***The Full Extent of His Love***

**With Jesus in the Upper Room, John 13:1-17 March 7, 2021**

***“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,   
you should also wash one another’s feet.”*John 13:14**

**The time had come: A new phase of John’s gospel**

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”*

*4 “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”*

John 2:1-4

*It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.  
 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.*

John 13:1-2

1) “The hour” bookends Jesus public ministry and points to the next step in Messiah’s program

2) Love begins as a simple act of service and ends as the ultimate act of self-sacrifice

3) John assumes we know the story of Last Supper and betrayal 🡪 Jesus is the true Bread and Wine

**When the master becomes the servant**

*3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

John 13:3-5

1) As shocking as this event is, it begins with a reminder of POWER

2) Notice that “knew” so that “he got up” 🡪 foot washing (and cross!) are part of God’s plan

3) Washing feet is menial, unspiritual, dirty – what I expect someone else to do, can’t do for myself

**Peter’s response (confusion, amazement, gratitude)**

*6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”*

*7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*

*8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”*

*Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”*

*9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”*

*10 Jesus answered, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.*

John 13:6-11 (see Spurgeon’s “Jesus Washing His Disciples’ Feet” sermon)

1) To belong at this meal, I have to be clean. To live I submission to Jesus, I have to be washed

2) Doug’s rule: Wash everyone’s feet because I do not know who is “clean”

**Jesus’ application: Doing more important than knowing**

12 *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

John 13:12-17 (see Jesus’ reinforcement in John 13:31-35)

1) This lesson is ESPECIALLY for disciples! [Luke 22:24-30]

2) We focus on the what, but the grace is in the who: Thomas, Peter, Judas and me!

3) Washing feet is menial, unspiritual, dirty – the perfect sacrament 🡪 a sign of ultimate sacrifice

4) Choose blessing! [Psalm 1; Matthew 5; Deuteronomy 28; Revelation 1:3]

**Resources for further studies of Jesus’ Upper Room Discourse**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on John at <https://open.life.church/items/179216-john-poster-jpg>

Spurgeon has a classic sermon at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-washing-his-disciples-feet/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-washing-his-disciples-feet/%23flipbook/)

J. C. Ryle’s commentary at [*https://www.monergism.com/lord-are-you-going-wash-my-feet-john-136-15*](https://www.monergism.com/lord-are-you-going-wash-my-feet-john-136-15)

Deffinbaugh’s sermon at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17)

I have really appreciated D. A. Carson’s commentary in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series (Eerdmans, 1991).

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# Jesus Washing his Disciples’ Feet

[Charles Haddon Spurgeon](https://www.spurgeon.org/multi_author/charles-haddon-spurgeon/) January 29, 1865   
at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-washing-his-disciples-feet/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-washing-his-disciples-feet/%23flipbook/)

##### “Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” John 13:6.

OUR Saviour had so steadfastly set his face towards the awful sufferings of his passion, that when they actually approached he was not in the slightest degree disturbed or disconcerted. If you were perfectly aware that to-morrow morning, after a night of terrible agony, you would be led forth to a cruel and ignominious death, you would probably feel like men distracted with terrible apprehensions; or at any rate, if through grace you were able to be calm and peaceful, your mind would scarcely be in a fit state to minister consolation to others, or to conceive new methods of instruction for your friends. But behold your Lord and Master! It is eventide of the same night in which he was betrayed; he foreknows that the bloody sweat within an hour or two. will crimson all his flesh; he is well aware that he who is eating bread with him will that night betray him; he foresees that he must feel the Roman scourge, and be the victim of Jewish slander; he knows right well that he must bear all the wrath of God on the behalf of his people; and yet he sits at supper, he feasts as if no unusual cloud were lowering; and when the supper is over, his inventive mind is fully at work with admirable plans of instruction for his disciples, and among the rest he takes off his upper garment, he wraps himself about the loins with a towel, he goes to them as they are reclining at full length around the table, and coming behind them he begins to wash the feet of first one and then another. What blessed calmness of mind! What hallowed serenity of spirit! O that our hearts were equally fixed on God in our days of trial and grief!

     Without question we may go further, and take most solemn notice that there was in the near approach of death a joy in Jesus' heart into which no stranger could enter. Now was about to be accomplished that which he had longed for. Did he not say, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.” “With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I die?” Did this account for his giving out a hymn of praise on that doleful night? for “after supper they sang a hymn.” Did that account for his adding these remarkable words: “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him?” Did his joy in the prospect of what he was about to accomplish for his people swell to the very highest, just about the time when the fountains of the depths of his griefs were about to be broken up, and his spirit to be flooded in agony as he cried, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death?” O to know his joy—the joy of loving even unto death!

     Let us come at once to the teaching of the Saviour, and let it be surrounded with an unusual interest, because of the fact that it is his dying teaching. Let us see him as he girds himself with the towel, remembering that he was soon to be girt with the bands of death: let us see him, I say, with a more profound interest, because he is just upon the verge of these terrible depths where all the waves and billows of Jehovah's justice dashed over him. His sermon beginning, “Let not your heart be troubled,” is his swan-song; these are the last drops of his life that he is now spending; at the supper-table you have the wine, which he keepeth until now. As we see him washing his disciples’ feet, we shall discover choice love worthy of the last solemn hour of departure.

     We shall take the text in four ways. First here is matter for enquiry—“Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” Secondly, here is matter for admiration—“Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” Thirdly, here is matter for gratitude. Fourthly, here is matter for imitation.

     I. HERE IS MATTER FOR ENQUIRY.

     We know that the Saviour washed the feet of Peter; but does he wash our feet also? We do not expect, of course, the literal transaction to take place; but is there anything in the conduct of Christ now analogous to his washing Peter’s feet when on earth?

     He has washed all believers, once for all, in his most precious blood. But of this we do not speak this morning. Cleansing, as before the bar of justice, is completely accomplished for ever for all the chosen by the great blood-shedding upon Calvary. That is a matter of the past—a thing for which to bless God to all eternity. “We are clean; through Jesus’ blood we are clean.” But here is another kind of washing—not of the entire man, but of the feet only; not with blood, but with water; not in the fountain filled from the Saviour’s veins, but in a basin filled with water. Does our Lord Jesus do anything of this kind now, anything so humbling to himself, and yet so needful for us? I answer, yes, he does.

     And, first, does not the Saviour perform an action parallel with this, when he watches over the temporal affairs of his people? You know, beloved, that not a hair of your head falleth to the ground without his care; in all your afflictions he is afflicted, and as the angel of God's presence he saves you and carries you. Your most trifling trouble may be taken in prayer to Christ, and spread before him with as much certainty of deliverance as when Hezekiah spread Sennacherib's letter before the Lord, for Jesus waiteth to be gracious to his own beloved. In every transaction we should adore the providential care of our great Shepherd and Friend, for the government is upon his shoulder. Now, when Jesus thus superintends your mean affairs, looks to your family troubles, and bears your household cares, saying unto you, “Cast all your care on me, for I care for you,” is he not in effect doing for you what he did for Peter, washing your feet—for he is caring for your lowest part, and minding the poor dust-stained body? O king of glory! the stars would not make a crown worthy of thee; the tempest is but a poor chariot for thy glory, and the winds are but slow coursers to be harnessed to thy car; and yet dost thou stoop from all this greatness to observe man, who is less than a worm, to observe me, less than the least of all thy saints, and to care for me as a mother careth for her child? It is even so; he does do it; he does in this sense wash his people's feet.

     When Jesus Christ puts away from us day by day our daily infirmities and sins, does he not wash our feet? Last night, when you bowed the knee, you could not help confessing that there had been much in the week’s transactions which was not worthy of your standing and profession; and even to-night, when the engagements of this day are over, you will have to mourn that you foolishly committed the very sins which you repented of weeks ago, that you have fallen again into the very sloughs of folly and sin from which special grace delivered yon long ago; and yet Jesus Christ will have great patience with you; he will hear your confession of sin; he will say, “I will, be thou clean;” he will again apply the blood of sprinkling; he will speak peace to your conscience, and remove every spot. Oh, it is a great act of eternal love when Christ once for all absolves the sinner, takes him from under the dominion of the law, and puts him into the family of Cod; but what long suffering and patience there is when the Saviour with much long-suffering bears the daily follies of the recipient of so much mercy, day by day, and hour by hour, putting away the constant sin of the erring but yet beloved child. To dry up a flood of sin is something marvellous, but to endure the constant dropping of daily sins—to bear with that constant weary trying of patience, this is divine indeed! To blot out the whole of sin like a thick cloud, this is a great and matchless power, as well as grace; but to remove the mist of every morning, and the damps of every night—oh! this is condescension; I would I could describe it; it is condescension well imaged in the washing of Peter’s feet.

     Consider again. Our poor prayers, which are very much the feet of our soul, since with them we climb to heaven, with them we run after God—our poor prayers always need washing. It is oftentimes easier, brethren, to do a thing over at once anew than it is to mend and patch up a work which has been badly done by others. Then what patience it must require in Christ's case, to take my poor, imperfect, and polluted prayers, and make them fit to be presented before his Father’s face! There are his own prayers for me—I thank him for them, for they prevail; but I cannot help also blessing him that he should take my prayers, and put them into the censer, and offer them before his Father's face; for I am certain that before they can have been fit to offer they must have experienced a deal of washing. John tells us that he offers “the prayers of saints”—this is humbling himself indeed! Oh, how much of redundance must have been taken away from our petitions, when we have asked for what we ought not to have desired! How much of omission must have been made up, when we have forgotten to ask for the things which we most needed! How much of unbelief he must take out of our prayers! How much coldness, deadness of heart! How much formality, wandering of thought! O how much holy life and unction, holy faith and holy joy, must the dear Redeemer have infused into our supplications, before they can have been fit to come up before the ears of the Lord God of hosts! Yes, in patiently bearing with my prayers he does daily wash my feet.

