



FOOT WASHING

Is Foot-Washing A Practice For Today?

FOOT WASHING : Is Foot-Washing A Practice For Today?

John 13:13-15

"You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for {so} I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."

Introduction

READ John 13:5-17

1. In **John 13**, as we study foot washing, many times related facts and occasional practices must be studied and understood.
2. It is our intention in this study to examine the text of scripture to determine if we are to practice the activity of foot-washing today? If we are to continue in foot-washing today, is it to be a church practice or something done individually? What would be the purpose of foot-washing today? When would be the appropriate time to practice it?

I. FOOT-WASHING AND THE PRESENT PRACTICE

A. Many in the religious world practice foot-washing.

1. Listen to the words of the various religions:

"Believers who wash each other's feet show that they share in the body of Christ. They thus acknowledge their frequent need of cleansing, renew their willingness to let go of pride and worldly power, and offer their lives in humble service and sacrificial love."

---Mennonite Confession Of Faith

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with me," Jesus said (Jn 13:8). Footwashing is not a symbolic ritual. It is a command from the Lord that you obey in order to have a part in His life.

God's saving grace doesn't end at baptism. His grace is a life-long gift. In order to participate in this lasting relationship, you need to accept footwashing from the Lord. Like baptism, footwashing is a sacrament: a physical action the Lord commanded His believers to receive that carries the spiritual effect of salvation. Through baptism, the Lord Jesus cleanses us of all our past sins. Through footwashing, He prepares our feet to walk in the path that He has already laid: the way of righteousness that leads to His kingdom.

In following Jesus' command, we also receive the spiritual teaching He conveyed. "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (Jn 13:15-16). Just as our Master washed the feet of sinners, we who follow Him are called to shed the outer shell of our ego, to bend humbly in service, and to share Christ's love with others."

---True Jesus Church Website

2. Some have even stated their directives in foot-washing.
 - The people gather and sit.
 - Someone reads John 13:1-11 and opens with prayer and possibly a short address...
 - Someone leads the group in singing familiar hymns. This goes on for the entire duration of the foot-washing.
 - Each person removes the footgear from one foot. It doesn't matter which foot.
 - The foot-washer places the bowl under the person's bare foot, pours water on the foot, and dries it with the towel.
 - The person replaces their footgear as the foot-washer moves to the next person.
 - The foot-washing continues until everyone's feet have been washed.
 - Someone reads John 13:12-17 and dismisses the people in prayer.

B. While some religions continue to wash the feet of their members, many today stand against it as a sacrament or command

1. Listen to the opposite side speak of foot-washing:

“Jesus said, ‘I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.’ The example He was speaking of was His example of humble service, which had taken the form of washing the feet of His disciples. He was not instituting another act of worship, as He had done with the Lord Supper, but was giving them an object lesson in humility and service. There are frequent New Testament references to the church meeting to partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-30), but there is no biblical reference to the church practicing the washing of feet as worship... It was a simple matter of cleanliness, made necessary by the land in which He lived. As Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, He washed away the dirt to give them an example of humble service to men who just before the supper were arguing about who would be greatest in the kingdom.”

---House to House and Heart to Heart

“Jesus literally startled and shocked the disciples on the occasion when He insisted upon washing their feet (John 13:1-20). It is nearly as surprising to find religious groups today who believe that Jesus was instituting an abiding occurrence—a worship act to be observed ritualistically in the practice of Christianity...”

“Since the disciples of Jesus already were practicing foot washing, Jesus was simply using the cultural custom to teach a spiritual principle. That is why He prefaced His action by noting they would not understand the significance of what He was about to do (John 13:7). That is why, when He finished, He asked, ‘Do you know

what I have done to you?” (vs. 12). Obviously, they knew that He had washed their feet! If He was merely urging them to continue this common practice, they would have understood His injunction instantly. But that was not the point He was attempting to get across to them. He was teaching self-humiliation and forgiveness. We, too, must be humble enough to correct our mistakes and receive the forgiveness that Jesus offers. We must be willing to treat others better than ourselves by serving them and showing concern for the fulfillment of their needs. It would be a simple matter if we could fulfill this edict by ritualistically washing another’s feet. However, Jesus was conveying the fact that the humility and unassuming, servant-attitude that He wants us to display require a far more diligent, consistent dedication of one’s daily behavior.” ---Apologetics Press, Dave Miller

2. We can see the division in the religious world over foot-washing even amongst those who call themselves followers of Christ. What does the Bible say about foot-washing?

