

# The Doctrine of Footwashing

DOCTRINAL SERIES



## **TRUE JESUS CHURCH**

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# Introduction

The position of the Roman Catholic Church on the number of sacraments is that Christ instituted seven sacraments, namely: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, order, and matrimony. Eastern Christianity, while acknowledging these seven sacraments, also recognizes a wide range of rituals considered sacramental in a broader sense, although they do not view them all with equal importance. They include the anointing of a king; the rite of monastic profession; burial rites; blessing of water on the feast of the Epiphany; and blessings of homes, fields, harvested crops, and artifacts.<sup>1</sup> The Protestant churches in general consider only baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments. None of these major theological views accepts footwashing as a sacrament.

The term "sacrament" is from the Latin translation of the Greek word for "mystery." In the history of Christianity, this word has come to denote the use of material elements as an external sign of spiritual grace. Hence, baptism, for example, is considered a sacrament because our Lord instituted this ceremony in which immersion in water brings about the saving grace of Christ. The Holy Communion (also known as the Lord's Supper and Eucharist), likewise is considered a sacrament because it is ordained by Christ Himself and by partaking of the bread and cup one receives the promised effect of life in Him.

Why is footwashing not considered a sacrament in the majority of Christendom even though Christ clearly commanded it? Granted, the word "sacrament" as a technical term for Christian rites is not found in the Bible. In fact, we do not need to insist on the use of this term at all. But whether we use the term "sacrament" for footwashing, the crucial question is this: "Does a person need to receive footwashing for salvation?" Christian churches have generally rejected footwashing as a sacrament for two main reasons. First, it is argued that Jesus' washing of His

1 Monika K. Hellwig, "Sacrament: Christian Sacraments," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd. ed., vol. 12 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 7960.

disciples feet was only an example of humility and service. The second reason for this stance is that there is no record in the New Testament of the church administering footwashing.

In contrast to this prevalent view among Christians, the True Jesus Church regards the doctrine of footwashing as of fundamental importance. We believe that it is a sacrament that must be received for salvation. Our position on this doctrine is therefore decidedly different from the widely held belief in today's Christendom that footwashing is a symbol of humble service rather than an ordinance necessary for salvation. Even among those who believe that it is necessary to practice footwashing in accord with the Lord's command, many hold the view that footwashing has no saving effect.

Because of the crucial place of footwashing in a believer's saving relationship with Christ and in the tenets of our church, it behooves us to present this truth clearly and to demonstrate that what the True Jesus Church has received and proclaims stands firmly on biblical grounds. Faced with the vast amount of theological examinations on the sacraments by Christian authors of various affiliations, a mere citation of John 13 as the basis of our basic doctrine on footwashing is insufficient. The purpose of this study is thus to examine the basic belief of the True Jesus Church on the sacrament of footwashing against the Scriptures to verify its soundness in the context of John 13 as well as its consistency with the overall theological perspective of the Bible on salvation.

# Chapter 1

## COMMENTARY ON JOHN 13:1-20

A study of the doctrine of footwashing must begin with the text containing the narrative of Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet. Our starting point will be the passage in John 13:1-20, the only account of this event in the Bible.

### A. TRANSLATION

The following is a translation of the passage. Wherever possible, the translation attempts to account for each Greek word and to reflect the Greek syntax.

1. Before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that His hour had come for Him to transfer out of this world to the Father, [and]<sup>2</sup> having loved His own who were in the world, loved them to the ultimate.
2. And while dinner was taking place, when the devil had already cast into the heart so that Judas of Simon the Iscariot might hand Him over,
3. [and] knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come out of God and was going away to God,
4. He rose from dinner, laid down the garments, and, having taken a towel, He girded Himself.
5. Then He poured water into the basin, and He began to wash the feet of the disciples and to wipe them dry with the towel with which He had been girded.

2 Words in brackets are not in the Greek but are supplied because they are needed in English.

6. Then He came to Simon Peter. He 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 will understand afterwards."
8. Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you are not having a part with Me."
9. Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also the hands and the head!"
10. Jesus said to him, "The one who is bathed does not have a need except to wash the feet. On the contrary, he is wholly clean. And you are clean, but not all [of you]."
11. For he knew the one who was handing him over. Because of this He said, "You are not all clean."
12. Then, when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and reclined again, He said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?"
13. You call me 'the Teacher,' and 'the Lord,' and you say well, for [that is what] I am.
14. Therefore, if I, the Lord and the teacher, washed your feet, you also must wash one another's feet.
15. For I gave you an example, in order that just as I did to you, you also might do.
16. Truly, truly, I say to you: a slave is not greater than his master; neither is an apostle greater than the one who has sent him.
17. If these things you know, blessed are you if you do them.
18. I am not speaking about all of you. I know whom I have chosen. But that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'The one eating my bread lifted his heel against me.'
19. From now I say to you before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I AM.



20. Truly, truly, I say to you: The one receiving whomever I send receives me, and the one receiving Me receives the One who has sent Me.”

## B. STRUCTURE

Based on the author’s organization of the footwashing narrative, we may discern three sections on the broadest level. The first section, which is written as a narration, depicts Jesus’ washing His disciples’ feet and the setting in which it took place (vv. 1-5). The second section records the dialogue between Simon Peter and Jesus (vv. 6-11). The final section, again written as a direct speech, quotes Jesus’ words to the disciples (vv. 12-20).

### 1. Section one (vv. 1-5)

Verses 1 to 5 consist of two parallel syntactical constructions. Both constructions have this pattern: 1) Timing; 2) Jesus’ knowledge; and 3) Jesus’ action.

First, with the prepositional phrase *πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα* (“before the Feast of the Passover”) the author informs the reader that what follows takes place before the Feast of the Passover (v. 1a). The participle *eidōs*, *εἰδὼς* (“knowing”) and the clause that it introduces tells us what Jesus knew while He carried out the ensuing action (v. 1b). Before the main action, we have also the participial clause *ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* (“having loved His own who were in the world”), which prepares for the main action. Then comes the primary clause in the construction *εἰς τέλος ἡγάπησεν αὐτούς* (“He loved them to the ultimate”), stating Jesus’ action of loving them to the ultimate (v. 1c).

The second half of the parallel construction has a similar structure. First, in two participial clauses we are told that dinner was taking place and that the devil had already cast into the heart of Judas of Simon the Iscariot to hand Jesus over (v. 2). Compared with the prepositional clause of verse 1a, these clauses give us even more specific details of the timing of Jesus’ action that is to follow. The second occurrence of *eidōs*, *εἰδὼς* (“knowing”) again introduces Jesus’ knowledge at the time of the ensuing

action. This time, the author elaborates on the knowledge spoken of in verse 1b, pointing out that the Father had given all things into Jesus' hands, and that He had come out of God and was going away toward God (v. 3). Finally, the leading verbs describe Jesus' actions of rising from dinner, putting down the garments, girding Himself with a towel, pouring water into the basin, washing the disciples' feet, and wiping them with the towel (vv. 4-5). These actions spell out for us how Jesus loved His disciples to the end as mentioned in the corresponding parallel in verse 1c.

The parallel constructions are presented in the following outline:

- A. Before the Feast of the Passover,
    - B. Jesus, knowing that His hour had come for Him to transfer out of this world to the Father, [and] having loved His own who were in the world,
    - C. loved them to the ultimate.
  - A'. And while dinner was taking place, after the devil had already cast into the heart so that Judas of Simon the Iscariot might hand Him over,
  - B'. [and] knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come out of God and was going away to God,
  - C'. He rose from dinner, laid down the garments, and having taken a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and He began to wash the feet of the disciples and to wipe them dry with the towel with which He had been girded.
2. Section two (vv. 6-11)

This section is distinct from the surrounding material in that it is presented in the form of a dialogue. It first opens with the statement that Jesus came to Simon Peter. Three times Peter speaks, and each time Jesus responds. Through this series of exchanges and the drastic shift in Peter's attitude, the narrative brings forth the crucial significance of the footwashing Jesus is

performing on His disciples. This section then concludes with the narrator's comment explaining Jesus' statement that not all the disciples are clean.

3. Section three (vv. 12-20)

The final section, which concludes the footwashing narrative, features Jesus' words to the disciples. The opening sentence (v. 12), marked by the transitional word *oun* οὖν ("then"), introduces Jesus' speech to the disciples with a reference of time: at the conclusion of the footwashing.

Jesus begins with the question to the disciples whether they knew what He had done for them (v. 12). He points to His own example as their Teacher and Lord as the basis for their obligation to also wash one another's feet (vv. 13-15).

In two "truly, truly" declarations Jesus identifies general truths that are key to the understanding of footwashing. The first of these speaks of the relative positions of a slave to his master and that of an apostle to the one who has sent him (v. 16). The second statement is even more explicit in that Jesus speaks of Himself (v. 20). Whoever receives the one Jesus sent receives Him and in turn receives the One who sent Him.