     Think yet again. Jesus makes our works acceptable. These may be compared to the soul's feet. It is by the feet that a man expresses his activity. The walk of a Christian—by this we mean the good works which the Christian performs for his Master. But look at our works; if Christ would simply throw all our good works into a heap, and let them rot, that would be the shortest way with them; if he would take our almsgivings, our preachings, our teachings of others, our prayers, and thoughts, and works all together, and just cast them into Tophet's fire, how dare we complain; but instead of that he is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love, but counts that herein his Father is glorified that we bear much fruit. We remember to have heard of some one who made sugar out of old rags; but then it was found that the sugar cost more a great deal than the sugar was worth; the manufacture cost more than the goods were worth when produced; and judging from our point of view, this is something like our works. Jesus Christ makes sweetness out of the poor rags of our good works; surely I may say they cost him more in the manufacturing than ever the raw material could have been worth, or the finished works themselves are worth, except in his esteem. Could he not, if he pleased, convert men without our preaching? But he will not do it; he would rather that they should be brought in by our imperfect preaching and therefore he washes our preaching—he washes our feet. Could he not save sinners without you, my sister—without you, my brother? And yet he sets you longing after souls, and opens your mouth to speak a good word to them; and he accepts what you do. But oh! what condescension is there, what tenderness, what divine stooping from his loftiness, that he should cleanse your works! It is more than he ever did for angels. When an angel had defiled his service, he banished him from heaven; but with all the imperfection of our service, we expect that in Christ we shall be welcomed into heaven with the words “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

     If you want other instances of the familiar condescension of Christ, let me remind you of how patiently he is content to suffer in his people's sufferings. Not a pang shoots through that head of yours but Jesus knows and feels it; not a grief makes that bosom heave in which Christ is not a partaker. “I will make all their bed in their sickness.” Oh! what a blessed text is that! As one old expositor says, “Not merely make their pillow, but their bolster and their bed, and make all their bed, where their feet lie, where their head lies; all, all of it. I will come, and I will have such sympathy with them in their entire grief, that from the beginning to the end of it I will make them happy in the midst of grief through my divine consolations.” “I will make all their bed in their sickness.” Have you not had choice manifestations from Christ in your worst seasons, so exactly fitted to the peculiarity of your case, that you did not know which to admire most, the love which visited you, or the condescending care which so brought itself down to your case, and sat so down at your bedside, and put itself so entirely into your position, that it could feel as you felt, and speak to you just the words which your case required. The Lord Jesus loves his people so, that every day he is washing their feet. Their poorest action he accepts; their deepest sorrow he feels; their slenderest wish he hears, and their greatest sin he forgives. He is still their servant as well as their friend; still he takes the basin; still he wears the towel. It is not only majestic deeds that he performs, as, wearing the mitre on his brow, and the precious jewels glittering on his breastplate, he stands up to plead; but humbly, patiently, still like a servant he goes about among his people, washing his disciples’ feet. I would to God I could speak worthily on such a theme as this; but it is true, as your experience must tell you, that “he remembereth our low estate; for his mercy endureth for ever.”

     Before I pass from this point, it is a matter of enquiry for some here—“Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” Some of you are not washed by Christ, for you live without thinking of him. “I never did any harm,” says one, “that I know of.” I will ask you another question—what did you ever do for Christ? Can you answer that? You must reply, “I have done nothing for him whatever.” Ah! then, if you have never been enabled to do anything for him, I fear it is because you have lived thoughtlessly, without a care for him; but, if he had ever washed your feet, you could not forget him; and little as it might be, yet you would have done something, and you would now be desiring to do more. Ah! my hearers, some of you are so far from ever having your feet washed daily, that you have never been washed at all. “There is a fountain filled with blood,” but filled in vain, as far as you are concerned; there is a Saviour, but you are unsaved; there is balm in Gilead, but you are not healed; there is a Physician there, but you are still sick; there is life in Christ, but you are dead; the brazen serpent is lifted up, but you are dying of the fiery serpent’s bite. One look at Jesus will save, but that look you have not given; you are without God, without Christ, without hope, and “strangers from the commonwealth of Israel.” May God the Holy Ghost visit you with his quickening power, and convince yon of your sin this morning! May he make you feel uneasy till you find Christ! May he give you a hungering and a thirsting after him that will never be satisfied till you clasp him in your, arms and say “Christ is mine.” I would to God that I had not to make this remark, but I must make it in faithfulness to your souls. You are obliged to answer, “No, no, no; the Lord Jesus has never washed my feet.” But then send up the prayer, " Lord, do it; Lord, do it now for thy love’s sake.”

     II. Our text is, in the second place, MATTER FOR ADMIRATION, and that, too, in several respects.

     It is matter for admiration when we consider the freeness of the deed. “Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” It is perfectly wonderful that he should, for we have scarcely desired the mercy. If you look the chapter through, you do not find that Peter asked Christ to do it. Peter was lying down: he had just been eating at the supper; he had no thought of Christ's washing his feet; there was not one of the twelve that ever dreamed of such a thing; and when the Lord began to wash the feet of one, the others did not say, “Lord, come and do the same to me.” No, it was unsolicited, unexpected; he comes, without any prayers or supplications on their part, and he begins to wash their feet. Peter is surprised. It is great goodness on Christ's part to do what we ask him to do—to hear our prayers when we really feel our need; but does he perform for us such menial, such generous acts, as to wash our feet without being asked? Oh! beloved, if Christ did no more for us than we ask him to do, we should perish for ever; for nine out of ten of the things which he gives us we never asked for, and what if I were to say, that three out of four of them we scarcely know that we want? We do not know our own needs. We have a general view of our necessities, wholesale, as it were; but our daily needs, our daily wants, who among us can tell them! Christ's sufferings are said, according to the Greek Liturgy, to have had unknown depths—“thine unknown sufferings;” were not those unknown sufferings endured for our unknown sins, and to make a supply for our unknown wants, that we might have that multitude of mercies which we may style unknown mercies? We should not only bless God for the mercies which we have known, but for those which we have not known—for probably those make up the larger proportion. You that are Christians, some of you who have been believers in Christ ten or twenty years Have there not been many nights on which you have gone to bed without any particular sense of guilt, and without any special intercession for peculiar cleansing? You have forgotten to ask for the cleansing, but he has never forgotten to give it, he has spontaneously washed your feet. You have risen in the morning; you were not aware that any special danger would come to you, and you did not pray for special protection, but yet he knew it; and unasked and unsought for he has followed you, held the shield over you, and kept you from danger. He has washed your feet without your having desired it, or having known that he had done it. Let his name be praised for this. These unsought favours of unspeakable love, these perpetual mercies of unslumbering carefulness—let them wake us now to gratitude, and now may we exclaim with wonder, “Lord, is it so? Dost thou always continue thus to wash my feet?”

     The next subject of wonder is the glory of the person. “Lord! King! Master! God! Everlasting! Eternal! Almighty! King of Kings, and Lord of Lords! Dost thou—dost THOU wash my feet? Thou callest the stars by their names, and they shine by thy light; Mazzaroth cometh forth in his season at thy bidding; thou guidest Arcturus with his sons! The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine; thou sittest upon the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers: thou holdest the waters in the hollow of thine hand, thou metest out heaven with thy span; Lord, dost thou wash my feet? When thou wast on earth thou didst tread the waters; the depths knew thee, and were like marble beneath thy feet; thou didst affright grim death himself, for Lazarus came forth at thy bidding from the shades of the grave; fevers knew thee; leprosy, paralysis, epilepsy—all diseases understood their Master's voice, and fled at thy bidding; the winds were hushed at thy will; even the devils were subject unto thee; though thou wast veiled in manhood thy creatures perceived thy greatness; angels ministered unto thee, and the heavens were opened unto thee; and dost thou wash my feet? O my brethren meditate on this! It is far more a theme for thought than for speech. He whom the angels worship takes a towel and girds himself. Hark to the song, “Holy holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory; all the earth doth worship thee, thou eternal Son of the Father.” “Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” Oh! think of this, ye spiritual men; think, till your hearts melt with love. No one else could cleanse us. The infinite God must take away the infinite blackness and filth of his people’s sin! What a stoop is here! Let us lift up our eyes and wonder; let us lift up our voices and praise his name, that he should ever wash our feet.

     Once again, there is a note of wonder if you lay the stress upon the word my: “Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” Perhaps to some of you this will be the greatest marvel of all—the unworthiness of the object of this washing. “Dost thou wash my feet?” Thou hast favoured me with more mercies than the most of men; thou hast overwhelmed me with thy bounties; and yet my heart is hard towards thee: I am often unbelieving, forgetful, slothful, careless; thou mightest well cast me away for ever; because of my ingratitude thou mightest well say, “Depart, I will have no more to do with thee: I have had enough of patience; I cannot endure thine ill-manners! Yet dost thou, Lord, absolutely condescend to wash my feet? Herein thou hast displayed thyself more gloriously than ever; thy grace has out-graced itself.” Thus would the preacher speak, and he thinks he hears you follow him. “Lord,” you say, “I once cursed thee to thy face; there was a time when thy holy day was my best day of business; when thy house was a place which I abhorred; thy book was unread; my knee was never bent to thee; I boasted of my own righteousness, when I was a sinner black and filthy,—and dost thou wash my feet!!” I hear a sister, with peculiar tenderness, say, “O Jesus, I would fain wash thy feet with my tears, and wipe them with the hair of my head, for I have been a sinner; and dost thou wash my feet!!” I think I hear another say, “Lord, I once denied thee; I made a profession of thy faith, but in an evil hour I fell; I went into sin; I said, 'I know not the man’! And dost thou wash my feet!!” I hear another say, “Lord, thou knowest my private sins, my secret vices; I dare not tell into the ear of my fellow-creature the faults into which I have fallen; I am only fit to be a faggot in hell-fire; there is nothing in me but what is damnable; I am altogether as an unclean thing; and dost thou wash my feet!” Oh, you that are the people of God, cannot you all find some special reason for wonder at this? There are some of you who are so poor that even some of your own Christian brethren are wicked enough to be half ashamed to own you; yet Jesus Christ washes your feet! your clothes would not sell for sixpence, and yet he washes your feet! You scarce have enough shoe-leather to keep your feet from the cold, and yet he washes them! You have been laughed at, and despised, and ridiculed, and yet you have Christ for your foot-washer! The moment your name is mentioned there are some ready at once to slander you and abuse you; yet so tenderly does Jesus love you, that he washes your foulest part. However, I must leave you to think—for I cannot talk—I must leave you to think on such a precious passage as this. Certainly the angels of heaven will never leave off wondering however it can be, that their King, their Prince, their Leader, could so humble himself as to become a servant of servants—to take the very meanest of his people, and declare that he will wash their feet, aye, and do it too.