II. FOOT-WASHING AND THE BIBLE

A. Foot-washing is a practice that is found throughout the Bible

1. Many tend to believe that what Jesus did with foot-washing was something new, something “instituted” and that it carried some religious significance from that time and into the church of today.
2. Foot-washing was actually a common practice of hospitality and of general cleanliness as a custom of the Jews.
(Gen 18:1-5; 19:1-2; 24:32; Judge 19:18-21; 1 Sam 25: 41)
3. When foot-washing was done by anyone other than a house servant, it was considered an act of humility (See John 13:8)
4. One man expressed some thoughts on early foot-washing in saying:

“In Biblical times shoes were made from animal skins, and these were difficult to clean. This may explain why shoes came to represent to the agricultural societies of the Old Testament, all that was unclean. The emblems of filth were left outside homes and *were* considered quite unsuitable for holy places. Feet encased in footwear *were* required to be purified and this responsibility usually fell to the lowest house servant. Baring feet signified the status of an honored guest. Washing feet put them at ease and comfort, and kept the floors, clean. Foot washing was viewed as an honor or service and became a common Jewish custom and at formal banquets. This took place either on arrival or before the feast.”

5. To fail to provide water for the feet was a failure to be hospitable and follow the general custom. **(See Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8)**
6. One man explained:
“From a natural standpoint, the washing of feet is perhaps not the most glorious activity in which we might engage. Considering some of the imperfections which each of us continues to have, it would take a large measure of love and humility to exert ourselves in striving to serve our brethren. We are not to allow differences along one line or another to hinder us from seeking to do good unto all that we have opportunity, especially the household of faith.”
(Gal. 6:10)

B. Some foot-washing had a ritualistic/ceremonial usage for spiritual services

1. The feet were to be clean before entering into service before God during the Old Testament services in the temple and other holy places.
(Exodus 30:17-21; See also Lev. 14:14-28)
2. The disciples needed to remember that the kingdom (church) of the Lord would not be a ritualistic, ceremonial body, but rather a group of saints that are striving to keep a clean conscience through the spiritual service of worship to God each day.
(Rom. 12:1-2; 14:17-18)
3. We should prepare ourselves to be humble servants to others as we strive to meet their needs through love, service, and hospitality.
4. It is obvious from the text, where Jesus washes the disciple’s feet, that the foot-washing had no purpose in spiritual cleansing and simply demonstrated humility and love for them.
(See John 13:5-12)
5. Some try to attach some special significance to the passage where Peter was told if Jesus did not wash him he had no part of Christ.
6. Peter asked Jesus to wash both his head, hands and feet, to which Jesus replied, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all {of you.}”
(John 13:10)
7. The point is that this was not to serve some purpose like that of baptism **(Acts 2:38; 22:16)** nor did it have anything to do with some instituting of a command for the church to follow.

C. Not all Jewish customs and practices are bound on us, today, in the NT

1. It must be mentioned that some of Jesus’ instructions are only for the people that He was speaking with at the time the teaching was given. **(See Luke 10:3-7, Take note of verse 11 for our study)**

2. While we might glean some spiritual applications for our lives from these teachings on foot-washing, to obey the exact teaching in the text would not apply to our spirituality, or what the Lord wills for us to do in meeting the needs of others through service in our day and time.
3. Even when the Lord gave the instructions to wash one another's feet as He had done to his disciples, it was based on moral grounds instead of a positive command. The Lord gave us an example.
4. The lesson here is that "the disciple is not above his master", and yet we need to serve all mankind **(See Matt. 10:24)**
5. Since the disciples were unwilling to condescend to a point of servitude, Jesus saw this moment as a chance to teach them by an example of total humility. The Lord and Master served others!
6. We also note that this is not the institution of a new church ordinance or sacrament. Since the Lord had expected the disciples to serve their Master, there must have been some existing principles in this era for the Lord to draw his "ought to wash" teaching from.
7. The text says, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you", showing that when the opportunity presents itself we ought to serve others. **(See Phil. 2:5-13)**
8. When Peter questioned Jesus about washing his feet, it is obvious that he recognized the Lordship of Jesus and could not allow the Master to wash the feet of a disciple. Jesus told Him that what was happening he would not understand at that time, but he would understand it later. **(See I Peter 3:8-12; 5:5-6)**
9. We who are disciples today ought to learn to serve out of a humble heart and through the example of our serving Lord, Jesus.