Framed by the two "truly, truly" declarations are words of promise and prediction. Blessings will follow if the disciples act on what they now know (v. 17). Jesus then shifts focus to Judas, who has forsaken the blessings mentioned, and to the betrayal that is to take place. Here we see two *hina*, ἵνα ("in order that") statements concerning purpose. The first purpose is the fulfillment of the words of Scripture (v. 18). The second purpose pertains to Jesus' prediction—that when what is foretold comes to pass, the disciples may believe that Jesus is the I AM (v. 19).

### C. THE PLACE OF JOHN 13:1-20

1. In relation to 13:21-30, the prediction of betrayal

Although the passage of our present study (13:1-20) ends with Jesus' discourse about the footwashing, the plot of the narrative extends to verse 30. Judas Iscariot and his intent to betray the Lord, which form the focus of this passage, have already been

mentioned in the setting of the footwashing narrative (13:2). The narrator also makes it clear that Jesus' words (i.e., not all the disciples are clean) allude to the impending betrayal (vv. 10-11). After the footwashing, Jesus quotes the Scriptures stating that he who eats bread with Him has lifted up his heel against Him (v. 18).

What was in the background in the footwashing narrative comes to the fore in 13:21-30. Jesus openly announces that one of the disciples is going to betray Him, and the disciples become perplexed at the announcement. Prompted by the inquiry of the disciple whom Jesus loves, Jesus gives a sign indicating it is Judas Iscariot. When Judas has received the bread, Satan enters him, and he goes out immediately. While verse 2 mentions that the devil planted in Judas' heart to betray Jesus, Satan now takes possession of him. Thus, Judas' betrayal, which is crucial to the setting of the footwashing narrative and interweaves through the narrative, finds fruition in the subsequent section.

2. In relation to 13:31-38, a new commandment and the prediction of denial

When Jesus rises from dinner to wash His disciple's feet, He does so with the knowledge that the Father has given all things into His hands and that He has come out of God and is going away (ὑπάγει) toward God (v. 3). The theme of going away is carried forward to 13:31-38. When Judas has gone out, Jesus says that the Son of Man is glorified. He then repeats what He has said to the Jews and to the disciples, "Where I am going (ὑπάγω), you cannot come." To this Simon Peter responds with the question, "Lord, where are you going (ὑπάγεις)?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going (ὑπάγω) you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward" (v. 36).

The theme of love likewise connects the footwashing narrative with 13:31-38. The author introduces the footwashing event with the remark that Jesus, having loved His own who were in the world, loves them to the end (v. 1). The new commandment that Jesus gives in 13:34 is founded on Jesus' love for His disciples. We also observe a close parallel between the

imperative to wash one another's feet and the command to love one another. At the conclusion of the footwashing, Jesus says to the disciples, "Therefore, if I, the Lord and the teacher, washed your feet, you also must wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example, in order that just as I did to you, you also might do" (vv. 14-15). The new commandment, similarly, places an obligation on the disciples to love one another because of Jesus' love for them: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (vv. 34-35).

3. In relation to 14:1-16:33, Jesus' farewell discourses

John 14:1-16:33 is comprised of a series of Jesus' discourses, and since the setting and subject matter pertain to Jesus' departure, they are considered the final discourses to the disciples. In these discourses, too, we notice several threads of themes and keywords running through them which we have seen in the footwashing narrative.

The repeated mention of Jesus' going away continues to run through these passages. Jesus begins His farewell discourse with the assurance that He is going to prepare a place for the disciples. He tells them, "And where I go (ὑπάγω) you know, and the way you know" (14:4). Thomas asks, "Lord, we do not know where You are going (ὑπάγεις), and how can we know the way?" (14:5). Again, while promising the disciples His peace and comforting them not to be troubled or afraid, Jesus echoes the words He has spoken earlier about going away (14:28). After foretelling how the world will hate the disciples, Jesus explains that He tells them these things now because He is going away (16:5), and His departure is in fact to their advantage because the Helper will come (16:7).

Along the theme of going away, Jesus also speaks about going to the Father. We have seen mention of this by the narrator in the introduction to the footwashing: "... knowing that His hour had come for him to transfer out of this world toward the Father..." (13:1). Similarly, "knowing ... that He had come out of God and was going away toward God..." (13:3). In His last farewell

discourse Jesus Himself speaks numerous times about going to the Father (16:5, 10, 16), and in a full presentation about His origin and destination, Jesus says, “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (16:28).

In view of His going away, Jesus repeatedly makes special note of what He is telling them. When foretelling the betrayal after the footwashing, Jesus says, “From now I say to you before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I AM” (13:19). Speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus says to the disciples, “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (14:25-26). He then adds, “And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe” (14:29). When exhorting His disciples to abide in His love, Jesus says to them, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (15:11). Preparing the disciples to face the coming times of persecution, Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble” (16:1), and He continues, “But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them” (16:4). Contrasting with the time that is to come, Jesus says to the disciples, “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language” (16:25). Concluding His last farewell discourse, He says, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace” (16:33).

4. In relation to 17:1-26, the prayer of the hour

Mlakuzhyil, building on the key word “hour” in the second part of the Gospel, assigns the title “the prayer of the hour” to 17:1-26.<sup>3</sup> We will also use this title in our analysis.

Some of the recurring themes we have seen so far can be found again in the prayer of the hour. In particular, we take note of

3 George Mlakuzhyil, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1987), 228.

the parallel between this prayer and the footwashing narrative. Just as Jesus knew that His hour had come for him to transfer out of this world to the Father (13:1), Jesus begins His prayer by acknowledging to the Father that the hour has come for the Father to glorify the Son that the Son also may glorify the Father (17:1). Mentions of Jesus' leaving the world to go to the Father, found in the setting of footwashing (13:1, 3), are echoed here in the prayer (17:11, 13).

In 13:3, before the footwashing, we are told that Jesus knew "that the Father had given all things into His hands." Parallel to this are Jesus' words to the Father in the prayer: "...You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him" (17:2). In reference to what He has received from the Father, Jesus says to the Father, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the word. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me..." (17:6-8). We also observe further references to those whom the Father has given to Jesus: "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours" (17:9); and again, "Those whom You gave Me I have kept..." (17:12).

5. In relation to the entire Fourth Gospel

An analysis of the structure of the Fourth Gospel reveals several major parts. 1:1-51 serves as the introduction. 2:1-12:50 is commonly known as "the book of Jesus' signs." 13:1-20:31 is quite appropriately called by Mlakuzhyil as "the book of Jesus' hour."<sup>4</sup> 21:1-25 is the conclusion to the Gospel.

The introduction section (1:1-51) opens the Gospel with a prologue, in the form of a hymn, about the incarnate *logos*, λόγος ("Word"), who was with God in the beginning and was God. He came into the world and dwelt among us. A man sent from God, named John, came to bear witness for the Word that had become flesh. A large portion of the introductory material

4 *ibid.*, 160-162.

concentrates on the witnessing, by John and others, about Jesus Christ, as well as Jesus' own self-revelation.

An outstanding theme in 2:1-12:50, which also characterizes the Fourth Gospel, is Jesus' signs, which in the Fourth Gospel specifically denote Jesus' miraculous works. The first passage records the miracle Jesus performed in Cana, which the author informs us is the "beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee" (2:11). Subsequent chapters make references to the many signs that Jesus had done (2:23; 3:2; 6:2, 14; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:18). When narrating Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, the author emphasizes that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which were not written in this book (20:30). The purpose of performing such signs is to manifest Jesus' glory and to lead to faith in Him (2:11, 23; 4:48; 20:30-31). The ultimate sign is His resurrection from the dead, as indicated by Jesus Himself (2:18-22). Yet, as this part of the Gospel comes to a close, we are told that they did not believe in Jesus despite the many signs that He had done before the people (12:37).

Another essential aspect of this part of the Gospel is Jesus' teachings and self-declarations. At times, He conversed with select individuals, such as Nicodemus (3:1-21), the Samaritan woman (4:5-26), and the man He healed from blindness (9:35-39). There were also moments when His words were directed to the disciples (e.g. 4:31-38; 6:61-67; 11:7-14). On other occasions, He spoke to the people in general or answered the comments of specific groups, such as the Jews or the Pharisees. Among the most well-known of Jesus' words found in only this Gospel are the seven "I am" statements, some of which are directly related to the signs He was doing. Like the signs He performed, His words revealed His identity and challenged the people to put their faith in Him.