     One more subject for wonder. It is perfectly marvellous to remember, that Christ does so completely wash our feet. “Dost thou wash my feet, Lord, then there cannot be any filth on them. Dost thou wash my feet? Then they must be clean. It cannot be that thou couldst wash, and yet filth remain.” When things are washed by careless servants, they want washing again; but when they are washed by the loving hands of Jesus, washed by him who makes heaven and earth, surely they cannot he badly done. Come, then, you that feel you have been sinning the last week—you that are God's people, you that are resting on Christ, but have a sense of guilt upon your consciences, and cannot get rid of it, and are sighing and crying, do ask this question, “Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Then I will come to thee; I will come with my feet all filthy if there is such a bath as this to be washed in. If my sins be returned to me, and appear to remain upon my conscience, if thou waitest still to wash me from present guilt and present depravity, then here I am,—as at the first I came, I come again; nothing but thy merit do I rely upon; nothing but thy love is my confidence; I give myself up to thee; take me as I am, and wash me clean.” I say it is a subject for admiration, how thoroughly clean Christ does wash his people, so that they can really cry, “There is no spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, even upon my feet; I shall be presented holy, unblamable and unreprovable in the sight of God, through Jesus Christ my Lord.”

     III. Now we will turn from admiration to what may be more practical—to GRATITUDE; I hope already we feel that heaven-born flame glowing in our souls.

     Here is matter for gratitude then. I heard the other day of a meeting for prayer, at which my dear brother Offord, who so marvellously made confession of sin at our great prayer-meeting ting in the first week of January, was moved to make another confession; and he did so in such a manner, that the whole assembly was moved, and there were audible sobs and cries from God’s people while they confessed their transgressions. No sooner had he done so, than some brother, wise above what is written, rose in the assembly, and said he thanked God he could not join in the confession, his sins were all forgiven him, and therefore he had no sins to confess; he stood before God so accepted in Christ that he had no sins whatever to make confession of. His prayer went far to spoil the meeting, and to grieve the people of God. I do occasionally meet with erring brethren, who say, “I never make any confession of sin.” “I have prayed for months,” said one to me, “and I have never made any confession of sin; I believe all my sins are forgiven, and I have none to confess.” Now, at the very first mention of this, do you not feel shocked? The holy sensibilities of a child of God suffer violence from the very thought of such absence of repentance. I should have been surprised if I did not hold myself prepared to hear any monstrosity from persons tinctured with the gall of Plymouth Brethrenism. Concerning that sect, much as I love and respect many of its members, I dare not say less than this, that God alone knows what they will teach to-morrow, for they seem to be given up to the inventions of their own vainglorious minds, to concoct and devise delusions without number. They have one mark of the Babylon which they profess to abhor, for mystery is written on their very brow. I pray God to keep our young people from their company, for their professions and pretences are such as might, if it were possible, deceive the very elect. Gracious men I grant them to be, but as to doctrine, as mad as March hares, and as perverse as bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke. When I first heard this doctrine of not confessing sins, I was startled. I felt as if I could have no more communion with a man who could talk in that way. Go on your knees, and not confess sin? My dear friends, I hope to die with this upon my lips, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments.” I hold that I shall be out of Christ altogether, when I reject repentance and confession. I know that my sins are forgiven me; there is no man in the world who preaches more than I do the doctrine that Christ has for ever made a full atonement for the sins of all his people; but as to not making a confession of sin, God forbid these lips should ever utter anything so ungospel-like, so un-Christlike!

     Let us put this matter before you pretty plainly. It is quite certain that those whom Christ has washed in his precious blood need not make a confession of sin as before God the Judge, because they are no longer under God as a Judge; they are not ruled and governed upon the principle of law at all. Christ has for ever taken away all their sins in a legal sense, so that no one can bring anything to their charge, and they need not confess where there is no one to accuse. The blood of Jesus has set his people entirely away from the position of prisoners under the law. They do not stand where they can be condemned. They are no longer culprits or criminals; they are taken from under the dominion of the Judge. But what are God's people? Why, they are children, and as long as God is their Father, and they are children, and imperfect children, nature teaches them that it is the duty of children to make a confession to their Father. If my boy should do anything amiss—God forbid it ever should be—suppose it were some petty theft, I might say, “My child, as far as that theft is concerned, no policeman shall take you, you shall not be taken before the bar or put in prison for that; you are quite forgiven as far as that is concerned.” I do not wish him to go before the magistrate and make a confession; but then he has offended me as his father; and I as his father expect him to confess the wrong that he has done to me, and if he does not, I chasten him, not by way of penal infliction, that is not my part as a father, I have nothing to do with penalties to my children, but by way of chastisement, that he may be led to see his fault, and may do it no more. No father who has his wits about him ever chastens his child in the light of punishment for the offence itself; no, he says, that is not my business, the offence must be punished by God, or if it be an offence against the law of the land, by the law of the land; when a father scourges, he does it for chastisement, for the good of the person chastised, not as a vindication of law and order. Now the Lord never chastens his people because of any sin in them, in order to punish them for their sin, for he has punished Christ instead of them—they are quite clear there; but now having become children, and offending as children, ought they not every day to go before their heavenly Father and confess the sin and acknowledge the iniquity? The grace of God in the heart would teach us all that it should be so. We daily offend as children; we offend, as we could not offend if we were not children. I doubt my Father, I am guilty of a want of love to him, or obedience to him, I offend as I could not offend if I were not his child. Supposing that this offence against my Father is not at once washed away by the cleansing power of the Lord Jesus, what will be the consequence of it? Why, I shall get under the thraldrom of bad habit; I shall feel such defilement in my nature, that I shall do again, and again, and again, what I had once done, till I get into the habit of doing it. If I am not washed from these offences against my Father, I shall feel at a distance from him; I shall begin to doubt his love to me; I shall tremble at him; most likely I shall be afraid to pray to him: I shall get to be like the prodigal, who, while he was a child, was yet far off from his father. If I am not washed, I shall very soon have need to feel the rod, and I shall have it. But oh! beloved, if the Lord Jesus Christ day by day shall come to me, and wash my feet from these defilements of offences against my Father, why, then I shall to a great extent escape the rod; I shall feel a holy love to my Father; I shall walk in the light of his countenance; I shall have joy and peace through believing, and I shall go through my Christian career, not only as saved, but as one enjoying present peace in God through Jesus Christ my Lord. I think you can see the difference between Christ putting away sin by blood and by water; I think you can see the distinction between confessing sin as a culprit,, and confessing sin as a child; and I think you can see how much gratitude you owe to Christ, that after having once set you free from the law, he day by day, as your Elder Brother, goes in before your Father's face, and still keeps you right before the Father, and when there has been any defilement, or any wrong, washes your feet from it, that you may still stand with peace in your conscience, with joy in your heart, with love in your bosom, and with the Father's love shed abroad in you. Here is matter for gratitude, that having once washed head and hands and feet with blood, he still doth daily wash my feet with water. For my part, I mean to keep on praying, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;” and it shall be my joy, that “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father,” and “the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”

     IV. The last point is, MATTER FOR IMITATION.

     Does Jesus wash our feet? Then we ought to wash one another's feet Some of our brethren, the Scotch Baptists, were accustomed to wash the saints' feet literally; I dare say it would not do some of the saints much hurt; but still it never was intended for us to carry out literally the example of the Saviour; there is a spiritual meaning here, and what he means is this. If there be any deed of kindness or love that we can do for the very meanest and most obscure of God's people, we ought to be willing to do it—to be servants to God’s servants—to feel like Abigail did, when she said to David, “Let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord.” Abigail became David's wife, that is the true position of every Christian; but yet she felt she was not worthy even to wash his servants' feet. That must be our spirit. Do you know any poor bed-ridden soul? Go and talk with that poor woman, or that poor man. Seek to take comfort to that poor man's miserable lodgings. Do you know a brother who is rather angry in temper, and he wants a kind word said to him, and some one says, “I will not speak to any such person as he is?” Do it—do it, my dear brother; go and wash his feet! Do you know one who has gone astray? Some one says, “I would not like to be seen in association with him.” My dear friend, you are spiritual; go and restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. Wash his feet! There is another riding the high horse; he is very very proud. One says, “I am not going to humble myself to him.” My dear brother, go to him, and wash his feet! Whenever there is a child of God who has any defilement upon him, and you are able to point it out and rid him of it, submit to any degradation, put yourself in any position, sooner than that child of God should be the subject of sin. Especially let those who are highest among us seek to do the lowest offices. “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” Recollect that Christ's way of rising is to go down. He descended, that he might ascend; and so must we. Let us count that evermore it is our highest honour and our greatest glory, to lay aside all honour and all glory, and to win honour and glory out of shame and humiliation for Christ Jesus’ sake. I believe this is done in this Church. I hope we are as free as possible from the feeling of caste: God deliver us from the last relic and remnant of it! Ye are brethren; love one another. “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich in that he is made low.” Ye are brethren, and one is your Master, even Christ. Try to carry out every one of you to your utmost the teaching of your Lord, that ye should wash one another's feet. You have an opportunity of doing it in the collection; for I believe that these servants of God, these aged ministers, these ministers who are in great poverty, need to-day y that you should by your contributions wash their feet.

# Menial Service (John 13:1-17) Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17)

### Introduction

I remember all too well that day many years ago when my wife came home to tell me that one of the other seminary wives was having trouble with her washing machine. This woman had just recently given birth to a baby by cesarean section and was suffering from some complications. To have no working washing machine was a serious problem. And so I went over to work on it. It was in seminary housing, where there was no hook-up provided for washing machines or dryers. There was, however, a very popular work-around to this problem. They would put the washing machine in the bathroom, connect an adapter to the sink faucet to get hot and cold water, and place the drain hose in the toilet. This worked reasonably well, most of the time.

The trouble on this occasion was that this woman’s washing machine was in a downstairs apartment. Every time the washer got to the spin cycle, the clutch would grab, the load in the washer would overload the motor, and the circuit breaker (which was located in the basement, some distance away) would trip. Every time I changed the adjustment on the clutch, I had to test it. Each time I did, the clutch would grab again, blowing the circuit breaker. And every time the circuit breaker would blow, I had to crawl out from under the washer, go around the back of the apartment complex, go down into the basement, reset the breaker, come back up the basement stairs, crawl back under the washer, and make another adjustment. This I did far too many times to count.

