

Hours before His betrayal and subsequent crucifixion, Jesus washed His disciples feet, picturing their need for daily cleansing, and committed to them the practice of the Bread and Cup, reminding them of His forgiveness through His blood. The Old Testament Levitical priests had similar reminders in the sacrifices and in the bronze basin from which they were required to wash. Today's believer in Christ can gain understanding of the importance of daily spiritual cleansing by observing three features in the bronze basin and its use that explain the symbolism of the washing.

I. *It was a preparatory washing.*

Stated clearly in verse 20 that they had to wash first, three further implications support this as preparation for ministry and service.

1. The placement of this text after chapter 29 implies that the washing was for the priestly ministry rather than inherently belonging to God's presence.
2. The bronze material of the basin implies that it had other symbolism than that of the tabernacle, preparing for access to the tabernacle.
3. The physical location of the basin between the bronze altar and the tent implies that it was preparatory for entering the tabernacle.

Cleansing from sin is important prior to service. Cf. 1 Timothy 2:8.

II. *It was a symbolic washing.*

Though a literal washing, it was symbolic of what cleansed from actual spiritual defilement.

1. The hands and feet had a dual symbolism: First, as only part of the body, it was a reminder that the priests had been bathed at their ordination. Second, they were parts of the body which represented the actions of the person. Jesus explained what truly defiled as that which came out of the heart (Mark 7:20–23). He also explained to Peter that those who had been bathed, needed only to wash the feet (John 13:10–11). I.e., those who have been saved and washed by regeneration (Titus 3:5–6) need only to be cleansed from daily sins.
2. The water of the bronze basin offered a beautiful picture when dirty hands and feet were washed clean.
 - a. The spiritual water which cleanses is the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7).
 - b. The tool which God uses to wash us with that blood is the Word of God (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:25–26). God by His Word through the Spirit lays bare our hearts, convicting and correcting.
 - c. To be cleansed from sin is more than being forgiven. Having pardoned the believer from sin, God works to remove sin from that person's life.

III. *It was an essential washing.*

If the priest did not wash, he would die. Twice this is stated, but in two different situations.

1. It was essential to enter the presence of God. God delighted in proper worship as represented in the offering of incense, but demanded upon the penalty of death that the priest approach Him having been cleansed.
2. It was essential for the priest to wash before approaching the altar of sacrifice to offer burnt offerings. Though all were part of worship, the work of sacrificing may emphasize more the duties of service and entering the Tent of Meeting the privilege of worship. In either case cleansing was important. So also for the believer today, that we have washed our hands and purified our hearts (James 4:8b).

Related to this is the answer of Jesus to Peter in John 13:8, that Peter had “no part with” Jesus unless Jesus washed his feet. There is little lexical support to understand Jesus as referring to fellowship (which is the common explanation). It seems rather that Jesus is pointing to a mark of a true believer, who will desire to be cleansed. This is John's teaching in 1 John 3:1–6. If your hope is in Jesus, you will want to be cleansed. If you resist cleansing, refusing to repent, you reveal an unregenerate heart, a heart that does not belong to Jesus. This is the symbolism of the bronze basin as well: wash or die.

Principles taught in Exodus and Leviticus about God and worship find parallels in New Testament Christianity. Unlike Israel who had a priesthood, believers today are a priesthood, a holy priesthood. Being a holy priesthood means being concerned about holiness, preparing for worship and for service by seeking spiritual cleansing by the blood of Jesus through His Word. Desiring that marks the believer as a true child of God.