III. FOOT-WASHING AND THE CUSTOMS OF THE JEWS

A. The Jews would regularly wash the feet of guests as a custom

1. Bergstresser says in his discussion on foot-washing:
 "The sandal was at first a flat piece of wood or leather, suited to the sole of the foot, and bound upon it by straps or strings. The fastening was called a latchet. Christ and His disciples wore sandals. John the Baptist says of Christ, "Whose shoe's latchet I am unworthy to unloose" **(John 1:27; See also Mark 6:7-9)**
2. He continues, "The sandal was easily stripped off, and it afforded no protection from the dust and dirt. Sandals were never worn in the house, as it was considered a violation of good manners. The necessity of washing the feet, therefore, after every walk, is obvious, and it was the first token of hospitality to supply water for this purpose"



Above is a picture of a sandal from the time of Jesus and His disciples

B. The background of the custom of foot-washing

1. When you entered a house and generally before a meal the feet were washed as a custom (**Luke 7:44; Judges 19:21**)
2. This was the act of a servant or handmaid in the house visited (**I Sam. 25:41; See also Mark 1:7**)
3. Bergstreser had this to say about the custom of foot-washing:
“It is well known that the Holy Scriptures were written in the east, and they have come to us in all their primitive, native simplicity; so that they, although translated, carry with them, more or less, the nature and style of the languages then spoken: and many of the expressions have reference to the climate varying from ours; customs and manners of a people differing greatly from us. To have then a correct view of feet-washing, we must, (1) be made acquainted with the facts that the climate in that country is warm; that it rarely rains during the summer, which lasts six months; and hence the roads become very dry and dusty; that there is no spring or fall, and that during the remainder of the year it mostly rains, which is their winter. (2) That the shoes worn are sandals, or soles without uppers, tied to the feet, and these are worn without stockings. Thus, then, we can readily imagine the state and condition of the feet under such usage.”



Feet were highly exposed to dirt and other defilements

4. Foot-washing is then a custom that if it were practiced today, would not be done because of Divine ordinance or with reference to

religion, but rather as an act of service from a humble heart to those who would ever have that specific need (See I Tim. 5:10).

5. At the Passover meal, Jesus waited until all of the disciples were reclining at the table, and when the food was served up, since no disciple could bring himself to wash the feet of those gathered, as was the custom, Jesus, their Lord, girded Himself and washed their feet. The servants of the Lord were to be proudful in wanting to be the greatest, so the Greatest put away pride to be their servant. Jesus taught the disciples humble service.



This picture shows Jesus kneeling before the disciples to wash their feet.

Conclusion

1. Due to the teachings that regard foot-washing as a church sacrament or religious ordinance, many have missed the point of humble service taught by the Lord to His disciples.
2. One concern that we must have is that as we stand against the binding of foot-washing, that we make sure to find ways to be humble servants to all mankind, especially those of the household of faith.
3. May we all learn to put away pride and avoid thinking too highly of ourselves so that we can serve one another (See Gal. 5:13-21).

4. We may never have the chance to wash the feet of Jesus, but Jesus said that when we serve others, we actually serve Him. (Matt. 25:34-40)

QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways that we can fulfill the instruction to serve others in humility?
2. Do you think that the disciples of the Lord today have gone from one extreme of service to the other when dealing with this passage? In other words, have we avoided the subject of this passage due to the understanding that it doesn't apply to us specifically?
3. How many lessons and Bible studies have you heard on this subject before? Why do you think that is?
4. Would you have been more like Peter or like the rest of the disciples in your response to Jesus girding Himself and stooping down to wash your feet?
5. How do you think our culture determines our attitudes toward service? What about humility?
6. Name one way in which you feel it would be helpful for others to serve you? What way do you feel you need to improve so that you can serve others and meet their needs?