After I had wasted a considerable amount of time, I laid there under the washing machine, grumbling to God. I was praying that God would enable me to fix this machine, but I was not a “happy camper.” Just about this time, I could feel the ceiling and walls vibrating, and I knew that the woman upstairs was doing her wash. She was washing dirty diapers in the washing machine, but she had made one crucial mistake. She had left one dirty diaper soaking in the toilet, and then turned on the washer, with the drain hose emptying into the toilet. When her washer went into its spin cycle, a good volume of dirty diaper water drained from the machine into the toilet. The dirty diaper in the toilet lodged there, stopping up the toilet, so that all the dirty diaper water from the toilet and the washer spilled out onto the floor, and then somehow made its way down through the ceiling light fixture of the room I was in, and down onto my body, which was spread out on the bathroom floor. Only my head was protected from the flood of filthy water, safely tucked under the wayward washing machine.

I called to the young mother who owned the washer, as she stood nearby trying to encourage me. I told her that the washer upstairs was overflowing and suggested that she turn off the light above me so that it would not explode. “Oh, it does that all the time,” she explained, “and it never explodes.” Poof! Just then, the light bulb exploded, showering my body with an abundance of small glass fragments, which was already soaked with dirty diaper water. It was sort of like sprinkling bits of coconut on a cake that had just been iced. That was about as much dirty work as I could take. Graciously, the Lord enabled my next adjustment to work so that I could go home and clean up.

All of us have had our share of “dirty work,” and I doubt that we have really enjoyed it. This Sunday, I asked for volunteers in the audience to share some of their “dirty work” experiences. I was told of experiences ranging from “changing dirty diapers” to “cleaning grease traps” while in the Army. I know from my own experience that there are many different forms of dirty work. I will not forget the first time I had to go to the store to buy Depends (adult diapers) for a friend and neighbor. I never knew that aisle existed before, and the choices facing me there were so numerous I would have called for help if I hadn’t been so embarrassed. (I drew the line when the visiting nurse told me she would show me how to change our friend’s diapers. I’m honestly not sure whether I declined to protect my neighbor’s dignity or my own.)

Our text is about the dirty work of washing the disciples’ feet. This menial task was performed by none other than the Lord of glory. What an amazing story it is. It is not included in any other Gospel account. It introduces the Upper Room Discourse of our Lord ([John 13-17](javascript:%7b%7d)), which is also found only in the Gospel of John. This is indeed a marvelous portion of John’s Gospel. John G. Mitchell writes,

Of all the Scriptures between Genesis and Revelation, I know of no greater portion as far as the people of God are concerned than chapters 13 through 17 of John. I believe in these chapters we have the seed germ of all the truth concerning the Church, as well as almost all the doctrine in the New Testament. Our Lord’s discourse here takes us within twenty-four hours of the crucifixion.[233](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3627_1433362)

Here is a text which has much to say to our generation. Let us listen well to what the Spirit of God has to say to each one of us.

### The Setting (13:1-5)

***What’s Jesus Doing With That Basin and Towel?***

*1 Just before the Passover feast,*[*234*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3633_1433733) *Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world to the Father. He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, that he should betray Jesus. 3 Jesus, because he knew that the Father had handed [all]*[*235*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3634_1434794) *things over to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 got up from the meal, removed his outer clothes, took a towel and tied it around himself. 5 He poured water into the washbasin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to dry them with the towel he had wrapped around himself.*[*236*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3635_1435287)

The washing of the feet of one’s guests was expected in Jesus’ day, as we can see from Luke’s Gospel:   
*44 Then, turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss of greeting, but from the time I entered she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfumed oil (*[*Luke 7:44-46*](javascript:%7b%7d)*).*

Normally, the host would not do this washing himself, because it was regarded as a very demeaning task. We get some idea of just how menial it was from the comment Abigail makes to David in the Old Testament: “Then she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, ‘Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord’” ([1 Samuel 25:41](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV).

Foot washing was understood in the same way by John the Baptist: *When John the Baptist desired to give expression to his feeling of unworthiness in comparison to Christ, he could think of no better way to express this than to say that he deemed himself unworthy of kneeling down in front of Jesus in order to unloose his sandalstraps and remove the sandals (with a view to washing the Master’s feet).”*[*237*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3641_1437402)

I believe our Lord’s washing of the disciples’ feet in [John 13](javascript:%7b%7d) is further explained by a comment that is found in Luke’s Gospel: *24 A dispute also started among them over which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 So Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ 26 But it must not be like that with you! Instead the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? But I am among you as one who serves”* ([Luke 22:24-27](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It would not at all surprise me if this dispute occurred just as the disciples were entering this upper room. The “table” was not like our kitchen “tables” at all. The meal would have been served to these disciples as they reclined in a u-shaped arrangement, with our Lord at what we might call the “head of the table.” Some suggest that Judas was sitting beside Jesus, at His right hand, in the place of honor. I wouldn’t be surprised. Each place at the table had its own social ranking. This is why our Lord can say: *8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, because a person more distinguished than you may have been invited by your host. 9 So the host who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your place,’ and then with shame you will start to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, go and take the least important place, so that when your host comes he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up here to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who share the meal with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted”* ([Luke 14:8-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I believe that when the disciples entered this upper room, they were all intent on sitting in the places of honor—at our Lord’s right and left hand (see [Matthew 20:21-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). I can almost see them pushing and shoving their way into the room, hurrying past the basin of water, where a servant normally would have been present to wash the feet of the guests as they entered, in preparation for the meal. This may well have been the time that the disciples argued among themselves about who was to be regarded as the greatest. After all, every one of them would have to establish their “ranking” among the 12 if they were to be seated according to their greatness. I can see our Lord, quietly observing His disciples as they squabble. I can imagine Him making His way to the washbasin, and filling it with water, while His disciples continue to argue with each other, completely oblivious to what He is doing. And then they suddenly become silent as they realize that He has taken the lowest position of all—lower than the lowest of the 12—the position of a servant (and not a high-ranking servant, either). To their amazement, they observe Jesus, working His way from one of them to the next, first washing a pair of dirty feet, and then drying them with the towel that is wrapped about His waist. The argument seems to end with the words of our Lord in verses 12-17. They may not understand all that He has done, but they must have had enough sense to know it was time to be stop bickering and be quiet.[238](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3647_1440826)

Two verses out of five focus on the actual washing of the disciples’ feet by our Lord. Three of the five verses provide us with background information, which John believes his readers need to know in order to properly understand the Lord’s actions. We might say that verses 1-3 provide us with information that gives us insight into our Lord’s “state of mind.”[239](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3649_1441320) This “state of mind”[240](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3650_1441805) of our Lord is expressed by John, both in terms of what Jesus “**knew**” (see verses 1, 3, 11), and in terms of why He did what He did (namely, His great love for His own).

John tells us Jesus “**knew**” that “**his time had come to depart from this world to the Father**” (verse 1), and that the Father had “**handed** [all] **things over to Him**” (verse 3). As He had come from the Father, so He was returning to the Father (verse 3). We are no doubt tempted to read this in a way that is different from and contradictory to what John is actually saying. We might be reading the text something like this: “Jesus, knowing that He was about to suffer on the cross of Calvary …” We have already read of our Lord’s agony over His coming alienation from the Father on the cross (12:27-28), and John does not wish to repeat this again. Here in our text, John emphasizes that Jesus knew His earthly mission was nearly complete, and that He was returning to the Father in heaven. He knew that everything had been given over to Him by the Father. In other words, He knew that everything was as it should be, and that He was in complete control. *It is our Lord’s sovereignty that is being stressed here, and not His suffering*.[241](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3652_1443995)

John wishes us to understand that Jesus washed the disciples’ feet at a time when others would not have been inclined to do so. Jesus was in complete control. Jesus was God’s CEO. When men find themselves in this position, they are tempted to behave very differently: “Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions exercise authority over them’” ([Mark 10:42](javascript:%7b%7d)). In spite of who He was; in spite of the fact that all authority had been given to Him, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. In spite of the fact that He could have required men to minister to Him, catering to His every whim, *Jesus humbled Himself by washing the feet of His disciples.* This was truly an amazing thing! Jesus humbled Himself, knowing that He was soon going to be exalted higher than anyone in all of human history.

If John is emphasizing the fact that Jesus *knew* all these things, he is at the same time stressing the fact that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as an expression of His great love for them: “He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end” ([John 13:1](javascript:%7b%7d)b).

The act of washing His disciples’ feet was our Lord’s way of showing them (and us) how much He loved them. Do you remember in chapter 11 when those standing around at the tomb of Lazarus saw Jesus weeping, they remarked, “**Look how much he loved him!**” (11:36b)? I think John is now saying to his readers, “Look how much He loved us!”

There is a rather dramatic shift in John’s vocabulary here in chapter 13, which underscores the importance of “**love**” in chapters 13-17. Let me summarize a few statistics regarding John’s vocabulary, which will underscore the fact that love is a very significant term from here on in John’s Gospel. Notice the frequency of the following terms in John’s Gospel:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| **WORLD** | | |
| In chapters 1-12 | “world” occurs 34 times | approx. 3 times per chapter |
| In chapters 13-17 | “world” occurs 41 times | approx. 8 times per chapter |
| **LIFE** | | |
| In chapters 1-12 | “life” occurs 50 time | approx. 4 times per chapter |
| In chapters 13-17 | “life” occurs 6 times | approx. 1 time per chapter |
| **LIGHT** | | |
| In chapters 1-12 | “light” occurs 32 times | approx. 3 times per chapter |
| In chapters 13-17 | “light” occurs 0 times |  |
| **LOVE** | | |
| In chapters 1-12 | “love” occurs 12 times | 1 time per chapter |
| In chapters 13-17 | “love” occurs 34 times | approx. 7 times per chapter |

It is obvious, is it not, that John wishes to emphasize the love our Lord has for His own? Mitchell observes:

It is remarkable that in this section, starting in chapter 13, begins with the statement, **‘Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end;’** (13:1). This section ends in chapter 17 with Jesus praying, **‘that the love wherewith thou has loved me may be in them, and I in them’** (17:26). He begins and ends with His love for His own. It’s just like the Savior! And down through these five chapters we have the marvelous revelation of His love, of His concern for His own.[242](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3698_1447262)

Here is the amazing thing. Jesus loves His own. Jesus loves His own, knowing everything. He loves His own, knowing that He is sovereign, and that He is about to leave this earth and return to His Father. He loves His own, knowing that they have been arguing (or will shortly do so) about who is the greatest, knowing that they are about to forsake Him and flee for their lives, knowing that Peter will deny Him. It is one thing for people to love us, who do not know all of our wicked deeds, thoughts, and motivations. It is another for the Holy God of heaven to love us, knowing every wicked thing we have done and will do. This is, indeed, amazing love. *What a comfort to the Christian, knowing that our Lord’s love is constant and unchanging, knowing that He chose to love us—and to keep on loving us—purely out of His grace, and not based upon our performance. Jesus loved His own; He loved them to the “end”—to the uttermost degree, and to the very end.*[*243*](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3700_1448266) *What security! What grace! What a Savior!*

### Peter’s Protest (13:6-11)

6 Then he came to Simon Peter. Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus replied, “You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things.” 8 Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet!” Jesus replied, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” 9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus replied, “The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean. And you[244](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3704_1449184) disciples are clean, but not every one of you.” 11 (For Jesus knew the one who was going to betray him. For this reason he said, “Not every one of you is clean.”)

