

Which Sandals Was Moses Told to Remove—Physical or Spiritual? (Exodus 3:5, ESV)

Let's read:

Exodus 3:5 (ESV) –

“Then he said, ‘Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’”

The sandals Moses was told to remove were physical sandals, not spiritual ones. This is reinforced elsewhere in Scripture: even Joshua was told to remove his sandals when encountering God's presence (Joshua 5:15, NIV: “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy”).

In the Old Testament, purity before God often involved external

rituals, such as washing, ablutions, and removing shoes. For example, Jews would wash their hands before eating, and anyone eating without washing was considered ceremonially unclean (Mark 7:2-4, NIV).

Mark 7:2-4 (NIV):

“Some Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with ‘unclean’ hands— that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles.)”

These practices reflected God’s covenant with His people, showing that ceremonial cleanliness was part of living in His presence. That’s why Moses removed his sandals: they represented contact with all the dirt and impurities of the world. Sandals touch dust, mud, and even excrement, so they were not

“clean.”

However, does this mean that physical washing or removing shoes is required to approach God today?

The answer is no. External rituals do not make a person acceptable before God in the New Covenant. Jesus clarified this teaching:

Matthew 15:16-20 (NIV) –

“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked. “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these defile a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; eating with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Here, Jesus shifts the focus from external ritual to the condition of

the heart. It is not physical dirt but sin and corruption in the human heart that truly defiles.

Theological Insight

Old Covenant vs. New Covenant Purity: In the Old Covenant, outward rituals (washing, removing sandals, ceremonial cleanness) were types and shadows pointing to inward holiness (Hebrews 9:9-10, ESV).

In the New Covenant, God calls His people to spiritual holiness, which flows from the heart rather than external actions (1 Peter 1:15-16, NIV: “Be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”).

The “Sandals of the Heart”: The sandals in Exodus symbolize what we carry with us spiritually. Just as physical sandals tread on dirt, our hearts can carry sin: lies, envy, sexual immorality, theft, pride, and unforgiveness.

REMOVING these “sandals” means repentance, confession, and cleansing by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7, NIV: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin”).

1. Approaching God Today:

Today, we do not need ceremonial washing or removing shoes to enter God's presence. Instead, we approach Him by faith in Jesus Christ, with a clean heart and a contrite spirit (Psalm 24:3-4, ESV).

Reflection

Have you received Jesus? Has your heart been washed by His blood? Have you removed the sandals of sin from your life? These are the things that make us holy and pleasing to God, not ritualistic acts of external cleansing.

Jesus is near. Let us draw near to Him with clean hearts, ready to serve and worship.

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