

LESSON 8



THE ORDINANCE OF FEET WASHING

Scripture Texts: John 13:3-17; Romans 12:10; 1 Timothy 5:10

Today we study into the second of three ordinances, that of Feet Washing. Christ ordained it for the New Testament church. Christ practiced it and commanded each member of His church to do it. Jesus loves His own and humbled Himself to prove it. We must love and serve as He did. We must put our brother before ourselves. Feet washing is a symbol of this love and humility. Only God can fit us to wash feet with a right attitude. Let us see what the Bible has to say about this second ordinance of God's house.

MEMORY VERSE: *If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.* *John 13:14*

Ordained by Christ

John 13:3-5 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands . . . come from God, and went to God—His beginning and future positions were the highest. All power was His. He was about to give His disciples a **new commandment** (verse 34). The account of His acts are given in detail. He **laid aside his garments . . . took a towel . . . poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet**—He took the place of a servant. The Highest stooped to the lowest.

John 13:6-11 Peter objected to Christ washing his feet. Peter objected because he did not understand Christ's purpose. Christ promised to explain later. **Peter saith . . . Jesus answered him . . . thou hast no part with me.** Christ told Peter the seriousness of his refusal. By this Jesus made a test of fellowship of this act of refusal. Peter's response was to immediately submit to the will of Christ. **Jesus saith . . . is clean every whit . . .** Christ explained that this act was not for a cleansing of dirt from their feet because they were already clean. It was customary for all who attended the Feast of the Passover to go through a cleansing process before leaving home.

Jesus Practiced and Commanded It

John 13:12 **Know ye what I have done to you?** His action was not a customary one. The Lord had washed the servants' feet; this required explanation. He now began to explain as He promised.

John 13:13-15 **Master and Lord . . . so I am**—Jesus claimed His true position. **If I . . . have washed your feet**—if He stooped so far—**ye also ought too wash one another's feet**—our stooping is nothing compared to His. This is His command to us. **I have given you an example**—an example is an act to be followed—**that ye should do as I have done to you**—very clear language, very difficult to be misunderstood.

John 13:16-17 **Servant is not greater than his lord.** Jesus is the Lord, or master. The disciples—all humans—are servants. **Neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.** We are servants and we are not greater than our Lord. We are not to be above doing as He commanded us. If Christ stooped, so must we. If He served, so must we. If Christ humbled Himself before His people, so must we. He taught here the meaning of the ordinance. **If ye know these things**—we know them, because He told us by Word and example—**happy are ye if ye do them.** A spiritual

blessing comes from obeying this command.

A Test of Humility

Romans 12:10 Our feelings toward one another are to be kind, **with brotherly love**—something more than the world calls love, of a different quality, the love of God—**in honour preferring one another**—from the heart desiring the other to be honored above one's self. These are Christlike qualities, the fruit of salvation. They fit one to take part in feet washing. Only God can give them. Feet washing symbolizes, or represents:

- (1) Jesus' great love for man
- (2) His humility in stooping to serve His people
- (3) the love of God in us
- (4) the spirit of humility in us to serve our brethren
- (5) the unity of the church.

The ordinance teaches these truths. It testifies that the participant believes and possesses them. It does not produce these qualities. It does not save.

The Practice of the Church

1 Timothy 5:10 Here Paul makes it plain that before a widow would be taken care of by the church she must, among other things, . . . **have washed the saints' feet**—a test of fellowship then that has never changed. Paul's attitude was God's attitude. The standard for widows is the standard for all.

At the time of giving this Christ impressed the fact of His divine Lordship and thus His right to give such a command. It was given at the same time and in the same place as the Lord's Supper. As in baptism Jesus set the example, so there can be no dispute as to what He desires done. It is a test of humility. Feet washing does not symbolize acts of charity toward the needy. Such acts are truly a part of Christian life, but are not within the meaning of feet washing, which typifies the relation of saints to saints, not to the needy. Jesus' act was not an act of charity, for the disciples did not understand it. His explanation was of the meekness, humility, yieldingness, submission, harmony, and love which saints should have toward each other. Nothing else will do. We have no right to substitute something else for any of the Lord's commands.

Who Should Partake?

As in baptism only those who have the spiritual reality in their hearts are fit to observe the ordinance. This can only be saved people. Saints possessing the love of God for the brethren are commanded to wash one another's feet. Feelings of pride, enmity, superiority, jealousy, envy, selfishness, etc., toward the brethren disqualify one to wash feet with them. It is not in man to do it. It takes a changed heart. It takes the love of God. It takes a feet-washing spirit. It is not humiliating to the humble but is a revealer of proud hearts who are unwilling to obey. We wash one another's feet taking our place on one common level.

Manner of Observance

Observance of an ordinance should follow Jesus' example and teaching in all points. The essentials are:

- (1) that each saint wash and wipe the feet of another saint

- (2)** that each have his feet washed and wiped
- (3)** that both feet be washed

To discriminate for or against any would be against the very reason for the ordinance. Outer clothing should be laid aside and a towel girded around the waist as Jesus did. It is proper that the men and women and boys and girls separate for the observance. All should be done with reverence, order, simplicity. If done properly it will make one happy. The sweet Spirit of Jesus Christ, loving, serving, exalting each his brother, blesses, beautifies, and makes fruitful His body, the church.

JUST A THOUGHT

**Is it not strange to what lengths we will go at times
to argue ourselves out of a blessing?**