It is as though Peter has been watching Jesus draw nearer to him, as He makes His way around the table, washing the feet of each of His disciples. And when Jesus reaches Peter’s feet, he does what seems to be the pious or humble thing to do—he declines. He asks His Master if He thinks He is going to wash *his* feet.[245](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3706_1450053) The inference is that Peter will have no part of this. We might paraphrase his words this way: “You don’t think you’re going to wash *my feet*, do you, Lord?” If the disciples thought it was inappropriate for them to wash the feet of their peers, they would surely think it inappropriate for the Master to wash their feet. Even Peter could see this, and thus he resisted having his feet washed by the Savior.

Peter’s words may appear humble, but they are really arrogant. In the first place, Peter is arrogant enough to think *he* knows better than Jesus what is appropriate and what is not. He knows that Jesus is deliberately washing the feet of every disciple, and yet Peter is so bold as to correct Jesus, as though He was wrong. John Calvin comments:

This speech expresses strong dislike of the action as foolish and unsuitable; for by asking what Christ is doing, he puts out his hand, as it were, to push him back. The modesty would be worthy of commendations, were it not that obedience is of greater value in the sight of God than any kind of honour or service, or rather, if this were not the true and only rule of humility, to yield ourselves in obedience to God, and to have all our senses regulated by his good pleasure, so that every thing which he declares to be agreeable to Him shall also be approved by us, without any scruple.[246](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3709_1451511)

We may be inclined to excuse Peter’s resistance at first, but his second protest is a more serious error. Jesus responded to Peter’s first protest by saying to him, “**You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things**.” In other words, Jesus not only indicated that He knew what He was doing and that it was right, but that Peter would understand this also, later on. Jesus is urging Peter both to trust and to obey Him.[247](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3711_1451988) Calvin writes:

Hitherto Peter’s modesty was excusable, though it was not free from blame; but now he errs more grievously, when he has been corrected, and yet does not yield. And, indeed, it is a common fault, that ignorance is closely followed by obstinacy. It is a plausible excuse, no doubt, that the refusal springs from reverence for Christ; but since he does not absolutely obey the injunction, the very desire of showing his respect for Christ loses all its gracefulness. The true wisdom of faith, therefore, is to approve and embrace with reverence whatever proceeds from God, as done with propriety and in good order; nor is there any other way, indeed, in which his name can be sanctified by us; for if we do not believe that whatever he does is done for a very good reason, our flesh, being naturally stubborn, will continually murmur, and will not render to God the honour due to him, unless by constraint. In short, until a man renounce the liberty of judging as to the works of God, whatever exertions he may make to honour God, still pride will always lurk under the garb of humility.[248](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3713_1453927)

Let me look at Peter’s protest from a somewhat different perspective. Has Peter protested against the omniscience (knowing all) and the sovereignty (absolute control) of our Lord? In addition to this, Peter is protesting against divine *grace*. Think of it for a moment. Peter is, with a fair measure of false humility, rejecting our Lord’s actions as though he is undeserving (which, of course, he is). That is the point. What Jesus does for His disciples, He does out of love and grace. And this is precisely what Jesus is about to point out to Peter. Would he resist having Jesus wash his feet, on the premise that he is unworthy? Then he must also reject having his sins washed away by the shed blood of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, for he is unworthy of this as well. To reject grace in principle is to reject all grace, period. And so Jesus says to Peter: “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”

With this statement, Peter is brought back to reality, to his senses. It was like a slap on the face. If Peter was too quick to protest our Lord’s gracious act of washing his feet, he was not too quick to repent of his foolishness. And that he does. We all can identify with Peter when he speaks before he thinks; would that we might identify with Peter in his ability to forsake his folly and cling to the Savior. Whatever Peter’s faults, he deeply loved the Savior. The thought of having no part with Him (as it would be with Judas) was too much. Now, far from resisting a foot washing, Peter is ready for a full bath. More than anything else, Peter wants to identify and to participate fully in all that Jesus will graciously grant.

Ever so graciously, Jesus denies this request of Peter. If he should mistakenly desire too little of Jesus, neither should he ask for more than is needed. He is clean; he does not need a bath, but just a foot washing. Jesus is also speaking to Peter on a spiritual level. One who has been bathed and thereby cleansed by His shed blood does not need to be “washed” this way over and over again; he needs only to be washed.[249](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3717_1456017) These words certainly appear to lay to rest the belief of some that men must be saved over and over again.

Jesus knows everything, including the fact that Judas had already purposed to betray him. And so Jesus clarifies that the “cleansing” of which He speaks does not belong to all who are with Him at the moment. This (like nearly everything else Jesus said at this moment of time) must have gone completely over the heads of the 11. Jesus wanted them to remember that even before His betrayal by Judas, He had spoken of it. Jesus was in control of this as well. *He was not a victim, but the Victor* (see verses 1-3).

### Getting to the Point (13:12-17)

12 So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, “Do you understand what I have done for you? 13 You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example: you should do just as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the solemn truth, the slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent as a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

The first thing we should observe from these verses is that our Lord taught His disciples by His deeds, and not just by His declarations. How different Jesus is from the Pharisees:

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and his disciples, 2 “The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. 3 Therefore, pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by people, for they make their phylacteries wide and their tassels long. 6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, 7 and to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have people call them ‘Rabbi’” ([Matthew 23:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus has washed the feet of the disciples purposefully. It was a task that needed doing, and our Lord did it. It was also a way that Jesus could demonstrate His unfathomable love for His disciples. But beyond this, it was a lesson which the disciples desperately needed to learn, a lesson in humility. These men were still looking at leadership from a “secular” point of view, rather than from a divine perspective. The secular world looks upon leadership as the opportunity to be served. A leader has many people “under him,” and thus he “uses” them to minister to his own needs. In the kingdom of God, a position of leadership is simply a place of service. No matter where one finds himself on the leader-follower scale, *the Christian is to serve God by serving others.* Leadership is simply one place of service. It enables one to serve as others cannot.

Jesus employs the greater/lesser logic here. He is the sovereign God, the supreme leader. This is what John emphasizes in the first verses of chapter 13. Knowing this, our Lord purposefully sets out to wash the feet of His disciples. If He, as the sovereign God, can wash their dirty feet, then surely they should do likewise to one another. Rather than arguing with each other about who is regarded to be the greatest, they should be humbling themselves by serving one another. Rather than striving to possess the “rights” of the one who ranks highest, they should seize the opportunity to serve others by doing menial tasks. Put differently, even those “on the top” can and should minister “from the bottom up.” In a “top-down” world, this is a revolutionary concept.

The last statement of our Lord, recorded in verse 17, is profoundly important: “**If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them**.” They really didn’t understand this yet, like everything else. But even when they are able to grasp this teaching academically, the important thing is not the *knowing* of this truth, but the *doing* of it. We are not blessed so much by what we know as we are blessed by the doing of what we know. This applies to far more than just this one command. It applies across the entire spectrum of biblical knowledge. There are some folks who do not *know* as much as others, but they *do* far more than those “in the know.” Again, it is Calvin who observes:

… for knowledge is not entitled to be called true, unless it produce such an effect on believers as to lead them to conform themselves to their Head. On the contrary, it is a vain imagination, when we look upon Christ, and the things which belong to Christ, as separate from ourselves. We may infer from this that, until a man has learned to yield to his brethren, he does not *know* if Christ be *the Master*. Since there is no man who performs his duty to his brethren in all respects, and since there are many who are careless and sluggish in brotherly offices, this shows us that we are still at a great distance from the full light of faith.[250](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3728_1461350)

### Conclusion

We know from our Lord’s words that we must be sure to put the lesson of this text into practice. And so as we conclude this lesson, let us ponder how we should do just that.

Let me begin with a very practical question: Does this text teach us that we must literally wash the feet of others, or does it teach that we must do more than wash feet? There have always been some who have taken the words of our Lord in a strictly literal way:

Foot-washing was practised on Maundy Thursday by the Church of Augustine’s day. It was recommended by Bernard of Clairvaux in one of his sermons. The practice, moreover, was continued by the pope at Rome and by emperors (of Austria, of Russia) and kings (of Spain, Portugal, Bavaria). For a while it was practised by the Church of England and by the Moravians. It has been continued to this very day by certain Baptist and Adventist bodies. It was roundly condemned by Luther and by his followers as ‘an abominable papal corruption.’[251](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3734_1462351)

I very much appreciate the comment of John G. Mitchell here:

Jesus has washed the feet of Peter who will deny Him, of Thomas who will doubt Him, and of Judas who will betray Him. He has more in mind here than an ordinance of foot washing. I have no argument against those who claim we should have literal foot washing services. If you feel you should do that, that’s between you and the Lord. I think, however, that the Lord has a far greater matter before us here.[252](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3737_1462853)

If one is convicted that this command should be taken literally, then he should literally apply the words of our Lord. Even so, this is not to be viewed as the limit to which these words should be taken. Jesus does not simply say that we should do *what* He has done, but that we should do *as* He has done. The washing of the disciples’ feet is an example[253](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3739_1463230) to be followed, and not just as an act to imitate as a ritual.[254](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-menial-service-john-131-17#P3740_1463427)

I believe that we must be very careful about coming to the conclusion that Jesus or His apostles did not mean what they appear to have said. Many of the commands of the Bible are too quickly and easily set aside, because we don’t like them, or because our culture will not tolerate them. The Bible’s teaching on the role of women is an example of the latter. Our Lord’s teaching about “turning the other cheek” is an example of the former. *But in our text, it seems as though Jesus is clear that He is teaching the principle of servanthood, rather than merely commanding the practice of foot washing.* We do not see this command repeated or practiced as an ordinance in Acts or in the Epistles. I do believe that while foot washing itself is not commanded, there are many other actions which the principle of servanthood does require. We shall seek to identify these by first identifying the characteristics of foot washing which are transferable, and then by considering some possible practices which conform to these characteristics.