The other major part of the Gospel, "the book of Jesus' hour," shifts focus to Jesus' going away to the Father. 13:1-17:26 record Jesus' actions and words before going away. In this section, Jesus' attention is primarily on His disciples. He predicted Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, and the disciples' scattering. He



alerted them to hostility by the world, but encouraged them to have peace in Him. He promised them the coming of the Helper, the promised Holy Spirit. Then He prayed to the Father over the disciples and all who would believe in Him. 18:1-20:29 contains accounts of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. As Jesus had predicted, Judas came with a detachment of soldiers to arrest and bind Jesus. He stood in trial before Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. In the meantime, Peter denied having any association with Jesus. Pressured by the Jews, Pilate had Jesus scourged and crucified. After He had died and was laid in a tomb, Jesus was raised to life and appeared on various occasions to Mary and the disciples. The author concludes his accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances with the statement that Jesus did many other signs before the disciples which are not written, but these are written so that the readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we may have life in His name (20:30-31).

The concluding section (21:1-25) consists of yet another appearance of Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection, followed by His dialogue with Peter. The Gospel finally ends with the author's affirmation that he is the disciple who testifies of the things that Jesus did and who has written them down, although Jesus had also done many other things that were too numerous to be written down.

With the above bird's-eye view of the structure of the Fourth Gospel, we can clearly see the place of the footwashing narrative in the entire Gospel. As early as 11:1-12:50, the author starts to transition to the next part of the Gospel. At this point, the chief priests and Pharisees began to plot to kill Jesus (11:53). We also see the mention of the Passover (11:55; 12:1). Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet served as a preparation for Jesus' burial. Jesus also said that the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified and spoke about His death (12:23-36). Jesus then departed and was hidden from the people (12:36). At this point, the public ministry had come to a close. Despite the unbelief of the people in general, Jesus' disciples remained with Him. Starting from 13:1, at the beginning of "the book of Jesus' hour,"

the Gospel makes a clear shift to Jesus' going away and His final hours with the disciples. It is here that the account of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet stands.

As we have observed, many of the predominant elements of this part of the Gospel, such as the arrival of the hour, the going away of Jesus, His love for the disciples, and the betrayal by Judas, are found in the footwashing narrative. Therefore, it is evident that the footwashing Jesus performed on His disciples has a profound and weighty significance in relation to the rest of the Fourth Gospel, particularly in connection with His going away and His love for His disciples.

#### D. KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Interpreting the meaning of a text invariably begins with a good understanding of the meaning of the individual words or expressions in the text. We will examine the meaning of key words and phrases in the current passage on several levels.

The first level is etymological. Whenever applicable, we will look at the origin and development of particular words. Secondly, we will explore the semantic domains of each word by categorizing its usage in Scripture and in non-biblical literature if relevant. This level of discussion will also involve the question of which usage best suits the context of the current passage. Lastly, where a phrase is an idiom, we will seek to understand its meaning based on its contemporary usage.

1. "The Feast of Passover" (τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα)

*Pascha*, πάσχα ("Passover") is a transcription of the Aramaic *psh'*, פֶּסַח.<sup>5</sup> In the LXX, it translates the Hebrew word *pesah*, פֶּסַח. The English "paschal" is derived from this word.

In the Old Testament (OT), *pesah*, פֶּסַח denotes: 1) the sacrifice of Passover (פֶּסַח־חֲבִיִּי Ex 12:27); 2) the animal victim of the Passover (Ex 12:21, etc.); and 3) the festival of the Passover

5 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 5:896.

(פסחָ הַפֶּסַח Ex 34:25).<sup>6</sup> *pesah*, פֶּסַח is derived from the verb *pāsaḥ*, פָּסַח. When associated with the preposition *al*, אַל, *pāsaḥ*, פָּסַח means “to pass over.” Of the four instances of *pāsaḥ*, פָּסַח in the Bible, three are in Exodus 12 (Ex 12:13, 23, 27), pertaining to the institution of the Passover decree in which the LORD promised that He would pass over the houses framed with the sign of blood as He goes through the land to strike down the firstborn of the Egyptians. The other instance is found in Isaiah 31:5, in which the LORD assured that He would protect Jerusalem by passing over it.

The LORD commanded the observance of this day as a memorial and as a feast to the LORD (Ex 12:14). The feast began on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Abib (known as Nisan after the exile<sup>7</sup>) with the preparation of a lamb for each household. The lamb was killed at twilight on the 14<sup>th</sup> day, and the blood was put on the doorposts and lintels of the houses where the lamb was eaten. On the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> day, the night when the LORD went through the land of Egypt to strike the firstborn of the Egyptians, the Hebrews partook of the Passover meal, which included the flesh of the lamb, roasted in fire, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (Ex 12:3-8). The Passover was immediately followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, during which the Israelites were commanded to remove all leaven but eat only unleavened bread (Ex 12:15-20; Lev 23:5-6). Because of the close connection between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover, Scripture often juxtaposes the two festivals and even views them as integral parts of the same celebration (Lev 23:4-6; Num 28:16-17; Deut 16:1-4; Ezra 6:19-22; Ezek 45:21).

The ordinance of the Passover excluded foreigners. Strangers who dwelt among the Hebrews or servants bought with money may keep and eat the Passover after they have been circumcised. The LORD also specified that the Passover must be eaten in one house. The people should not carry any of the flesh of

6 Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Strong's, TWOT, and GK references Copyright 2000 by Logos Research Systems, Inc., electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 820.

7 Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Map on lining papers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 786.

the lamb outside the house nor break one of its bones (Ex 12:43-49).

Deuteronomy 16:1-8 foresaw the establishment of the sanctuary (“The place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide”) and stipulated that the sacrifice of the Passover take place at the sanctuary. As such, the Passover later became a national celebration centralized in Jerusalem as part of the temple cult. This is evident in the celebrations led by Josiah and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 23:21-24; 2 Chr 30:1-27; 35:1-19) and the keeping of the festival by the returned exiles (Ezra 6:19-22).

The New Testament (NT) identifies the Feast of the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lk 22:1, 7; Mt 26:17) and treats the Passover as the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Mk 14:12). The Jews went up to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover (Lk 2:41). From sunset until long into the night, the pilgrims ate the Passover meal in kinship groups within the walls of Jerusalem. In the Gospels, the passion narratives, including the accounts of the last supper and the footwashing, are in the Passover setting (Mt 26:2, 17-19; Mk 14:1-16; Lk 22:1-15; Jn 11:15; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28; 19:14). The connection is deeply significant because Jesus Christ Himself is our Passover (1 Cor 5:7).

Therefore, *pascha*, *πάσχα* in the NT historical accounts refers to the Feast of the Passover observed by the Jews, including the closely associated seven-day Feast of the Unleavened Bread; the Passover meal (Mt 26:19; Mk 14:16; Lk 22:8, 13); or the Passover lamb (Mt 26:17; Mk 14:12; Lk 22:7, 11, 15; Jn 18:28). “The Feast of the Passover” (ἡ ἑορτή τοῦ πάσχα) has become a fixed expression for the week-long festival and is occasionally abbreviated to ἑορτή (e.g., Jn 4:45).<sup>8</sup> But the meaning of Passover also reached a whole new level with the passion of Christ and became an allusion to Christ the Passover Lamb. According to Jesus at the last supper, the Passover would be fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Lk 22:16). Indeed, the celebration (ἑορτάζω)

8 Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-c1993), 3:50.

of the Passover today translates to the new life of believers in the body of Christ (1 Cor 5:8).

2. “Love” (ἀγαπάω)

The LXX uses *agapaō*, ἀγαπάω to express the Hebrew root *ʾḥb*, אהב with its derivatives. The concept of love in the OT is profane and immanent as well as religious and theological. In the sphere of the profane and immanent, love (אהב) encompasses sexual love; the love of parents, blood relations, and friendship; and the love one shows toward his neighbors. In a religious or theological sense, this word is employed when speaking about our love for God and His love for us, and God’s love for His people is seen on a nationwide level rather than directed toward certain individuals.<sup>9</sup>

*Agapē*, ἀγάπη is the primary word for love in the NT. It is a rational kind of love that involves recognition and judgment of value, from which its frequent nuance is “preference.” The verb *agapaō*, ἀγαπάω most often means “value, set great store by, hold in high esteem.”<sup>10</sup> The concept of love does not carry any sexual connotations the way it does in the OT. *Agapaō*, ἀγαπάω is barely used for even the love for family members and friends. Instead, with respect to our relationship to other human beings, it pertains primarily to our love for neighbors, including our enemies. This is the new demand Jesus lays down, which is in fact a fulfillment of the requirement of the OT law. Of course, *agapaō*, ἀγαπάω in the NT furthermore applies to God’s relationship with us. God’s love is not only towards the nation of Israel, but we are taught expressly that God loved the world (Jn 3:16). Nevertheless, where the NT speaks about God’s love for us, it still focuses on His love toward the believers, specifically those who keeps Jesus’ commandments (Jn 14:21). We also see instances in which Jesus’ love was directed at individuals (Mk 10:21; Jn 11:5; 13:23). The greatest manifestation of God’s love toward us is in the personal sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ (Jn 15:13; Rom 5:8; Gal 2:20). This divine love transforms believers,

9 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 1:21-35.

