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Defilement Dealt With (Nov 1956)

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In the latter part of John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ is occupied with the preparation of His own earthly witnesses. This is evident in chapter 17, the High Priestly prayer.

In chapters 13 to 17, we have five views of the Lord Jesus in His work before the Father to maintain us in fellowship with Himself, that we might be true witnesses for Him. Throughout these chapters, the Lord is usually standing to serve His own as a servant.

He seems to be working as though Calvary were past. "Father, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John 17:4). The Lord Jesus became a priest only in resurrection, so in spirit, from chapter 11 on, it is as though the Jews have succeeded in killing Him, and He is labouring for His own to show them the character and objective of the work with which He will be occupied for them during their earthly witness. He seems to give a preview of His work as Advocate and High Priest for His own, a work which He is now carrying on in glory.

Between the two clauses in chapter 14, "I go," and "I will come again," what is the Lord Jesus doing? John mentions one thing in his first epistle (2:1), "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." In Hebrews we read that, "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). If we fall into sin, we have an Advocate to deal with defilement; as pilgrims, we have an High Priest to encourage, strengthen, and

sympathize. Moses was advocate, and Aaron was high priest. Joining the work of these two gives us a picture of the Lord Jesus in His present work.

Be sure of this; out of fellowship with Christ, we are worth nothing as witnesses, for He said, “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Anything that would disturb fellowship with Him must be dealt with by our Advocate and High Priest before the Father, in order that we be kept in contact and communication with Himself. That is His work at the present.

The scene is not a pleasant one. The Lord, knowing that His dread hour has come, is ready to depart, and His whole heart is taken up, not with Himself, but with His own. Yet in Luke 22, we read of strife among the disciples as to who should be the greatest. The mind of the Lord Jesus is perturbed by things amongst His own which hindered communion with Himself. In the great cross-work before Him He is going to deal with sin. What are they doing? Striving! Some times when we should be taken up with the glorious truths our Lord has given us, we do nothing better than think about who shall be greatest. They are occupied with self-exaltation; He, with the will of God. They enter the room, at the hour of the last supper, quarreling among themselves. Who is to be the greatest?

In eastern homes, before the meal a servant of the home should wash the guests’ feet. There is no servant among them on this occasion because no one is willing to take the servant’s place. How are they going to solve the problem? “Well, I’m not going to do it. He said he was going to be first in the kingdom; all right, let him pay a

servant to wash his feet.” Each thus turned his back on the job.

They came in one after another; with the little low table in the middle they stretch out eastern style, leaning on the left arm with the feet toward the outside. “The supper being ended” probably should be “the supper being set.” Foot-washing would come before the meal not after it. Everything is now ready, except the disciples; nobody is going to give in. They lie with their feet stretched out, but there is no one humble enough to wash their feet. Everybody is ashamed and embarrassed, but stubborn.

Paul, in Philippians 2 says He became your servant. Unfortunately, the disciples did not care; even today, we hear of similar things among God’s people.

I should remember that if it does not matter to me about you then I must be out of communion with the Lord, for He cares about you. That is the sad part; when one is not right with God, it matters to Him. He is fond of you; you should be fond of others as well; you should care about things that are important to Him.

As they sit in stubborn self-exaltation, blessing and revelation are at an end; worship, at a standstill. Nothing can proceed until this matter is dealt with. Many assemblies of God’s people are stagnant and at a standstill for lack of those who care about the condition of others. You cannot live a selfish spiritual life! You are part of a body. You are members one of another, and you cannot dissociate yourself from other members of the body of Christ without mutilating that which is precious to Him, and without grieving Him, breaking His heart! He cares, even if you do not.

As they sit, there is a rustle of garments. To their dismay, they discover it is the Lord. Defilement must be dealt with before communion can be real. The Lord Jesus lays off His outer garment, and takes up the basin and towel. They are always available; the trouble is to find the man who is in a condition to use them. The Lord of glory goes to the foot of the table, girding the towel around His waist. He drops to His knees on the floor. What a stunned feeling must have struck the hearts of those foolish men! They had shown their need of washing, and wash them He would, for nobody else was in a condition to do it!

At first, no one could speak; the flesh is always dumb in the presence of such active grace. When He comes to Peter, his love bursts out in horror at the thought, and he exclaims, “Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?” The emphasis is on the two pronouns. “Yes,” indicated the Lord, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know experimentally hereafter.”