### The Essence of Washing Feet

Consider the following elements which characterize our Lord’s act of washing the disciples’ feet:

***(1) Our Lord’s washing of the disciples’ feet was service****.* Our Lord did the work of a servant as He served His disciples.

***(2) Our Lord’s washing of the disciples’ feet was a necessary, beneficial service***. As a former student and classroom teacher, I can safely say that this was not “busy work.” It was not work for work’s sake, but work that **had very practical benefits for the disciples—clean feet**.

***(3) Our Lord’s washing of the disciples’ feet was menial service***. Foot washing is “dirty work,” work which required our Lord to “get His hands dirty.” This work was so menial the disciples were not willing to perform it themselves, and at least Peter attempted to keep Jesus from carrying out this humble task.

***(4) Our Lord’s service of washing the disciples’ feet was a voluntary act, motivated by love***. Jesus was not fulfilling any Old Testament commandment or prophecy. What Jesus chose to do here was not “in His job description.” Our Lord’s service was “above and beyond the call of duty.” He was not doing what someone (including the disciples) had asked Him to do.

***(5) Our Lord’s service of washing the disciples’ feet was a task which someone else could have done***. This foot washing was a task Jesus could have commanded any one of His disciples to do. Jesus did what someone else could have done, what the disciples expected someone else to do.

***(6) Our Lord’s service of washing the disciples’ feet was His gracious ministry to those who were undeserving, and even to him who would betray his Lord***. Here they were, arguing with each other about who was the greatest, oblivious to what lay ahead for the Master. Here they were, those who would desert Him, who would deny Him, who would betray Him, and Jesus washed the feet of all.

***(7) Our Lord’s service was the meeting of a need that no one else was willing to meet***.

***(8) Our Lord’s service does not appear to be very “spiritual” nor very “significant*.”** How quickly ministry opportunities are seized when the ministry is prominent, popular, prestigious, fulfilling, and profitable. The washing of the disciples’ feet appeared to be none of these. Foot washing is mundane, everyday, garden-variety service.

***(9) Our Lord’s service was selfless, sacrificial service***.

### The Expression of Foot Washing Today

So, assuming we understand better what the foot washing of our text was, in essence, how should it be expressed today? How can you and I obey our Lord’s command and wash feet in today’s context? I have some very practical suggestions.

***(1) Make a commitment to the Lord to begin “washing the feet” of others***. Recognize that this is contrary to the spirit of our age. Jeannette and I attended an HCJB (a fantastic radio station which broadcasts the gospel from the mountains of Quito, Ecuador) banquet this past week. As I looked about I noted that almost all the guests were older folks, like myself (not ancient, but mature, mind you). I have been told that one of the characteristics of the so-called “Generation X” is that they are completely selfish. They don’t give themselves or their money. Instead, they expect others to give to them. Foot washing begins with taking up one’s cross and following Jesus. If we truly follow Him, we will take up our cross, and we will sacrificially serve others. This is what the gospel brings about.

***(2) You don’t have to look for this kind of ministry opportunity; it will find you***. Our problem is not a lack of opportunities to “wash feet”; it is our unwillingness to “see” and to seize these opportunities. Look, for example, at the story of the “Good Samaritan” in Luke chapter 10. The priest and the Levite saw the man who had been beaten, there in the road before them, but they did not view ministering to him as their responsibility. It wasn’t in their “job description.” They had their religious duties to carry out. They weren’t into foot washing of this kind. But the Samaritan took this ministry upon himself. The need for “foot washing” in our society is as common as dirty feet were in our Lord’s day. We simply need to open our eyes to see these needs.

***(3) We must take our eyes off of ourselves, and gird ourselves with the “mind of Christ” which we see in our text***. When sacrificial service is our goal rather than self-seeking, we will see the many needs around us for “foot washing.” We simply need to look for those needs which are not being met and, with the strength God provides, meet them. Once a desire for practical service overcomes the urge for self-seeking, the opportunities are unlimited.

***(4) We need to focus our attention on those undone things which we have come to expect someone else to do***. For example, as you get up to leave this service, are there bulletins, dirty Kleenexes, and half-filled coffee cups left behind? Do we have a custodian? We do, but why should we not serve him by taking out our own trash, or that left behind by someone else? If we see trash in the parking lot, do we walk by it, just as the disciples hurried by the water basin? Every Sunday, one or more couples gets up at the end of the worship hour to minister to one of our handicapped young people. This kind of ministry does not seem significant, but it is the very kind of ministry our Lord commands and commends.

When I prepare to conduct a funeral service, I usually meet with the immediate family and close friends, to go over the plans for the service, and also to obtain information about the life of the one who passed away. Often, I will say, “Can you think of a story which captures the essence of what \_\_\_\_\_\_’s life was about?” Very often, they will tell me a story, and when the others hear it, they will say, “Oh, you’re right, that is just like \_\_\_\_\_\_.” This story of the washing of the disciples’ feet is just like Jesus. It captures the “**mind of Christ**” in a very practical way. It is this spirit which prompted our Lord to perform the ultimate washing, the washing away of our sins through the shedding of His blood on the cross of Calvary. We, like the disciples, were dirty and defiled, and totally unworthy of His mercy and love. And yet He humbled Himself to cleanse us from sin by His humiliation and suffering on the cross. Have you accepted this washing for yourself personally, or have you, like Peter, sought to push Jesus aside? We must humble ourselves by acknowledging our sin and our need, and the necessity to be cleansed by Him who is without sin—Jesus Christ. May we accept His gracious offer of cleansing, and thus enter into the joy of intimate fellowship with Him.

One final thing I would like you to ponder as I conclude this message. It is a statement that is made necessary by the twisted culture in which we live: Love is not about sex as much as it is about dirty feet. May God give us the grace to wash feet this very day.

233 John G. Mitchell, with Dick Bohrer, *An Everlasting Love: A Devotional Study of the Gospel of John* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1982), p. 247.

234 There are many technical questions involved in the timing of this meal, which are of much interest to scholars, but not of much profit to our exposition. Suffice it to say that John is not really interested in such matters, either. He must have read the Synoptic Gospels before he wrote this Gospel, and yet he did not see it profitable to clarify every apparent discrepancy. For a more careful look into these issues and possible solutions, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 455-458; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-1954), vol. 2, pp. 221-227.

235 The NET Bible has a footnote indicating that the Greek text literally reads “all things.” I believe the “all” is necessary to our understanding of this verse, and so I have inserted it.

236 It would seem to me that the lack of a servant to wash the disciples’ feet was deliberate on our Lord’s part. First of all, it was the host’s responsibility to provide this (see [Luke 7](javascript:%7b%7d)), and Jesus *was* the host. Furthermore, throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus very carefully arranging for things in advance (the procuring of the donkey and its colt, and of a place in which to celebrate Passover, etc.). I cannot imagine that our Lord—who is omniscient (knowing all)—would forget to provide for the foot washing. And finally, all the things that were necessary for the foot washing were present (the basin, the water, the towel). I am therefore inclined to think that Jesus purposefully arranged for a servant not to be present, so that He could wash the disciples’ feet, knowing (as He did) all that would take place during this meal.

237 Hendriksen, vol. 2, p. 228.

238 This entire paragraph is speculative, and thus the reader should beware, but it does at least suggest how things may have happened.

239 In a criminal trial, the state of mind of the accused is usually given considerable attention, especially in crimes which have different degrees (first, second, third) of guilt, and therefore of punishment. Here, while it is unusual perhaps, John describes our Lord’s “state of mind” so that we can determine the degree of goodness of this foot washing. I think we should conclude from what we are told that Jesus is to be assessed with “first degree goodness.”

240 “I am of the opinion that this was added for the purpose of informing us whence Christ obtained such a well-regulated composure of mind. It was because, having already obtained a victory over death, he raised his mind to the glorious triumph which was speedily to follow. It usually happens, that men seized with fear are greatly agitated. The Evangelist means, that no agitation of this sort was to be found in Christ, because, though he was to be immediately betrayed by Judas, still he knew that *the Father had given all things into his hand*. It may be asked, How then was he reduced to such a degree of sadness that he sweat blood? I reply, both were necessary. It was necessary that he should have a dread of death, and it was necessary that, notwithstanding of this, he should fearlessly discharge every thing that belonged to the office of the Mediator.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume 7: The Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., n.d.), p. 821.

241 Being omniscient, Jesus knew everything. He knew that Judas had decided to betray Him to the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus would also have known that all of His disciples would abandon Him and that Peter would deny Him, but in verses 1-3, this is not John’s emphasis.

242 John G. Mitchell, with Dick Bohrer, p. 248.

243 “… (this noun only here in this Gospel) is ambiguous, meaning both ‘to the end’ and ‘to the utmost.’ It is likely that here we have a typical Johannine double meaning, with both meanings intended. But the aorist, hgaphsen, is more consistent with love shown in a single act than with the continuance of love (imperfect).” Carson, p. 614, fn. 8.

244 The NET Bible carefully renders “**you**” (plural) so that we understand that Jesus is not just speaking to Peter, but to all the disciples. Morris comments, “But Jesus goes on to affirm that the apostolic band (‘ye’ is plural, showing that Jesus is now looking beyond Peter) are clean in the sense meant, *i.e.* clean from sin (*cf.* 15:3). But He immediately adds ‘but not all.’” Morris, p. 619.

245 We might be tempted to agree with Peter. As often as he “put his foot in his mouth,” his feet may have been clean!

246 John Calvin, p. 821.

247 Calvin’s words here are powerful when he writes, “We are taught by these words, that we ought simply to obey Christ, even though we should not perceive the reason why he wishes this or that thing to be done. In a well-regulated house, one person, the head of the family, has the sole right to say what ought to be done; and the servants are bound to employ their hands and feet in his service. That man, therefore, is too haughty, who refuses to obey the command of God, because he does not know the reason of it. But this admonition has a still more extensive meaning, and that is, that we should not take it ill to be ignorant of those things which God wishes to be hidden from us for a time; for this kind of ignorance is more learned than any other kind of knowledge, when we permit God to be wise above us.” John Calvin, pp. 821-822.