10 Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:11-12.

compels them, and enables them to love. Thus we are to love God in response to His love, and this love is shown in our love for one another in the fulfillment of Christ's new commandment (Jn 13:34; 14:15; 15:12; 2 Cor 5:14; 1 Jn 4:7, 19, 21; 5:1, 2).

Unique to the NT, particularly the Gospels, are the teachings about the Father's love for the Son and vice versa. God revealed His Son to the world and called Him His beloved Son (Mt 3:17; 17:5; Mk 1:11; 9:7; Lk 3:22). The Father loves Jesus the Son because He lays down His life (Jn 10:17) and this love was from before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:24). The Son likewise reciprocates His love for the Father and abides in His love (Jn 14:31; 15:10).

### 3. "One's own" (ἰδιος)

The adjective *idios*, ἰδιος, which can be treated as a possessive (meaning "one's own"), is frequent in the NT. It is opposed to *koinos*, κοινός ("common") and *dēmosios*, δημόσιος ("public").<sup>11</sup> When functioning as a possessive pronoun, it has a more or less emphatic sense (e.g. Mt 9:1: ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν πόλιν; "He came to His own city").<sup>12</sup> Sometimes the word implies what is peculiar to someone (cf. 1 Cor 3:8; 7:7).<sup>13</sup> Because of the exclusive relationship that it connotes, *idios*, ἰδιος is not simply equivalent to the possessive genitive (e.g. "your own eye" as opposed to "your brother's eye" in Lk 6:41).<sup>14</sup>

*Idios*, ἰδιος is used in the relationship of the wife to her husband or vice versa (Acts 24:24; 1 Cor 7:2, 4; 14:35; Eph 5:22; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5) and with reference to the family or the household (cf. 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12; 5:4). In a similar vein, it applies to the relationship between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (Jn 5:18; Rom 8:32). The word may apply to private property (Acts 4:32), an individual's circumstance or condition (e.g., Mt 25:15; Jn

11 Robertson, A.T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. 5th ed. (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 691.

12 Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-c1993), 2:171.

13 A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. 5th ed. (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 691.

14 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker," 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 466.

7:18; Rom 10:3; 1 Cor 3:8), and God's appointed time (Gal 6:9; 1 Tim 2:6; 6:15; Tit 1:3).

When used as an adverb, *idios*, ἰδίος means "by oneself" or "privately." Thus, the Spirit distributes "by Himself" to each just as He wills (1 Cor 12:11). *Kat' idian*, κατ' ἰδίαν appears numerous times, particularly in the Gospels, such as when it is said that Jesus withdrew by Himself or took the disciples aside privately (Mt 14:13, 23; 17:1, 19; 20:17; 24:3; Mk 4:34; 6:31, 32; 7:33; 9:2, 28; 13:3; Lk 9:10; 10:23).

The substantive *hoi idioi*, οἱ ἴδιοι in certain non-biblical literature has the meaning of comrades in battle or compatriots. Hence we may understand Acts 4:23 and 24:23 as references to fellow Christians. *Hoi idioi*, οἱ ἴδιοι is also used of one's relatives, and hence 1 Tim 5:8 speaks of providing for one's household. As it does in Greek literature, *ta idia*, τὰ ἴδια in John 16:32; 19:27, and Acts 21:6 means "home." But in certain instances it may carry the broader meaning of one's possessions (Lk 18:28; Jn 8:44).<sup>15</sup> Because their usage in John has a special theological significance, in the exegesis section we will delve more deeply into the meaning of *ta idia*, τὰ ἴδια and *hoi idioi*, οἱ ἴδιοι in the context of passages such as John 1:11 and 13:1.

4. "End" (τέλος)

In the LXX, *telos*, τέλος translates various Hebrew terms to denote the "end" of a period of time (Judg 11:39; 2 Sam 24:8; Neh 13:6; etc.), or "end" as apposed to *archē*, ἀρχή "beginning" (Eccl 3:11). Besides indications of time, the word may have a sense of "extreme limit" or "fullness" (2 Kgs 19:23; 2 Macc 6:15). When used as part of an adverbial expression, it carries the meaning of "constantly," (Isa 62:6), "fully," (Ps 37:7), "totally," (Amos 9:8), or "forever," (1 Chr 28:9; Ps 9:19 LXX). Furthermore, the word may also mean "completion" (i.e., of executing a plan or work; 3 Macc 3:14) or "conclusion" (Eccl 12:13).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 467.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 49-54

The term *telos*, τέλος in the Greek world has a range of meaning including achievement, execution, fulfillment, implementation, completion, crowning, and maturity. To understand *telos*, τέλος and especially the verb *teleō*, τελέω (to complete, to finish, to end, to accomplish) in the NT, it is important to bear in mind the originally dynamic character of the noun. *Telos echein*, τέλος ἔχειν (“to have an end”) in Luke 22:37 indicates that the things concerning Jesus would be fulfilled. On the other hand, *telos*, τέλος in 1 Tim 1:5 has the sense of “goal.” Hebrews 6:8 uses the word to refer to the “result” of the land that bears thorns and briers. *Telos*, τέλος to denote the “conclusion” of eschatological events is attested in Matthew 24:14. In Revelation 21:6 and 22:13, God and Christ declares “ἐγὼ... ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος” (“I am the beginning and the end”), where τέλος corresponds with the preceding *eschatos*, ἔσχατος (“last”). *Telos*, τέλος can also mean “cessation” as in “end of life” (Heb 7:3) and “end of what was passing away” (2 Cor 3:13). Quite apart from the meaning of what has been mentioned, but still well attested in non-biblical writings, is the use of *telos*, τέλος for “tribute” or “tax” in Matthew 17:25 and Romans 13:7.<sup>17</sup>

Of particular interest to our study is the adverbial expression *eis telos*, εἰς τέλος found in Jn 13:1. As in general Greek usage, *eis telos*, εἰς τέλος may be either temporal (as in “finally” and “to the end”) or quantitative, meaning “fully.” Context must decide whether the temporal or the quantitative sense is in view. “He who endures; εἰς τέλος” in Matthew 10:22; 24:13, and Mark 13:13 would be understood in the temporal sense. The expression in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 concerning the coming of the wrath upon the persecutors may take the quantitative sense: “in full measure.” The context of John 13:1 permits both the temporal and quantitative meaning. We will discuss this more fully in the exegesis section.

5. “Wash” (νίπτω)

The Greeks used three different words to denote different types of washing. *Plynein*, πλύνειν applies to the washing of objects,

<sup>17</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 8:49-54.



*niptein*, νίπτειν to the partial washing of persons, and *louein*, λούειν or *louesthai*, λούεσθαι to full washing or bathing.<sup>18</sup>

The LXX conforms to the general Greek usage and employs *niptein*, νίπτειν for partial washing. It is applicable in ordinary washings, such as the washing of feet (Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Jdg 19:21; 1 Sam 25:41; 2 Sam 11:8; Song 5:3) and the washing of the face (Gen 43:31). *Niptein*, νίπτειν is also used figuratively in expressions related to the washing of the feet and the hands (Ps 57:11; 72:13 LXX). Besides denoting ordinary washing, *niptein*, νίπτειν is also used of ceremonial washing for cultic purity. The LORD required Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and their feet in water from the laver of bronze when going into the tabernacle of meeting or coming near the altar to minister (Ex 30:18-21). The elders of the city nearest to a slain man found in the field had to wash their hands over a heifer to declare their innocence in the matter (Deut 21:6). The declaration of the psalmist in Ps 25:6 LXX connects the washing of hands as a symbol of innocence with offering at the altar. According to the levitical code, the unwashed hands (τὰς χεῖρας οὐ νένιπτται) of a man with a discharge was capable of defiling the person he touched (Lev 15:11).

*Niptein*, νίπτειν in the NT is likewise used for partial washing, such as the washing of the face (Mt 6:17). The washing of hands mentioned in Mt 15:2 and Mk 7:3 alludes to the Jewish ritual of washing of the hands before a meal. The washing of saints' feet is listed among the ministries of widows in the church in 1 Tim 5:10. *Niptein*, νίπτειν occurs predominately in John (13 out of 17 times in the NT). The word is found in two narratives. In the account of the healing of a blind man in John 9, Jesus instructed the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The other narrative where *niptein*, νίπτειν plays a key part is the footwashing narrative, the passage of our study. Here, the word is used specifically for the washing of the feet.

