

Mutual Refreshing

by Watchman Nee

Watchman Nee emphasizes the importance of mutual refreshment among believers to restore spiritual clarity and connection with God.

Scripture: John 13:14

Topics: "Spiritual Refreshment", "Mutual Encouragement"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the importance of mutual refreshment among believers, drawing from the example of Jesus washing His disciples' feet in John 13. He explains that while sin requires repentance, the daily 'dust' we accumulate from the world necessitates mutual support and encouragement to restore our spiritual freshness. Nee encourages Christians to actively minister to one another, highlighting that this refreshing is a shared responsibility and essential for maintaining a vibrant relationship with God. He concludes that through this mutual ministry, believers can combat the weariness of the world and experience the joy of divine communion.

Transcript

In John's Gospel there is recorded an event which only he has preserved for us. It is an event full of divine meaning and one which greatly helps to illumine for us this problem of living in the world. I refer to the incident in Chapter 13 in which our Lord Jesus girds himself with a towel, and taking a basin, washes his disciples' feet. This action of Jesus has lessons to teach us which I do not propose to go into fully here. Instead I want us to look in particular at his command which follows it. "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should also do as I have done to you.... If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them" (verses 14-17). What is this mutual feet washing? What does it mean that I should wash my brother's feet and that my feet should be washed by my brother?

The aspect of truth specially emphasized here is refreshment. As we shall shortly see, it is something very dear to the Lord that we as his children should learn to minister refreshment to our brethren, and that they in turn should be a means of refreshment to our spirits.

Let me say at once that this passage does not concern sins. Whether I go barefoot or wearing sandals, or even shoes, the dust that gathers on my feet is something inevitable. I cannot avoid it. But for me to have a fall, and having fallen to roll in the dust so that it collects on my body and on my clothes-that is not inevitable; it is altogether wrong! I have to walk from one place to another, but it is quite unnecessary for me to roll along the street in order to get there. I can do so without floundering in the mud!

Equally in the Christian life, to stumble and fall and then to flounder in the dust is sin, certainly. It calls for repentance and it needs God's forgiveness. For it is not necessary for me to walk with the Lord like that, hiding behind the excuse that "I must fall once in a while; it is inevitable!" That, we all agree, is wrong.

But the point about the dust on our feet is this, that in walking through the world, no matter who we are or how careful we may be, it is inevitable table that our feet will collect something. Of course if we do not touch the earth at all, we certainly pick up nothing, but to achieve this we should have to be carried around. If we do touch the ground-and who seriously expects not to?-we are certain to pick up what is there. Even our Lord Jesus rebuked his host with the words: "Thou gayest me no water for my feet" (Luke 7:44). So please remember that the mutual washing in John 13 is not concerned with sins committed, for which there is always forgiveness through the Blood, but from which anyway God intends that we should be delivered. No, it is concerned rather with our daily walk through the world, during which it is unavoidable that we shall contract something. "Ye are clean," Jesus says. The precious Blood sees to that. "He that is bathed needeth not ..." and as far as sin is concerned the sentence might end there. But move about in Satan's kingdom and something certainly clings to us. Like a film upon us it comes between us and our Lord. This is inescapable, simply because we are touching the world's things all the time, its business and its pleasures, its corrupt scale of values and its whole ungodly outlook. Hence the words with which Jesus concludes: "... save to wash his feet."

So let us come now to the practical outworking of this. Some of you brothers and sisters in Christ have to go out to work in offices or shops for, say, seven or eight hours a day. It is not wrong that you do so. It is not sin to work in a shop or a factory. But when you come home from your place of employment, do you not find yourself tired and dispirited and out of tune with things? You meet a brother, but you cannot slip easily and directly into speaking with him of divine things. It is as though there were a coating of something contaminating you. I repeat: that is not necessarily sin at all; it is just that your contact with the world has deposited upon you that film of tarnish. You cannot help feeling it, for there seems to be an inability to rise up to the Lord at once. The luminous touch which you had with him in the morning seems to-have been darkened; its freshness has gone from you. We all know that experience.