248 John Calvin, p. 822.

249 “The Old Testament priests were ceremonially bathed just once when they were inducted into the priest’s office. After that, they washed only their feet and hands at the laver of cleansing.” Mitchell, p. 252.

250 John Calvin, p. 824.

251 Hendriksen, vol.2, p. 236, fn. 134.

252 Mitchell, pp. 253-254.

253 The term “**example**” is found not only here (this one time) in John, but also in [Hebrews 4:11; 8:5; 9:26](javascript:%7b%7d); [James 5:10](javascript:%7b%7d); and [2 Peter 2:6](javascript:%7b%7d).

254 I will quote Calvin one more time here: “Now, therefore, he discloses the reason of what he had done; namely, that he *who is the Master and Lord of all gave an example* to be followed by all the godly, that none might grudge to descend to do a service to his brethren and equals, however mean and low that service might be. For the reason why the love of the brethren is despised is, that every man thinks more highly of himself than he ought, and despises almost every other person. Nor did he intend merely to inculcate modesty, but likewise to lay down this rule of brotherly love, that they should serve one another; for there is no brotherly love where there is not a voluntary subjection in assisting a neighbour.” Calvin, pp. 823-824.

**Lord, Are You Going to Wash My Feet? - John 13:6-15**J.C Ryle at[*https://www.monergism.com/lord-are-you-going-wash-my-feet-john-136-15*](https://www.monergism.com/lord-are-you-going-wash-my-feet-john-136-15)

*Then he came to Simon Peter. Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus replied, "The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not every one of you." (For Jesus knew the one who was going to betray him. For this reason he said, "Not every one of you is clean.")*

*So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example--you should do just as I have done for you.*

The verses we have now read conclude the story of our Lord's washing the feet of His disciples, the night before He was crucified. It is a story full of touching interest, which for some wise reason no Evangelist records except John. The wonderful condescension of Christ, in doing such a menial action, can hardly fail to strike any reader. The mere fact that the Master should wash the feet of the servants might well fill us with surprise. But the circumstances and sayings which arose out of the action are just as interesting as the action itself. Let us see what they were.

We should notice, firstly, ***the hasty ignorance of the Apostle Peter.***One moment we find him refusing to allow his Master to do such a servile work as He is about to do--"Do you wash my feet?" "You shall never wash my feet." Another moment we find him rushing with characteristic impetuosity into the other extreme--"Lord, wash not my feet only, but my hands and my head." But throughout the transaction we find him unable to take in the real meaning of what his eyes behold. He sees, but he does not understand.

Let us learn from Peter's conduct that a man may have plenty of faith and love, and yet be sadly destitute of clear knowledge. We must not set down men as graceless and godless because they are dull, and stupid, and blundering in their religion. The heart may often be quite right when the head is quite wrong. We must make allowances for the corruption of the understanding, as well as of the will. We must not be surprised to find that the brains as well as the affections of Adam's children have been hurt by the fall. It is a humbling lesson, and one seldom fully learned except by long experience. But the longer we live the more true shall we find it, that a believer, like Peter, may make many mistakes and lack understanding, and yet, like Peter, have a heart right before God, and get to heaven at last.

Even at our best estate we shall find that many of Christ's dealings with us are hard to understand in this life. The "why" and "wherefore" of many a providence will often puzzle and perplex us quite as much as the washing puzzled Peter. The wisdom, and fitness, and necessity of many a thing will often be hidden from our eyes. But at times like these we must remember the Master's words, and fall back upon them--"What I do you know not now, but you shall know hereafter." There came days, long after Christ had left the world, when Peter saw the full meaning of all that happened on the memorable night before the crucifixion. Even so there will be a day when *every dark page in our life's history* will be explained, and when, as we stand with Christ in glory, we shall know all.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, ***the plain practical lesson which lies upon its surface.*** That lesson is read out to us by our Lord. He says, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

HUMILITY is evidently one part of the lesson. If the only-begotten Son of God, the King of kings, did not think it beneath Him to do the humblest work of a servant, there is nothing which His disciples should think themselves too great or too good to do. No sin is so offensive to God, and so injurious to the soul as pride. No grace is so commended, both by precept and example, as humility. "Be clothed with humility." "He who humbles himself shall be exalted." "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God--but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men--and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself." (1 Pet. 5:5; Luke 18:14; Phil. 2:5-8.) Well would it be for the Church if this very simple truth was more remembered, and real humility was not so sadly rare. Perhaps there is no sight so displeasing in God's eyes as a self-conceited, self-satisfied, self-contented, stuck-up professor of religion. Alas, it is a sight only too common! Yet the words which John here records have never been repealed. They will be a swift witness against many at the last day, except they repent.

LOVE is manifestly the other part of the great practical lesson. Our Lord would have us love others so much that we should delight to do anything which can promote their happiness. We ought to rejoice in doing kindnesses, even in little things. We ought to count it a pleasure to lessen sorrow and multiply joy, even when it costs us some self-sacrifice and self-denial. We ought to love every child of Adam so well, that if in the least trifle we can do anything to make him more happy and comfortable, we should be glad to do it. This was the mind of the Master, and this the ruling principle of His conduct upon earth. There are but few who walk in His steps, it may be feared; but these few are men and women after His own heart.

The lesson before us may seem a very simple one; but its importance can never be overrated. Humility and love are precisely the graces which the men of the world can understand, if they do not comprehend doctrines. They are graces about which there is no mystery, and they are within reach of all Christians. The poorest and most ignorant Christian can every day find occasion for practicing love and humility. Then if we would do good to the world, and make our calling and election sure, let no man forget our Lord's example in this passage. Like Him, let us be humble and loving towards all.

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, ***the deep spiritual lessons which lie beneath its surface.***They are three in number, and lie at the very root of religion, though we can only touch them briefly.

For one thing, we learn that all need to be washed by Christ. "If I wash you not, then have no part in Me." No man or woman can be saved unless his sins are washed away in Christ's precious blood. Nothing else can make us clean or acceptable before God. We must be "washed, sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) Christ must wash us, if we are ever to sit down with saints in glory. Then let us take heed that we apply to Him by faith, wash and become clean. They only are washed who believe.

For another thing, we learn that even those who are cleansed and forgiven need a daily application to the blood of Christ for daily pardon. We cannot pass through this evil world without defilement. There is not a day in our lives but we fail and come short in many things, and need fresh supplies of mercy. Even "he that is washed needs to wash his feet," and to wash them in the same fountain where he found peace of conscience when he first believed. Then let us daily use that fountain without fear. With the blood of Christ we must begin, and with the blood of Christ we must go on.

Finally, we learn that even those who kept company with Christ, and were baptized with water as His disciples, were "not all" washed from their sin. These words are very solemn--"You are clean--but not all." Then let us take heed to ourselves, and beware of false profession. If even Christ's own disciples are not all cleansed and justified, we have reason to be on our guard. Baptism and Churchmanship are no proof that we are right in the sight of God.

**Technical Notes:**

**6. Then he came to Simon Peter, and Peter said to him, Lord, are you washing my feet? 7. Jesus answered and said to him, What I am doing you do not understand now, but you shall understand hereafter. 8.  Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet! Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with me. 9. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head! 10.  Jesus said to him, He who is washed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. 11. For he knew who should betray him; therefore he said, Ye are not all clean. 12.  So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and sat down again, he said to them, Do ye know 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. 15. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.**  
  
6.--[*Then he came to Simon Peter.*] Whether our Lord began with Simon Peter is not quite clear from the words before us. The word “then,” however, certainly does not mean “then” in the sense of “in order.” Chrysostom and Theophylact hold that Jesus washed Judas Iscariot’s feet and then came to Peter. From the subsequent action of dipping and giving a morsel to Judas, it certainly seems probable that he sat very near our Lord.  
  
Augustine holds that Jesus began with Peter. Bellarmine eagerly grasps at this and gives it as one of twenty-eight alleged proofs that Peter always had a primacy among the Apostles!  
  
[*And Peter said to him.*] The word “Peter” is not in the Greek text here, but simply “he” or “that man.” Our translators seem to have inserted it to make the meaning plain.  
  
[*Lord, do you wash my feet?*] The English language here fails to give the full emphasis of the Greek. It would be literally rendered, “Do You, of me, wash the feet?” Such a one as You are, wash the feet of such a one as I am! It is like John the Baptist’s exclamation when our Lord came to his baptism: “Come thou to me?” (Matt. 3:14.)  
  
7.--[*Jesus answered and said, etc.*] The famous saying of this verse stretches far beyond the literal application of the words. Primarily, of course, it means, “This action of mine has a meaning which in a few minutes I will explain and you will understand, though at present it may seem to you strange and unsuitable.” But in every age true Christians have seen a higher, deeper, broader meaning in the words, and a pious mind cannot doubt that they were intended to bear that meaning. It supplies the key to many things that we cannot understand in the providential government of the world, in the history of the Church, in the events of our own lives. We must make up our minds to see many things happening which we do not know and understand now, and of which we cannot at present see the wisdom. But we must believe that “we shall know hereafter” the full purposes, the why and wherefore and needs-be of each and all. It is a golden sentence to store up in our memories. God’s eternal counsels, the wisdom of the great Head of the Church, must never be forgotten. All is going on well, even when we think all is going on ill. When we cannot see it, we must believe.  In sickness, sorrow, bereavement, disappointment, we must summon up faith and patience and hear Christ saying to us, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you shall understand hereafter.” Musculus has some happy remarks here on the applicability of this expression to infant baptism, which are most just and true.

8.--[*Peter said...never wash my feet.*] Here, again, the English version fails to give the full strength of the Greek words. This sentence would be rendered literally, “You shall never wash my feet forever,” or unto eternity.  
  
We may note here, in Peter’s language, that there is such a thing as “a voluntary humility” which runs into extremes. Hutcheson remarks: “Men may have much seeming humility in the matters of God which is yet but preposterous and sinful and learned from carnal reason.” Rollock compares with Peter’s conduct here the Romish worship of saints and angels under the pretense of deep humility and unworthiness to approach God.  
  