*Niptō*, νίπτω in the active voice followed by a noun in the accusative can mean either to wash something, specifically the feet

18 *ibid.*, 4:946.

in the NT (Jn 13:5, 8, 12, 14; 1 Tim 5:10), or to wash someone (Jn 13:8). The verb in the middle voice has the sense of washing oneself (Jn 9:7, 11, 15). Accompanied by a noun in the accusative, the verb in the middle voice means to wash something for oneself, for example, to wash one's face (Mt 6:17) or wash one's hands (Mt 15:2; Mk 7:3).<sup>19</sup> John 13:10 uses the middle voice because Jesus was using ordinary washing as an analogy, for in an ordinary footwashing subsequent to a bath, the person would wash his own feet. This word choice does not mean that the footwashing Jesus instituted was to be self-administered.

#### 6. "Foot" (πούς)

The LXX uses *pous*, πούς to translate several Hebrew words in the OT, the most common of which is *regel*, רֶגֶל, "foot." Other such words include *kap-regel*, כַּף-רֶגֶל, "sole" (Gen 8:9; Job 2:7; Isa 1:6; Ezek 1:7), *ʿaqēb*, עֲקֵב, "heel" (Gen 49:19), *parsā*, פֶּרֶסָה, "hoof" (Isa 5:28), *kerāʾ*, כַּרְעַ, "leg" (Ex 12:9; 29:17), *marginēlōt*, מַרְגְּלֹת, "footing" (Ruth 3:4, 7, 8, 14), *paʾam*, פֶּעַם, "footstep" (2 Kgs 19:24; Prov 29:5; Song 7:2 BHS), *ʾāšūr*, אֲשׁוּר, "step" (Job 31:7), *šul*, שׁוּל, "skirt" (Lam 1:9), and *ʾōmed*, עֹמֵד, "standing place" (Dan 8:18).

*Pous*, πούς in its literal sense denotes the lower extremities which we normally associate with the word "foot." In both the OT and the NT we can find occasional references to the feet of specific individuals (Gen 49:33; Num 22:25; 1 Sam 14:13; 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Kgs 15:23; Isa 6:2; Lk 24:39, 40; Jn 20:12; Acts 14:8, 10). The lifting of one's feet is an expression that means setting out on a journey (Gen 29:1). Paul mentions the foot and personifies it when he uses the analogy of the members of the body for the believers in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:15, 21).

While *pous*, πούς usually denotes the human foot, it is also used of the feet of animals (Ezek 29:11), such as the feet of doves (Gen 8:9) and the legs of lambs, goats, and rams (Ex 12:9; 29:17). The word is furthermore used of the legs of the table for

<sup>19</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker," 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 674.

the showbread (Ex 25:26). “Foot” in Acts 7:5 should be understood as a measure, whereas Gen 33:14 has in view the pace of livestock and children.

As part of hospitality, water was brought to guests so that they may wash their feet (Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24). David instructed Uriah to go down to his house and wash his feet (2 Sam 11:8). In the Song of Songs of the beloved was reluctant to open the door because she had washed her feet (Song 5:3). Thus it was customarily to wash one’s feet before retiring for the night. Abigail called David her lord and expressed her willing submission by offering to wash the feet of his servants (1 Sam 25:41). In 1 Tim 5:10, the washing of the saints’ feet is listed as one of the works of ministry by the widows in the church.

The feet carry a certain religious significance. Both Moses and Joshua, when in the presence of the divine, were commanded to take their sandals off their feet (Ex 3:5; Acts 7:33; Josh 5:15). The reason given was that the particular places where they were standing were holy. Before Aaron and his sons entered the tabernacle of meeting or came near the altar to minister, they must wash their hands and feet with water from the laver of bronze (Ex 30:18-21). As part of the consecration of Aaron and his sons for ministry, Moses was to put the blood of the ram on the big toes of their right feet (Ex 29:20; Lev 8:23, 24).

*Pous*, πούς often functions as a synecdoche for the entire person. Thus, “foot of pride” (Ps 36:11) means not an arrogant foot but the conduct of the arrogant man. Since the foot is associated with standing (Ezek 2:2; 2 Kgs 21:8), being able to stand on one’s feet is symbolic of stability and safety. Thus, the collective declaration “Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!” indicates a firm standing of the entire person in the city of God (Ps 122:2). “My foot stands in an even place” (Ps 26:12) represents being firmly and safely planted by God. The psalmist likewise speaks of God’s deliverance when he says, “You have set my feet in a wide place” (Ps 31:8). The notion of being delivered from danger and set in security is further seen in the words, “He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to

stand" (Ps 40:2). On the contrary, the stumbling or slipping of the foot (Ps 38:17; 66:9; 73:2; 94:18; 116:8; 121:3; Prov 3:23, 26) symbolizes danger, and the feet being sunk in the mire is a figure of speech for being in a predicament (Jer 38:22). Similarly, the spreading of the net for a person's feet indicates an action that places the person in danger. (Ps 139:6 LXX; Prov 29:5; Lam 1:13).

The feet may further represent a person's conduct or walk of life. Thus *pous*, ποὺς is often connected with the path a person takes ("I have restrained my feet from every evil way," Ps 119:101; "Keep your foot from their path," Prov 1:15; "Make straight the path for your feet," Prov 4:26 LXX and Heb 12:13; "Turn your foot from the road of evil," Prov 4:27; "To guide our feet into the way of peace," Lk 1:79; and in Ps 119:105, "a lamp to my feet" parallels "a light to my path"). Shoeing our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace refers to a way of life that embodies and proclaims the good message (Eph 6:15). The turning of the feet represents the moral choice that directs the person's conduct (Job 31:7; Ps 119:59; Prov 4:27). Hence, the foot may be a cause for sin (Mk 9:45). We are admonished to keep watch over our feet when we go into the house of God (Ecc 5:1). The LORD speaks of the obstinate people who have not restrained their feet but have loved to wander (Jer 14:10). The feet of the wicked are swift to run to evil, deceit, and the shedding of blood (Job 31:5; Prov 1:16; 6:18; Rom 3:15).

The feet also often symbolize power. The LORD promised His people that He would give them every place that their feet would tread upon (Deut 11:24; Josh 1:3; 14:9; 2 Kgs 21:8). When one's enemies have fallen or been crushed under his feet, it means that he has utterly defeated them (2 Sam 22:39; 1 Kgs 5:3; Ps 18:38; 47:3; Rom 16:20). Joshua commanded the captains of the men of war to put their feet on the necks of the defeated kings as a sign of victory (Josh 10:24). The dipping of one's feet in the enemies' blood is likewise an expression of triumph (Ps 58:10). In the well-known prophecy about the Christ, God has put all things under His feet (Ps 8:6; Mt 22:44; Mk 12:36; 1Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:8). Similarly, the LORD promised

that He would make the enemies of Christ His footstool (Ps 110: 1; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:43; Acts 2:35; 1 Cor 15:25, 27; Heb 1:13; 10:13). Other imageries in which the feet are symbolic of power include “troubling the waters with your feet” (Ezek 32:2, 13; 34:18, 19), “feet like pillars of fire” (Rev 10:1, 2), and “with the moon under her feet” (Rev 12:1). Also related to the idea of power is the expression to shake off the dust of one’s feet (Mt 10:14; Mk 6:11; Lk 9:5; 10:11; Acts 13:51). This was a judicial and penal gesture that has the effect of accusation.<sup>20</sup> That Sapphira fell down at Peter’s feet and breathed her last was a manifestation of the power of God granted to the apostles (Acts 5:10, 11).

On the other hand, actions toward another person’s feet can convey subordination. For instance, to fall or worship at someone’s feet is a sign of obeisance (1 Sam 25:24; 2 Kgs 4:37; Est 8:3; Acts 10:25; Rev 3:9; 19:10; 22:8). In the same fashion, licking up the dust of another person’s feet symbolizes surrender (Isa 49:23). Paul related how he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), meaning that he was under Gamaliel’s tutelage.

Worthy of special mention are the numerous references to God’s feet in the Bible. On the mountain where the God of Israel appeared to the nobles of Israel, they saw that under God’s feet as it were was a paved work of sapphire stone (Ex 24:10). In a psalmic description, God is depicted as coming down from the heavens with darkness under His feet (2 Sam 22:10; Ps 18:9). In an imagery that conveys God’s great power, the prophet writes, “The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nah 1:3). In spite of His power, the LORD shows compassion and does not crush under His feet all the prisoners of the earth (Lam 3:32-34). On the contrary, He will trample the wicked, and they shall be ashes under the soles of the feet of His people (Mal 4:3). With respect to God’s majestic greatness, we are taught that the earth is God’s footstool (Mt 5:35; Acts 7:49). Yet, in regards to God’s special presence among His people,

<sup>20</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 6:629.

