangrene from one patient to the next. The Creator understood the infectious nature of “uncleanness” long before humanity ever discovered it. Yet the necessity of the priests to wash their hands and feet before ministering in the Tabernacle was only typical of the infectious nature of spiritual “uncleanness.” It was not long before the typical picture lost its connection to the spiritual reality portrayed therein.

¹⁰ In the four and twentieth *day* of the ninth *month*, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, ¹¹ Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, ¹² **If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy?** And the priests answered and said, **No** {*holiness could not be transferred from something holy to something unholy*}. ¹³ Then said Haggai, **If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?** And the priests answered and said, **It shall be unclean** {*Uncleanness or defilement contaminated everything it came in contact with*}. ¹⁴ Then answered Haggai, and said, *So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean {because the priesthood had failed to maintain their holiness/separation before the Lord and had defiled themselves and their ministry}*. ¹⁵ And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: ¹⁶ Since those *days* were, when *one* came to an heap of twenty *measures*, there were *but* ten {*chastisement rather than blessing*}: when *one* came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty *vessels* out

of the press, there were *but* twenty {*chastisement rather than blessing*}.¹⁷ I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands {*chastisement rather than blessing*}; yet ye *turned* not to me {*refused to repent*}, saith the LORD.¹⁸ Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth *month*, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider *it*.¹⁹ Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth {*the potential for blessing or chastisement was still open*}: from this day {*the decision regarding your repentance right now*} will I bless you" (Haggai 2:10-19).

Water baptism connects the believer to his understanding of this spiritual dynamic of the absolute necessity of separation from a life of sin and worldliness and separation unto God through "the work of the ministry" in a lifetime of evangelism/discipleship. Although physical cleanliness is important, healthy, and will certainly affect whether or not someone will want to be near you long enough for you to explain the Gospel and lead him to Christ, *spiritual cleanness* is the essential to God's supernatural enablement and blessing upon your "work of the ministry." This was Christ's emphasis to the "scribes and Pharisees" in their accusation against the disciples for eating bread with unwashed hands.

¹ Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
² Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. ³ But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. ⁵ But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is* a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; ⁶ And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. ⁷ Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, ⁸ This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. ⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:1-9).

Believers quickly and easily slip into externalism and lose the spiritual significance of ordinances. This is certainly true with water baptism. How important is it to God that believers are sensitive to the sin in our lives? How important is it that believers understand that sin (any sin) is a great offense against the holy character of our heavenly Father? Does God merely want us to recognize

the fact that we are sinners and that sin is therefore inevitable in our lives? God's Word clearly teaches that He expects His children to both recognize what sin is and turn from that sin in our lives. God wants us to hate sin as He hates sin. God wants us to have a broken heart about the sin in our lives. Water baptism is intended to be a moment in time when we testify to our accountability peers in a local church that we understand this spiritual reality and that we are making a lifetime commitment to live it.

Have you ever found yourself saying, "Sure, I did that but what do you expect, after all, we are all sinners?" How easy it is to justify our failures before a forgiving God of grace and mercy. How easy it is to justify our rebellion and refusal to obey God's commands. How easy it is to justify our refusal to do the work He has called us to do. How easy it is to take His grace and mercy for granted.

The central theme of the book of Zechariah (as well as Haggai and Malachi) is that the children of Israel were expected to live exemplary lives of holiness before a world of people who were very hostile to the absolute truths of God's Word. Regardless of how morally and politically wicked the world was toward God's children, they were to *maintain* a relationship of personal holiness with God and before the world. That relationship involved maintaining sensitivity towards sin while the world around them was becoming completely insensitive about sin.

Believers were responsible to *maintain* a Biblical perspective of who they were as a people – God's children. Their first and foremost responsibility was to live in such a way as to please God and bring Him glory (as models of the *Christ-life*) regardless of how peculiar that lifestyle appeared to the world around them.

Christians cannot seem to grasp the difference between the completeness of our salvation "in Christ" positionally and our daily responsibilities of the momentary (*moment-by-moment*) repentance of sin and cleansing of sin to maintain our practical sanctification before the Lord. Without this *moment-by-moment* maintenance of our intimacy with God in "fellowship," we quickly lapse into deadly externalism, spiritual pretense, and ritual *God-stuff* without the intimacy of our relationship with God. This is one of the spiritual truths Jesus taught His disciples by washing their feet.

¹ Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. ² And supper being ended {*after the Lamb was killed, the blood applied, and the flesh eaten*}, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; ³ Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; ⁴ He riseth from supper, and

laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. ⁵ After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded. ⁶ Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? ⁷ Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. ⁸ Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. ⁹ Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my hands and my head* {*ignorance often speaks the loudest and its demands are foolish*}. ¹⁰ Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean {*alluding to justification 'by grace through faith'*}, but not all. ¹¹ For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. ¹² So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? ¹³ Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. ¹⁴ If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet {*mutuality in the local church in helping to maintain one another's sanctification*}. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. ¹⁷ If ye know these things, happy {*blessed of God*} are ye if ye do them" (John 13:1-17).

Obviously, Jesus washing the feet of His disciples was intended to portray (typically) that they would be contaminated daily by their contact with the world. They would occasionally and regularly fail, falter, and fall. They would need to be regularly and habitually cleansed. It should be equally obvious that no one believed that *foot washing* was to be a continued ordinance in the church (at least we never see it practiced anywhere else in Scripture). Equally obvious was the fact that no one understood this to mean that sanctification came through regularly washing your feet in water.