*[Jesus answered...not wash you...no part with me.] We need not doubt that* this sentence was meant to bear a deep and full meaning and to reach far beyond the primary application. It would be a very cold and tame exposition to say that our Lord only meant, “Unless your feet are washed by Me tonight, you are not one of my disciples.” It means a great deal more.  Our Lord seems in effect to say, “You will not be wise to object to the symbolic action which I am performing. Remember, no one can be saved or have any part in Me and my work of redemption unless I wash away his sins.  Except I wash away your many sins, even you, Simon Peter, have no part in Me. I must wash every saved soul, and every saved soul must be washed.  Surely, therefore, it does not become you to object to my doing an instructive and figurative act to your feet when I must needs do a far greater work to your soul.”  
  
The sentence is one of wide, deep, and sweeping application. It is true of every Christian of every rank and position. To each one Christ says, “If I wash you not, you have no part in Me.” It is not enough that we are Churchmen, professed communicants, and the like. The great question for everyone is this: “Am I washed and justified?” The common assertion that this “washing” here spoken of is baptism seems to be unwarrantable. Our Lord never baptized anyone, so far as we can learn from Scripture. Where is it said that He baptized Peter? Moreover, if baptism were meant, the past tense would have been used: “If I had not washed you, you would have no part in Me.” The washing here spoken of is something far above baptism.  
  
9.--[*Simon Peter said, etc.*] The exclamation of Peter in this verse is highly characteristic of the man. Impulsive, excitable, zealous, ardent, with more love than knowledge and more feeling than spiritual discernment, he is horrified at the very idea of “having no part in Christ.” Anything rather than that! Not seeing clearly the deep meaning of His Master’s words, and still sticking to a carnal, literal interpretation of the word “washing,” he cries out that his Master may wash him all over, hands and head as well as feet, if an interest in Christ depends on that.  Great zeal and love are perfectly consistent with great spiritual ignorance and dulness, and great slowness to comprehend spiritual truth.  Rollock remarks that Peter erred as much in one extreme now as he had erred before in another.  
  
Stier remarks that the passionate, strong expression of Peter in this verse is just the language of a warm-hearted but dull-minded disciple just beginning to understand, as if light had suddenly flashed on him.

10.--[*Jesus said to him, He who is washed, etc.*] This sentence of our Lord’s conveys a latent rebuke of Peter’s spiritual dulness. It is as though Jesus said, “The washing of head and hands of which you speak is not needed. Even assuming that a literal washing is all I meant in saying, ‘If I wash you not,’ it is well known that he who is washed needs only to wash his feet after a journey, and is accounted clean entirely after such a partial washing. But this is far more true of the washing of pardon and justification. He who is pardoned and justified by Me is entirely washed from all his sins and only needs the daily forgiveness of the daily defilement he contracts in traveling through a sinful world. Once washed, justified, and accepted by Me, ye are clean before God—although not all of you. There is one painful exception.”  
  
The great practical truth contained in this sentence ought to be carefully noted and treasured up by all believers. Once joined to Christ and cleansed in His blood, they are completely absolved and free from all spot of guilt and are counted without blame before God. But for all this, they need every day, as they walk through this world, to confess their daily failures and to sue for daily pardon. They require, in short, a daily washing of their feet over and above the great washing of justification, which is theirs the moment they first believe. He who neglects this daily washing is a very questionable and doubtful kind of Christian. Luther remarks pithily, “The devil allows no Christian to reach heaven with clean feet all the way.”

“Every whit,” in this verse, means literally “the whole man.” The deep mine of meaning that often lies under the surface of our Lord’s language is strikingly exemplified in this verse, as well as in the seventh and eighth. There is far more in many of His sayings, we may believe, than has ever yet been discovered.  
  
It is striking to observe that even of His poor, weak, erring disciples, Jesus says “Ye are clean.” Bullinger observes that the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses,” are a daily confession of the very thing here mentioned—the need of daily washing of our feet. Casaubon remarks that those who come out of a bath, as a matter of constant experience, only need to wash their feet which, stepping on the ground as they come out, must needs contract some defilement. In eastern countries where bathing was very common, all could see the force of this.  Hengstenberg remarks that “the expression ‘but not all’ was intended to pierce the conscience of Judas, whom the Redeemer did not give up until the last good impulse died within him.”  
  
The common idea that the “washing” here spoken of refers to the baptism, seems to me quite untenable. He who is washed must mean only “washed in a spiritual sense from his sins;” as Psalm 51:4. Hengstenberg’s discussion of the point is worth reading.  
  
Burgon observes, “The traitor, Judas, though washed by the hands of Christ Himself, was filthy still.”  
  
11.--[*For he knew who should betray him, etc.*] Our Lord’s perfect foreknowledge of His sufferings and the manner of them, and His thorough discernment of the real characters of all His disciples, are alike shown in this verse. He did not suffer because he did not foresee it and was taken by surprise. He walked up to death knowing every step he was about to tread.  
  
The sentence is an example of the explanatory glosses which are so characteristic of St. John’s Gospel.  
  
The Greek words rendered “who should betray Him” are literally, “the person betraying Him,” in the past participle.  
  
12.--[*So after...feet.*] After the conversation between our Lord and Peter, the washing seems to have gone on without interruption. The disciples were accustomed to see their Master do things they did not understand, and they submitted in silence.  
  
[*And had taken...sat down again.*] This refers to His putting on again the long loose outer robe, which was laid aside on performing any action requiring exertion in the East. Then our Lord took His place once more at the table and commenced a discourse that seems to have ushered in the Lord’s Supper. Whether the washing of the feet was meant, among other things, to teach the need of special preparation for that blessed ordinance, is an interesting thought and worth consideration. It certainly seems our Lord’s last *action* before He gave the bread and wine.

[*He said, Do ye know what I have done to you?*] This question was meant to stir up in the disciples’ minds inquiry as to the meaning of what they had just seen. Understanding and intelligent perception of all we do in religion should be sought after and valued by all true Christians. There is no real religion in blind devotion. “What do I mean by this service?” should be the question often impressed on our minds.

13.--[*Ye call me Master and Lord.*] These words would be more literally rendered, “Ye call Me, or speak of Me, as the Master and the Lord.” The expression seems to show that this was the habitual language of the disciples while our Lord was on earth. So Martha says to Mary, “The Master is come” (John 11:28).

[*Ye say well, for so I am.*] The word “so” is not in the Greek. It is simply, “for I am.” The expression is a beautiful warrant for applying to Jesus especially the appellation “the Lord.” He has Himself endorsed it by the words “Ye say well.”  
  
14.--[*If I then, your Lord, etc.*] The argument of this verse is one which our Lord very frequently uses: “If I do a thing, much more ought ye to do it.” Literally rendered the meaning is, “If I, the Person whom ye speak of as ‘the Lord’ and ‘the Master,’ have washed your feet and condescended to perform the most menial act of attention to you, ye also ought to feel it a duty to do acts of the same kind for one another—acts as condescending as washing one another’s feet.” The words “Your Lord and Master” in the Greek are literally “The Lord and the Master.” “Ye ought” is a very strong expression. It is tantamount to saying, “It is your duty and debt—ye are under an obligation to do it.” Paley in Evidences, p. 2, ch. 4, has a remarkable passage showing the close affinity between our Lord’s conduct here and His conduct when taking a little child and putting him in the midst of the disciples. In both he taught humility, that rare grace, by action.  
  
15.--[*For I have given you an example, etc.*] “I have, in my own person, given you a pattern of what your own conduct should be. The duty I want you to learn is of such vast importance that I have not left it to a general precept but have given you an example of my meaning.” Of course, the question at once rises, What did our Lord really mean? Did he mean that we all ought literally to do the very same thing that He did?  Or did he only mean that we are to imitate the spirit of this action?  The Church of Rome, it is well known, puts a literal sense on our Lord’s language. Once every year, about Easter, the head of the Romish Church publicly washes the feet of certain poor persons got ready for the occasion. The absurdity, to say the least, of this view is evident on a moment’s reflection.  
  
It seems absurd to take our Lord’s words literally and to suppose that the Pope’s literal washing of a few feet at Easter can supersede the duty of all Christians to do the same. Yet it is only fair to remember that the Moravians to this day take a literal view of those words and have a custom called “pedilavium.”  
  
It is, in any case, absurd to suppose that our Lord would require His disciples to perform a duty which the young and the feeble would be physically unable to do. It is inconsistent with the general tenor of our Lord’s teaching to suppose that He would ever attach so much importance to a mere bodily action.  “Bodily exercise profits little” (1 Tim. 4:8). A formal performance of bodily acts of religion is just the easiest thing that can be imposed on people. The thing that is really hard, and yet always required, is the service of the heart.

The true interpretation of the two verses is that which places a spiritual sense on our Lord’s words. It is a practical illustration of Matthew 20:26-28. **He wished to teach His disciples that they ought to be willing to wait on one another, serve one another, minister to one another even in the least and lowest things. They should think nothing too low, or humble, or menial to undertake if they can show love, kindness, and condescension to another. If He, the King of kings, condescended to leave heaven to save souls and dwell 31 years in this sin-defiled world, there is nothing that we should think too lowly to undertake.**  
  
Pride, because we possess wealth, rank, position, place, education, or high-breeding, is condemned heavily in this passage. He who would shrink from doing the least kindness to the poorest Christian has read these verses to little purpose and does not copy his Master’s example.  One caution only we must remember. Let us not suppose that an ostentatious attention to the poor constitutes the whole of obedience to the law of this passage. It is easy work comparatively to care for the poor. We are to be ready to do the least acts of kindness to our equals quite as much as to the poor. There is nothing about temporal poverty in the passage. The disciples were told their duty to “one another.” This is a very important point. It is much easier and more self-satisfying to play the part and do the work of a Christian to the poor than to our equals.  How entirely the passage overthrows the claim of mere talking, head-learned professors of sound doctrine to be accounted true Christians, it is needless to show. Doctrinal orthodoxy without practical love and humility is utterly worthless before God.  
  
Bullinger remarks how singularly full of Christian truth the passage is which ends at this verse. That we are washed clean from all sins by Christ our Savior, that although washed the remainder of infirmity sticks to us and obliges us to wash our feet daily, that the duty of a disciple is to make Christ his example in all things—these three great lessons stand forth most prominently.  
  
Gurnall observes, “The master here does not only rule the scholar’s book for him, but writes him a copy with his own hand.”