Scripture calls the tabernacle or the temple the place of God's feet (1 Chr 28:2; Ps 132:7; Ezek 43:6, 7; cf. Lam 2:1). Therefore, the psalmist's call to worship the LORD at His footstool is a call to worship Him at the temple (Ps 99:5; 132:7). According to an eschatological prophecy, on the day of the LORD in which He will fight against the nations who battle against Jerusalem, the feet of the LORD will stand on the Mount of Olives, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two (Zech 14:4).

In the NT, mentions of the feet of Jesus also deserve our attention. The comment of John the Baptist that he was not worthy to loose the sandals of Jesus' feet speaks to Jesus' far superior status (Acts 13:25). Sitting at the feet of Jesus was a gesture of veneration and devotion (Lk 8:35; 10:39). We may say the same of the great multitudes who brought the sick to Jesus and laid them down at His feet (Mt 15:30). Falling down at Jesus' feet as well as holding Jesus by the feet was a posture of worship (Mt 28:9; Mk 5:22; 7:25; Lk 8:41; Jn 11:32). Mary anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (Jn 11:2; 12:3). This humbling action not only reveals her deep affection for the Lord but also acknowledged Jesus' divinity. The sinful woman who came to Jesus while He was eating at the Pharisee's house stood at Jesus' feet behind Him, weeping, began to wash His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed His feet, and anointed them with the fragrant oil. This series of actions expresses an utmost veneration toward Jesus as the One who has both the power and the mercy to grant the forgiveness of sins (Lk 7:36-50). In the vision shown to John in Revelation, Jesus' feet were like fine brass (Rev 1:15; 2:18). His divine appearance was so overwhelming that John fell at His feet as dead (Rev 1:17).

It is in light of the actions toward another's feet as signs of surrender and veneration that we must consider Jesus' action of washing His disciples' feet. Jesus—at whose feet men sat, fell down, and worshipped, and under whose feet God will put all things—stooped to wash the feet of those who were His own.

7. "Part" or "share" (μέρος)

In the LXX, *meros*, μέρος is used for various Hebrew words and has the following meanings: part or piece (Gen 47:24; Job

26:14); side or edge (Ex 32:15; Ezek 1:8; 40:47; 47:20); division of an army (1 Macc 4:19). The word also means share or portion in an inheritance (Prov 17:2). The related word *meris*, μέρος also has close connections to inheritance or heritage (Gen 23:9; 31:14; Num 18:20; Josh 24:32; 1 Kgs 12:16; Ps 15:5; 72:26; 118:57; 141:6; Ecc 5:17; Jer 10:16; Zech 2:12).

Various shades of meaning of the word can also be found in the NT, such as side (Jn 21:6), trade (Acts 19:27), and party (Acts 23:9). However, the two primary meanings of the word are “part” and “share.” As such we find references to parts of the body (Lk 11:36), of the proceeds of a sale (Acts 5:2), of a garment (Jn 19:23), of a fish (Lk 24:42), of a city (Rev 16:19), of the earth (Eph 4:9), et cetera.

In terms of the meaning of “share,” a person may have a share in the Lord Jesus (Jn 13:8). To have a share in a group of persons, such as the hypocrites or the unbelievers, means to be assigned a place among those in the group and be identified with them (Mt 24:51; Lk 12:46). In the story of the father and his two sons, *meros*, μέρος refers to a share of the father’s inheritance (Lk 15:12). In Revelation, *meros*, μέρος relates to a person’s salvation or condemnation. The saved have a part in the first resurrection (Rev 20:6) and in the tree of life and the holy city (Rev 22:19), but the condemned have a part in the lake of fire (Rev 21:8).

The verb form *merizō*, μερίζω (“divide” or “apportion”) is often employed in relation to inheritance or possessions. The Lord commanded Moses to divide the land by lot so that the tribes may each receive its inheritance (Num 26:55, 56). The same language is used when Scripture records the actual division of land after the conquest (Josh 13:7; 14:5; 18:6). The LORD declared judgment upon the neighboring nations who touched His inheritance, which He had allotted to His people Israel (Jer 12:14). Job 31:2 speaks of what God allots from above to refer to the portion God gives to the wicked. Luke 12:13 records the incident when someone asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him. Abraham was said to have apportioned a tenth part of all (ἐμέρισεν; Heb 7:2). Along the same

lines, *merizō*, μερίζω also applies to the division of spoils (Ex 15:9; 1 Sam 30:24).

8. “Bathe” (λούω)

In Hellenism, *louein*, λούειν normally denotes the complete cleansing of the body in the sense of “to wash” or “to bathe.” It is distinct from *plynein*, πλύνειν, the washing of clothes and *nizein*, νίζειν or *niptein*, νίπτειν, which refer to washing the face, hands, or feet. Lustrations were not merely for the cleansing of the body but also served purposes of religious purification.<sup>21</sup>

In the OT, *louō*, λούω translates the Hebrew word *rāḥaṣ*, רָחַץ. In ordinary usage it means “to bathe” (Ex 2:5; 2 Sam 11:2; 12:20). In most cases, however, the word is used for purification rites. The person who had become unclean, whether by touching a carcass or corpse, or because of skin ailments, leprosy, or bodily discharge, needed to wash his body to be cleansed (Lev 11:40; 14:8; etc). The purification of the priests in preparation for service also involved washing with water (Ex 29:4; 40:12; Lev 16:4). In addition, the law also required washing after certain priestly rites even though no specific impurities are mentioned (Lev 16:24, 26, 28; Num 19:7, 8). In poetic and prophetic language, *louō*, λούω has a figurative meaning. The Psalmist speaks of washing his bed each night with his tears (Ps 6:7 LXX). The LORD demanded His people to wash themselves and put away evil (Isa 1:16). He also reminisced how He washed them to cleanse them on the day they were born (Ezek 16:4, 9). The related verb, *apolouō*, ἀπολούω, is found in Job where Job speaks figuratively of washing away guilt (Job 9:30).

In the NT, the word is used in a secular sense of washing the wound (Acts 16:33) and of washing a corpse (Acts 9:37). In a proverb quoted by Peter, it is used in the washing of a sow (2 Pet 2:22). Oepke states unequivocally, and rightly so, that other than the secular meaning, the references to washing in the NT are allusions to Christian baptism.<sup>22</sup> Employing the imagery of the purification of the High Priest in the OT, Heb

21 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 4:295-299.

22 *ibid.*, 303-306.



10:22 teaches that believers have been washed with pure water. Through the cleansing of sin in baptism effected by the blood of Christ, believers may now draw near to God's presence. *Apolouō*, ἀπολούω, "wash," likewise is used of spiritual cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11). As is evident from Ananias' imperative in Acts 22:16, the washing away of sins takes effect during baptism. According to 1 Cor 6:11, believers were washed "in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Along with the divine washing were sanctification and justification. The connection to baptism is definite. The noun *loutron*, λουτρόν, ("washing") used in Eph 5:26 and Tit 3:5, is also an allusion to the cleansing bath of baptism as part of God's saving act. Even Peter's analogy of the sow wallowing in her mire after having washed is figurative of those who return to sin after having been cleansed through baptism. In view of the close connection between washing and baptism, *ho leloumenos*, ὁ λελουμένος ("the one who is bathed") in Jn 13:10 means none other than the one who has been washed and cleansed in baptism.

9. "Clean" (καθαρός)

A large corpus of material in the OT contains God's stipulations on cleanliness. The requirements for cleanliness begin with the service at the tent of meeting. Only those who are clean may eat of the flesh of the sacrifice (Lev 7:19–21; 22:4–7; Num 18:13). Any priest who comes near the holy things while they are unclean would be cut off from the LORD's presence (Lev 22:1–3). The remains of sacrifices are to be disposed of in a clean place (Lev 4:11–12; 6:10–11). The flesh of the sacrifice that has touched anything unclean must not be eaten (Lev 7:19).

The demand for cleanliness extends outward from the sanctuary to the daily life of every Israelite. God gave specific laws on distinguishing the clean and the unclean animals, birds, fish, and insects (Lev ch. 11). Only the clean creatures may be consumed for food. Touching the carcasses of either the clean or unclean creatures causes one to become unclean. Other sources of uncleanness include childbirth (Lev ch. 12), skin ailments (Lev chs. 13–14), mildew (Lev ch. 14), and bodily discharges

(Lev ch. 15). The law further prescribes in meticulous detail the steps in purifying from uncleanness.