“Lord, Thou shalt never wash my feet!” Cried Peter. His love could not bear the thought of the Lord washing his feet, but the Lord replied, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.” If there is no washing, there can be no fellowship. Communion is broken by defilement.

“Oh,” says Peter, “if that is the way of it, then let us do a good job. Not my feet only, but my head and hands. Give me a bath.”

“Not at all,” said the Lord, “He that is washed needeth not but to wash his feet, and is clean every whit.”

Here we have a reference to Exodus 29. Moses follows the instructions of the Lord to sanctify unto Him Aaron and his sons, that they might serve Him in the

priesthood (Ex. 28: 41). In the separation and establishment of these men in priestly activity, they are first stripped and washed from head to foot. Then they are clothed with priestly garments, anointed with oil, and sprinkled with blood; their hands filled with a sacrifice, and only then can they function as priests. Notice that the bathing of induction was never repeated in the life of the priest. Inside the court of the tabernacle, nevertheless, there was a laver, not for bathing the whole person, but for cleansing from the daily and hourly defilement. Aaron and his sons were to wash at the laver every time they entered the Holy Place (Ex. 30:18-21).

The Lord Jesus Christ says, “I am leaving you behind,” and Peter says that we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Priesthood and holiness go together.

The disciples must be maintained holy in order to “show forth the excellencies of Him Who hath called us.” How can you show forth His excellencies with defiled hands and feet? There can be no going back on the cross-work of Christ; His shed blood avails once for all. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, but there must be a continual return to the laver, to the washing by the Word. There must be a continual judging of self, and we are to judge our hearts in the presence of God through meditation upon the Word of God. Nothing will reveal the defilement of your feet and heart like His Word. It is the water, the pure water of the Word, which rolling over our souls, will bring us into self-judgment, and will reveal the thoughts and intents of the heart before Him. “All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do.”

At last Peter is silenced in the presence of the Lord. Not one bit of washing is done while Peter quibbles about these things. Peter resists, until judged by the utterances of the Lord he submits to cleansing by Him. How humbled he must have been!

Throughout the cleansing silence reigns; that is the effect of self-judgment in the presence of God. Every mouth is stopped; all flesh is guilty-before God; and broken, cleansed, and restored to God. That is the order, and there is no other order! If there is defilement, there must be cleansing before you can walk with God. If there is no walk with God, there can be no service for God. Worship is broken, when fellowship is broken; and when worship is broken service goes by the board.

Paul says, “I serve as a priest in the gospel of His Son” (Rom. 1:9). Every act of service that Paul carried out, was done in a spirit of worship. Everything that we do should be done as an act of devotion to God; that is the secret of service.

After He had washed their feet, He said, Do you know what I have done? I did this for cleansing, but I did it as an example as well. There was something wrong in your heart when you came into this room; stubborn pride kept you from dealing with defilement. God hates stubbornness. It broke the heart of the Lord Jesus; it drove Him to His knees before His disciples. It has driven Him to His knees, metaphorically, many times since. However, they had a lesson to learn as well as a cleansing to experience. Christ enquired if they understood what He had done to them. Ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye say well for so I am.” He then

informed them that He had given them an example to do for each other what He had done.

The theme of the chapter is “Defilement dealt with,” in order that communion might be restored first with the Lord, and then with each other. The hardest thing to do with defilement is to deal with it. You will find many people who can gossip, scold, and preach about it. However, it takes one in the mind of the Lord Jesus to deal with defilement in his brother. The Lord deals with defilement on our behalf, and then each one of us owes this service to the other.

The work of the Advocate begins when sin comes in. As High Priest, Christ encourages and strengthens, with sympathy for our weaknesses, before sin comes in. Advocacy is seen in John 13. The Holy Spirit, through the ministry of Christ, applies the water of the Word to my condition, making me conscious of my defilement, and cleansing me as I judge myself, thus restoring me to communion. I sin; the Advocate takes it up with God until the Holy Spirit convicts me by God’s truth. If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from the immediate defilement, and give the power to overcome the principle of unrighteousness.

Are you in a condition to carry out this work for your brethren? “Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one.” It is a difficult matter because it calls for self-judgment; your own hands must be in the water while you are washing the feet of another.

May we go in the strength of that, with a care for each other; each trying to cleanse the other and keep him away from defilement. Let us walk in the light as He is

in the light, sin being judged. If we do so the ever-availing power of His blood, the value of His cross, and the application of His Word, will maintain us in fellowship with Himself and with one another.