

Washing One Another's Feet

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the significance of foot washing as depicted in John 13:2-17, where Jesus humbly washes His disciples' feet, emphasizing the call to serve one another selflessly. The act of foot washing symbolizes humility, servanthood, and the importance of setting aside pride and position to care for others. While foot washing may not be a common practice today, the essence of the lesson lies in sacrificially meeting the needs of fellow believers and serving with a humble heart, following Christ's example of selfless service.

Scripture: John 13:14, John 13:16, John 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5, Philippians 2:3, Galatians 5:13, Mark 10:45, Romans 12:10, 1 John 3:16

Topics: "Humility", "Selfless Service"

Description

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Transcript

And I want you to biblically try to discern this, try to answer this. This first question was submitted, and then the sister who submitted it retracted it. And I actually thought that it was a good question, so I'm going to go ahead and answer it.

She asked, in the Pentecostal church that I grew up in, they used to do foot washing. I believe this was based on John 13, 13. So let's all turn there.

The question has to do with foot washing, John 13, 13. John 13, 13 is the text that she references, but there's a broader context here. Let's look at verse 2. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

He laid aside his outer garments. So here it is. Jesus lays aside his outer garments.

He takes them off. He takes a towel. He ties it around his waist.

Then he poured water into a basin, and he began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. It came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, what I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet.

Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus said to him, the one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean, and you are clean, but not every one of you.

For he knew who was to betray him. That was why he said, not all of you are clean. When he washed their feet, he put on his outer garments, and he resumed his place.

He said to them, do you understand what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example that you also should do, just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Now, this is well worth looking at, especially verse 17. Look, if God pronounces a blessing, if the Son of God pronounces a blessing, then it definitely behooves us to be involved in it, to do it, to make sure we know what it is that He's talking about.

And what's happening here? Well, what He says is this. Verse 14 and 15, they're the two verses with the thrust, with the weight. If I, then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

So what you have is you have groups like the Pentecostal Church. There's different groups. You have different churches in different places at different times that they involve themselves in foot washing.

So the sister asked this. Do you think this is something that should be done? Or would you say that we can apply this verse to any way that we serve one another? Now, I just want you to think about foot washing for a second. The thing is, in the day when our Lord lived, foot washing was something that was done.

It was done in the culture, not just in Christianity. In fact, up until this, there's really no evidence that washing feet happened among the people of God, one doing it to another. But what we do know is that it happened.

It was common. It was part of the culture in that day. Why? Because the roads were typically not paved.

They were typically dusty. People walked where there was dirt. The common footwear was some sort of sandal, barefooted or some sort of open sandal.

And so when people arrived at their destinations, their feet were dirty. It was a common practice for people to wash their feet. I think that the bride in the Song of Solomon, actually in Song of Solomon chapter 5, I believe that when the groom comes for her, he comes to her and calls her that one of the reasons she doesn't get up is because she's already in bed and her feet are washed.

Isn't that right? I mean, I haven't looked at that. But if my memory serves me right, I believe that that's the case. Yeah, that's right.

Yeah, I remember that. And my point is that it was a part of the culture in that time. And so the thing is this, that if we were washing one another's feet today, it's not really, it would be more of a symbolic gesture than something that was really practically needed.

I mean, look, the reality is if you wanted me to take my shoes and my socks off at church and you wanted to wash my feet, it would simply be a gesture. It really would not be something that was practical. And so I think what we want to think about here is that when Jesus specifically says that just as He has done, you also should do just as I have done to you.

And to say that, look, a servant's not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Basically, He says in 14, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

Now, somebody could say, well, it's plain as day. It's plain as the nose on your face. Well, I think that that is Jesus teaching that basically is saying this.

The point of Jesus washing their feet is that Jesus is basically saying to us, He's saying that no matter what position we have, no matter how high we might be, no matter how rich we might be, no matter how wealthy, how much success, how much power, how much notoriety, what kind of name we may have for ourselves, how much of a position we might have in the church, that He's wanting to send the message to them that would basically lead them all in a position where none of them would ever be able to say, well, that's beneath me. There's what Jesus is doing is giving us an example that none of us can ever look at any way of serving one another where we would say, well, you know, I'm too high for that. I'm too great for that.