Along with the numerous regulations on cleanliness, the LORD entrusted to Aaron and his sons the duty of discerning and teaching (Lev 10:9-11; cf. Ezek 44:23). The purpose of maintaining the cleanliness of the Israelites is twofold. First, preserving their cleanliness ensures the sanctity of God's dwelling and the safety of the people (Lev 15:31). Second, the laws of cleanliness, together with the ethical demands God has also laid down, set the chosen race apart from other nations to be holy unto the LORD (Lev 20:25-26).<sup>23</sup>

The word *katharos*, καθαρός, taken to mean "pure," also applies to the materials used in the tabernacle. Pure gold was used to make or overlay certain articles, including the ark of the covenant (Ex 25:11; 38:2); the mercy seat (Ex 25:17); the table of showbread (Ex 25:23, 28, 29; 37:10); the lampstand (Ex 25:31, 36; 39:37) and the wick trimmers and trays (Ex 25:38, 39); the settings, chains, and plate on the priestly garments (Ex 28:13, 14, 22); and the altar of incense (Ex 30:3). The oil for the lamp must be of pure olive oil (Ex 27:20). The incense is likewise to be pure (Ex 30:35; 37:29).

Beyond the stipulations on cleanliness, *katharos*, καθαρός is used of inner and moral purity. A person without evil intent is said to have a pure heart (Gen 20:5, 6; Job 11:13; Ps 24:4; 51:10) and he who does not practice evil has clean hands (Job 17:9). To be sinless is to be pure from sin (Prov 20:9). The upright person is considered clean (Job 4:7, 17; 8:6; 33:9; Ecc 9:2), and so are his works and his prayers (Job 11:4; 16:17).

Through the prophet the LORD urged the people to wash themselves and make themselves clean (Isa 1:16). In fact He promised that He would cleanse them Himself (Isa 1:25; Ezek 36:25). On the day of the LORD's vengeance for Zion, there will be a highway, a "clean way" and a "holy way" in the desert for the ransomed of the LORD to return to Zion (Isa 35:8

23 *The Doctrine of Baptism* (Anaheim: True Jesus Church, 2008), 8-9.

LXX). Such eschatological promises anticipated the spiritual cleanliness to be realized in the NT.

In the Gospels we have accounts of Jesus' cleansing the leprous (Mt 8:2, 3; Mk 1:40-44; Lk 5:12-14; 17:11-19). Jesus went beyond observing the laws of cleansing by miraculously healing them of their disease. This divine act of cleansing was one of the signs that Jesus was the Messiah (Mt 11:2-6; Mk 1:44; Lk 7:20-23; cf. Lk 4:27). Jesus also gave this power to the apostles as they went out to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 10:8).

The imperative of cleanliness that Jesus taught directly contradicted the Pharisees and scribes who paid close attention to superficial purity but neglected inner purity (Mt 23:25-26; Mk 7:5-23; Lk 11:39-41). What defiles a man is not unwashed hands but the evil things that come from within him (Mk 7:18-23). Thus, in the Beatitudes the Lord declares that the pure in heart is blessed, for they shall see God (Mt 5:8). Paul also stresses the importance of a pure heart (1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22).

In fulfillment of the prophecies in the OT that God Himself would provide cleansing, Jesus Christ through His sacrifice purifies us from our sins (Tit 2:13, 14; Heb 1:3; 1 Jn 1:9). This purification is effected through the blood of Christ (1 Jn 1:7), which cleanses our evil conscience (Heb 9:14; 10:22). This spiritual cleansing of the conscience by the blood of Christ occurs in baptism (1 Pet 3:21; Eph 5:25, 26). Through baptism, both Jews and Gentiles alike receive the right to be sons of God (Gal 3:26-29). This is the grace of God, bringing a new state of purification through faith that supplants the separation that once excluded Gentiles (Acts 10:10-16, 28; 15:8-9).

The purification that believers have received places them in an obligation to keep their purity, for this is the purpose for which God has called them (1 Thess 4:7; Tit 2:14). Therefore, Paul exhorts us to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness and separate ourselves from the unclean (2 Cor 6:17-7:1; 2 Tim 2:20, 21). Having been made holy, believers in the body of Christ must purge out all sins from among them (1 Cor 5:7). In the apocalyptic picture we see the wife of the Lamb adorned with the fine, clean, and bright linen which represents the righteous acts

of the saints (Rev 19:7, 8). Whereas we had once presented our members as slaves of uncleanness, we are now to present our members as slaves of righteousness for holiness (Rom 6:19). Obedience to the truth results in purity of the soul through the Spirit (1 Pet 1:22), for God is able to cleanse believers through His word (Jn 15:2-3).

Jesus' words in the footwashing narrative about cleanliness reveal both the purity afforded by God as well as the need for believers to keep that purity. He stated that he who is bathed is completely clean (Jn 13:10)—a reference to the cleansing received through baptism. Nevertheless, Jesus pointed out that not all of His disciples are clean, knowing who would betray Him (Jn 13:10, 11). By turning away from the way of righteousness, Judas had forfeited the grace of cleansing.

## E. EXEGESIS

### 1. Verse 1-5

This section not only depicts Jesus' footwashing but also provides the setting within which the footwashing takes place. Specifically, we learn of the timing of the event, the characters involved, and the meaning behind Jesus' action. Much theological significance is compacted into the first three verses of the narrative. Many key words seen in earlier chapters of the Gospel now come together, including the Passover, His hour, His own, going to the Father, and Judas Iscariot.

#### a. Verse 1

##### **"Before the Feast of the Passover,"**

On three occasions in the Gospel the author notes with a similar expression that it was near the Passover, the feast of the Jews (Jn 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). The last of these follows Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, the final recorded sign in the "book of Jesus' signs." The miracle led to a mixed result. While many believed in Jesus, some reported it to the Pharisees (Jn 11:45, 46). Gravely concerned by Jesus' widespread influence, the Pharisees convened a council, and from that day on, they plotted to kill Jesus. As the Passover

was approaching, many were seeking Him and wondering whether He would come to the Feast, while the chief priest and the Pharisees had given an injunction for anyone who might know Jesus' whereabouts to report Him.

The narrative that follows begins with another temporal note that it was six days before the Passover (Jn 12:1). Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet, the presence of Judas the betrayer, and the recurring mention of the murderous plot of the chief priests all contribute to the buildup to the "book of Jesus' hour."<sup>24</sup> Thus, we observe that each succeeding reference to the final Passover signals the coming of the hour for Jesus the Lamb of God to be slain and for Him to be glorified.

The present verse, which opens the second major section of the Gospel (i.e. the "book of Jesus' hour"), once again provides us with a time reference with respect to the Passover. The setting of the footwashing narrative is a dinner "before the Feast of the Passover."

Was this dinner the last supper? While the Fourth Gospel omits the institution of the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion), the parallel accounts—found in all four Gospels—of Jesus' revelation of His betrayer during dinner places the footwashing definitively in the last supper (Mt 26:21-25; Mk 14:18-21; Lk 22:21-23; Jn 13:21-30; cf. 1 Cor 11:23-25).

The more difficult question is whether the last supper was also the Passover meal. There seems to be a contradiction between the accounts in John and the synoptic Gospels. While the synoptic accounts indicate that the last supper was also the Passover meal (Mt 26:17, 18; Mk 14:12; Lk 22:7, 8, 13, 15, 16), Jn 18:28 informs us that Jesus was led to Pilate before the eating of the Passover (the Jews would not enter the Praetorium lest they should be defiled and unfit to eat the Passover). One attempt at resolving the chronological problem is to understand the eating of the Passover in John 18:28 as eating the festival offering during the Feast of

<sup>24</sup> As discussed in the structural analysis of this passage, the "book of Jesus' hour" is a reference to the second major section of the Gospel, i.e. John 13:1-20:31.

the Unleavened Bread, which has come to be identified as also the Feast of Passover.<sup>25</sup> If this interpretation is correct, then the expression “before the Feast of the Passover” can be understood as an introduction to the footwashing, which immediately preceded the eating of the Passover. Furthermore, “preparation of the Passover” (παρασκευῇ τοῦ πάσχα) in John 19:14 and “preparation” (παρασκευῇ) in John 19:31, referring to the eve of the Passover week rather than the eve of the Passover meal,<sup>26</sup> do not contradict this chronology.

### “Jesus, knowing”

The word for “know” (οἶδα) and its derivatives recur throughout the narrative. The present verse reveals Jesus’ foreknowledge of His imminent departure from this world. Parallel to this in verse 3 is His surpassing knowledge of the universal authority He has received from the Father, His divine origin, and His returning to God. He also knows who will betray Him (v. 11) as well as whom He has chosen (v. 18). In contrast, the disciples do not as of yet know (σὺ οὐκ οἶδας ἄρτι) what Jesus was doing (v. 7). Their knowledge derives only from Jesus’ subsequent explanation and instruction (v. 17). Hence, the narrator’s stress of Jesus’ knowledge helps us see that Jesus’ actions and their timing were not from impulse but stemmed directly from a clear divine purpose.