Or again, some of our sisters have to attend to domestic duties. Let us suppose a young mother is preparing dinner and has something cooking on the stove. All at once the baby cries, the door bell rings, the milk boils over-everything comes upon her together in a rush. She runs to one and misses the other! After everything is eventually settled she sits down, and it seems as if she needs a power to lift her up to God again. She is conscious of something there-not sin, but as it were a deposit of dust over everything. It clings like a film, coming between her and her Lord, and she feels tarnished, soiled. There is not that clear way which takes her through to God at once. This I think illustrates for us the need of feet washing.

Many a time we are tired and jaded by our secular duties. When we get down to pray, we find we have to wait for awhile. It seems to take us ten or twenty minutes to come back to that place where we can really get through to God. Or we sit down to read the Word, we find it requires a determined effort to restore again that openness to his speaking. But how good it is if on the road home we meet a brother with an overflowing heart, fresh from communion with God! Without meaning to do anything he just spontaneously shakes our hand and says, "Brother, praise the Lord!" He may not know it, but somehow it is as if he has come with a duster and wiped everything clean. Immediately we feel that our touch with God has been restored.

Sometimes you may come into a prayer meeting with a heavy spirit, through the effect of your work during the day. Someone may pray, and you still feel the same; and another prays, and there is no difference. But then another brother or sister prays, and somehow you immediately feel the lifting power. You are refreshed; your feet have been washed. What, then, does washing mean? It means to restore to the original freshness. It means to bring things back to a point of such clearness that it is once again as though they came out of God's immediate presence, new from his hand.

I do not know how many times I personally have felt low like that, when it was not exactly sin that was troubling, but that feeling of a coating of the world's dust; and then I have met a brother or a sister, one who may have known nothing at all of my condition, but who has just passed on a remark that has brightened everything. When this happens you simply feel all the darkness gone, the film swept away. Praise God, you are refreshed and put back at once into the condition where you can directly enjoy touch with him again. That is footwashing to refresh my brethren in Christ; to bring a brother again to the place where it is as though he had just come out from the very presence of God. It is this ministry to one another that the Lord desires to see among his children.

If we are walking with God there is not a day when we may not, if we wish, be a refreshment to our brethren. This is one of the greatest ministries. It may be no more than a handshake. It may be a word of encouragement almost casually spoken. It may be just the light of heaven on our faces. But if the Lord has got his way with us and we are in the state of having no cloud between ourselves and him, we shall find that we are quietly being used. We may not know it, for it is better not to seek to know it—indeed it may be better never to know it. But whether we know it or not, we are constantly being used to refresh our brother. When he is low and in darkness, when he has a burden on his heart or a film before his eyes, when he has been tarnished and stained, then to us he will come. He may not stay long, perhaps only for a few minutes. Seek for that ministry. Find grace from God to help him. Often we think it would be good if we could give long sermons that command a wide hearing, but few have that gift, and many are not reached by those few who have. To refresh the hearts of the saints is the kind of ministry which everyone can fulfill and which can reach everywhere. In the valuation of God it is without price.

But to serve others in this way we must fulfill the conditions. If we are really going on with the Lord there is of course no question that we shall be used, for there are no limitations with him. If we ourselves are untarnished, with hearts brimming with his joy and peace, there is bound to be an overflow. So the simple question I put to you is this: Is there any point of controversy between you and God? I refer of course to real, known issues. If there is nothing special, then there is no need for you to search around to find something; the Lord himself will always discover it. When he wants to bring to light something you are overlooking, he will always point his finger there, and you will know it. There is no need for you to turn your eyes within and by checking up and analyzing every feeling to try to dig it out. Just praise him! It is the Lord's business, not yours, to shine into your heart and show you when you are astray from him.

But one thing is certain. If you do have a controversy with God, you can only tarnish others. You can never wash their feet. When they are low, you will bring them lower. When they feel heavy, you will come to them and make them heavier still. Instead of refreshing them and restoring to them the newness that comes out from God, you can only plunge them into deeper gloom. To be at odds with God is the sure way to be a drain upon the life of his Church, whereas the greatest manifestation of power is, I believe, to be able constantly to refresh others. It is a priceless thing, that touch of heaven that lifts, cleanses, renews.

"Ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Of all his commandments to his disciples this is-and I use the expression in its purest sense-the most dramatic. To impress on them its importance he himself acted it out before them. It was an expression of his love for "his own which were in the world" (verse 1). He set himself to show his disciples what he meant by ministry. It is not platform work. It is serving one another with a basin and a towel. There will always be a need of restoring people who have fallen, of bringing back to repentance the weak ones who have sinned; but the greatest need of the saints today is of refreshment, by which I mean recalling them afresh to what is original and of God. That is power. Jesus himself "came forth from God" (verse 3) to do this. I do not know how it strikes you, but I think there is no greater power for God than to be fresh from him before the world. Do you not find it to be the greatest manifestation of the power of divine life? In a world system darkened with the smoke of the pit, how we rejoice to meet saints who are fresh with the clean air of heaven. Such freshness brings anew to you and me the divine breath of life.

I thank the Lord that in my younger days I had the great privilege of knowing one of the rarest of saints. I knew her for many years, and found her to have many spiritual qualities; but I think the thing that impressed me above them all was the sense of God. You could not for long sit in her presence, or even walk into her room and have a handshake, without feeling a sense of God coming over you. You did not know why, but you felt it. I was not the only one who felt this. Everyone who had touch with her gave the same testimony. I have to confess that in those days many a time I was feeling downhearted, and it seemed as though everything had gone wrong. I walked into her room, and immediately I felt rebuked. Immediately I felt I was face to face with God, I was refreshed.

Why should this thing happen, this immediate restoration? Surely not because it is just the ministry of a privileged few. The Lord would like every single one of us to be like that, to impart that power to brighten our brothers and sisters when they have become tarnished. Please remember-dare I say this?-that sometimes being tarnished does more to hurt the impact of the Christian's life upon the world than do his actual, conscious sins. Once in a while we may sin, any of us, but because we are sensitive to that, we know at once that we have done so and will seek and find forgiveness. But many a time we have been tarnished for hours with the world's tarnish, and because it is not actual sin we remain unconcerned. Then it is that our impact for God upon the world becomes blunted. How good it is at such a time to have around a brother or sister through whom we are lifted once more to a renewed communion with God!

What, then, are the rules? They are two. First, as we have seen, there must be no known discord between me and my Lord that is not at once cleared up; for if there is, that effectively puts me out of this ministry altogether. Whatever the matter be, it is to be settled at once or I am useless. Far from being an asset to the Church of God I have become only a burden. I can contribute nothing; I can only add to the debit side of the life of his children. In order to be a contributor, there must be a transparent clearness between me and God on every conscious issue. Then, free of such disharmony, I too may be the means of lifting my brethren back to their place of power against the world.

Secondly-and to avoid misunderstanding this needs stating plainly: please remember that this refreshing is mutual. "Wash one another's feet," Jesus said. The refresher must expect also to be refreshed by others. Many a time the Lord may use you, but equally, many a time he may use someone else to refresh you. There exist no chosen few set apart for a spiritual task as "refreshers," just as none of us are absolved from walking through this world and needing therefore to be refreshed. As with Peter, no single one of us is entitled to say of himself: "I have gone beyond that stage. I am now in such touch with God that I am above tarnish, and can pray or preach without the need of such a ministry. Thou shalt never

wash my feet!"

No superior class of brothers exists in the Church that has no need to be refreshed. It is something every servant of God depends on. Employed in a workshop or a kitchen all day, you may well need brightening up; but some of us have been working all day in churches, and we too need to be brightened! Our need of restoration is often just as great, though we may well be lulled into overlooking that fact. Whether we work in any obviously secular sphere or are engaged in so-called spiritual things, the world is all around us, closing in. Ever and anon therefore we need the help of some brother or sister to lift us again to that fresh touch of God, that renewal of divine power.

Thus the principle of the Body is, quite simply, refreshing and being refreshed. The more we go on with the Lord the more we need the brethren. For in this ministry not one of us is insignificant, and not one of us ever reaches the point where he has no need to be ministered to by another. My prayer for myself is that God may once in a while use me to refresh someone else's spirit when it is jaded, and that likewise he may once in a while use someone else to touch my flagging spirit and refresh me. If by that brother the tarnish of the world is wiped off me, so that coming weary I go away renewed, then his has been a ministry of Christ to me.

What I have thus sought to describe in simple terms amounts to a united front against the world. This is no small thing. If we will believe it enough to practice it, it possesses, I am convinced, the power to make Satan's mightiest strongholds tremble. In Jesus' words: "If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/watchman-nee/mutual-refreshing/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net