Never can we get to a place where we would look at anything and say, you know, that, like I said, that's beneath me. I'm not going to do that because of my position. Don't you know who I am? That's what Jesus is wanting to remove in that.

I mean, serving one another is the teaching here. What this is saying is Christian, go low. You know that Jesus teaches in other places that the greatest in the kingdom, those are going to be the ones who are the least.

And you think about what the foot washing meant, the foot washing, especially in a Jewish society, you think about the feet, the feet, if the feet were coming in contact with the road. Look, I've been in third world countries and you look at, there's chickens running around. Some places there's pigs running around.

There's dogs running around. If there's, I mean, when you're out in the streets, there's, I can remember walking around in places in India, I mean, your shoes stink. When, if there's anything that's likely to come in contact with something unclean, as far as the Jewish culture goes, it's the feet.

The feet, when you walk barefoot or you, even if you've trounced around for a long time and your feet are sweaty, if there's anything that's dirty and smelly, you know, in various societies, you have to be careful. I mean, I've traveled a lot of countries in the world. And one of the things that you want to find out about is what is offensive, like even coming here, you know, basically giving the peace sign like I might do in the United States.

I understand if I do it exactly the right way, it's extremely offensive here. But you know, in lots of Muslim countries, if you point your feet at people, like you may remember years ago, somebody in a Muslim country threw their shoe at our President Bush and there's, anyway, the fact is, if it's an insult to point your feet at people, Peter recognizes this. This is why Peter is just repulsed at the thought of this.

He does not, listen, what you have to recognize about Peter, even though he's constantly putting his foot in his mouth, he loved the Lord and he wanted to honor the Lord. That's why he reacts. That's why he's unwilling to subject Jesus to such a demeaning task and to such dishonor.

And of course, what Jesus is saying, I think there's a bigger picture here. I think this actually is pointing to the cross itself. It's like, Peter, unless you let me bear your dishonor and your uncleanness, you can't be my disciple.

And so basically what we see here is the opposite of the world. And so I think that the thing is, in this day, foot washing was something that they did. It's something that culturally, it was part of cleanliness.

I remember James Jennings, he did a biographical sketch on a man, I don't remember exactly who it was, it's on the tip of my tongue. It was an Englishman and he was a very godly man. And what he did was whenever anybody stayed at his home, he polished their shoes or their boots.

And he served people like that his whole life. But see, that was practical because that was something that was done in his day. I think when we do the foot washing thing, we're basically, we're kind of missing the point if we perpetuate the foot washing.

I think what we want to look at is what are real ways that people have needs today, that we can meet those needs. You know what's interesting? After John 13, you never find Christians washing each other's feet ever again. But you know what you do find? You find Christians selling their land to make sure that their brothers and sisters are provided for.

You find very poor Macedonian Christians, you remember that in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9, where you've got these Macedonians who they were in affliction and great poverty. And they gave beyond their means, Paul said. You see, that's the kind of thing we find.

We find that people were giving of themselves in whatever ways were necessary. And you remember Ananias and Sapphira, they tried to copy that. I think it was Barnabas who was so applauded by his sacrificial giving.

And Ananias and Sapphira wanted to jump on board the applause. And they promised the proceeds from the land and then they held back part of it. But if you look, the sacrifices that tend to be made after John 13, not a single one of them do we ever find foot washing again.

But you find the brethren sacrificing for each other in lots of different ways. And we're all wired different. So the thing that I would really encourage everybody is use your gifts.

Some people are real encouragers. Some people are real prayer warriors. Some people are very giving.

I would say whatever way that your gifts shine most, you want to lay down your life to use those gifts for the common good and for the sake of each other. We want to be really mindful to meet the needs. And we want to be mindful of Jesus.

You think about it. There's no higher king than Christ. And yet, look what he did.

He did the most menial task, a task that a slave would do. He did. And he said, you're not greater than me.

And so if it wasn't beneath Christ to wash feet, then it wouldn't be beneath us to wash toilets at the church building or to mop the floor or to do what's necessary. Anyway, I think we want to see that example of the Lord Jesus for what it is. Amen.

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