### “that His hour had come”

The coming of “His hour” reinforces the sense of purpose with which Jesus carried out the following actions. “Hour” (ὥρα) is a key concept in the Gospel, especially in the second major part (hence the term “the book of Jesus’ hour”). The Greek word *hōra*, ὥρα (“hour”) often refers to a time in God’s grand scheme in which what has been predestined must be fulfilled (Jn 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 16:2, 4, 21, 25, 32).

Central to the unfolding of God’s program is the expression

25 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Apollos; Eerdmans, 1991), 589.

26 J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover from the Earliest Times to A.D. 70* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 36–37; and C. C. Torrey, “The Date of the Crucifixion according to the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931): 227.

“His hour,” which alludes to the hour of Jesus’ passion and glorification—the hour for which Jesus came into the world (Jn 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1)<sup>27</sup>. Before the arrival of this foreordained hour, no one could lay hands on Him. But now, that hour has come. The knowledge of this fact prompts Jesus’ subsequent actions.

**“in order that He might transfer out of this world to the Father,”**

This clause, introduced by the conjunction *hina*, ἵνα (“in order that”), specifies the purpose of Jesus’ hour. The basic meaning of *metabainō*, μεταβαίνω (“transfer”) is to go from one place to another. John 5:24 and 1 John 3:14 use the word beyond its spatial meaning to speak of crossing over from death to life. In the present verse, the word is used in the spatial sense but extends it into the heavenly realm. Having been sent into the world to save the world (Jn 3:17), the Son of God must now complete His mission in this world and return to His Father.

**“[and] having loved His own who were in the world,”**

Here we have another participial clause. Whereas the preceding participial clause pertains to Jesus’ knowledge, this one speaks of His love. Being an aorist participle, the time of *agapēsas*, ἀγαπήσας (“having loved”) is prior to the action of the leading verb, *ēgapēsen*, ἠγάπησεν (“He loved”). By placing the same word for love thus in a participle construction, the author brings our attention to this single act of love as the culmination of the love He has shown up to this point.

The adjective *idios*, ἴδιος (“own”), which is used substantively in the plural to refer to a specified group (since it is preceded by the definite article), underscores the concept of exclusive possession. Thus, when the Jews accused Jesus of calling God His own Father (Jn 5:18), the implication is that Jesus had taught that He was in a unique relationship to the Father. In John 1:11, we learn that the Logos came to

27 Although “My hour” in Jn 2:4 may encompass a broader perspective of God’s timing, it certainly includes, if not ultimately has in view, the hour of Jesus’ glorification.

the created world, which is His own (τὰ ἴδια), yet His own creatures (οἱ ἴδιοι) did not receive Him. In this context, this created world and the people therein are considered Jesus' own. However, in John chapter 10, *ta idia*, τὰ ἴδια ("His own") refers to a more narrowly defined group, namely, the believers (Jn 10:3, 4). These are the sheep within the fold who know, as well as are known by, the good shepherd and who hear His voice. This is in sharp contrast to the hireling, who would never consider the sheep his own (Jn 10:12). It is in this latter sense that we may understand the meaning of *tous idious*, τοὺς ἰδίους ("His own") in Jn 13:1. These are the followers of Christ, and within the setting of the footwashing narrative, they are the disciples of Jesus who were present at the dinner. They are the ones whom Jesus had loved all along. While God loves the whole world (Jn 3:16), His love for those who keep His commandments is special (Jn 14:21, 23).

**"loved them to the ultimate."**

Before Jesus' departure from this world, He loved His own who were in the world with a final act of love. As discussed in the word study section, *eis telos*, εἰς τέλος may be either temporal ("to the end") or quantitative ("to the extreme"). Here, the context allows for both meanings. The reference to the arrival of Jesus' hour indicates that this act of love takes place towards the conclusion of Jesus' earthly mission. The participial clause immediately preceding this main clause that Jesus has loved His own further suggests that this final act of love is also the crowning act of love. Therefore, we may translate the clause in a way that includes both aspects: "He loved them to the ultimate" or "He loved them to the uttermost."

In the broader context of "the book of Jesus' hour" and the entire Scripture, this ultimate act of love can be none other than Jesus' personal sacrifice, for in this most noble act God demonstrated His love toward us (Jn 15:13; Rom 5:8; Gal 2:20). Without denying this truth, several observations suggest that the ultimate act of love mentioned here refers



to Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet. First, the opening words *πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα* ("before the Feast of the Passover") places the leading verb *agapēsas, ἀγαπήσας* ("He loved") in a narrower context; that is, Jesus loved them once more before the Feast of the Passover. Second, the preceding participial clause about Jesus' knowledge that His hour had come seems to indicate that this act of love was to be one final act before He goes to the cross. Lastly, the close parallel in syntactic construction between verse 1 and the following verses (2-5), and the fact that the latter verses expand upon verse 1, all add weight to the understanding that Jesus' footwashing is in view here. Thus, the thought that this act of love is a crowning act towards the end of Jesus ministry is appropriate, and it by no means undermines the truth that Jesus' greatest love was to lay down His life.

b. Verse 2

**"And while dinner was taking place,"**

The conjunction *kai, καὶ* ("and") links the thought of this sentence with that of the previous—another clue that the statement in verse 1 is an introduction to the footwashing narrative (indicating that Jesus' act of ultimate love refers to His footwashing). This temporal note parallels "before the Feast of the Passover" in the previous sentence. The footwashing took place during a meal. The present tense of the participle *ginomenou, γινομένου* ("while it is taking place") informs us that it is an action in progress when the action of the leading verb *egeiretai, ἐγείρεται* ("He rises") is taking place. The thought conveyed is thus "while dinner is taking place, ... he rises." In other words, the author spells out for us that the footwashing event occurred while dinner was taking place. This observation is significant because it highlights the fact that what Jesus did was not an ordinary washing of feet, which was usually provided before rather than during the meal.<sup>28</sup>

28 G. M. Behler, *Les Paroles D'Adieux Du Seigneur* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1960), 26

Even though *deipnon*, δειπνον may denote an ordinary meal, the meaning of a formal meal with guests is predominant in the NT. As such, the word is often translated “feast” or “banquet.” For example, Jesus criticized the scribes and Pharisees, who loved the best places at feasts (Mt 23:6; Mk 12:38, 39; Lk 20:46). The word is also used when Mark records the banquet Herod gave on his birthday (Mk 6:21). Another usage of the word is symbolic. In Revelation, we read of two kinds of *deipna*, δεῖπνα, namely the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9) and the supper of the great God (Rev 19:17). In 1 Corinthians, *deipnon*, δειπνον is used of the Lord’s Supper as well as the meal preceding it (1 Cor 11:20, 21).

It is noteworthy that in the chapter prior to the footwashing narrative, we also have an account of a dinner. Jesus was invited to a dinner at Bethany at the house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (Jn 12:1-7). What is even more striking is that something akin to footwashing took place during this dinner. Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with costly oil and wiped His feet with her hair. According to Jesus, Mary’s act was for the day of His burial. Other elements in this account, such as the mention of the Passover and the presence of Judas Iscariot, anticipate “the book of Jesus’ hour.” Therefore, a reader who follows the unfolding of events can hardly miss the parallel between this dinner and the dinner in which Jesus washed His disciples’ feet. Whereas Jesus was accorded with the greatest honor by Mary’s anointing of His feet in chapter 12, His role was reversed in chapter 13, in which He humbly stooped to wash His disciples’ feet.

It turns out that the *deipnon*, δειπνον in chapter 13 occupies a crucial place in the Gospel. Several key events took place here: Jesus’ crowning act of love, His washing of the disciples feet, the disclosure of the betrayer, the beloved disciple’s leaning on Jesus’ breast, and the departure of Judas into the night. Furthermore, the dinner setting serves as a necessary backdrop for the quotation of the prophetic words of Psalm 41:9, “He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his

heel against Me” (Jn 13:18).<sup>29</sup> Overall, there is in this dinner a strong anticipation of Jesus’ departure from this world toward the Father. It is no wonder that when the author refers back to this special occasion later on, he simply calls it “the supper” (Jn 21:20).

**“when the devil had already cast into the heart so that Judas of Simon the Iscariot might hand Him over,”**

This participial clause immediately follows the previous clause and elaborates on the setting of the footwashing. The devil had already placed the intention of betrayal into the heart of Judas.

“The devil” is another name for “Satan” (Rev 12:9; 20:2), and therefore the names are used interchangeably (e.g. Mt 4:10, 11). While the devil is mentioned at the beginning of the story, we are told later on that after Jesus had given the bread to Judas, Satan entered Judas (Jn 13:26, 27). Although he had failed in his endeavors to tempt Jesus, the devil worked through one of Jesus’ disciples. Because he succumbed to the work of the devil, Judas became the devil’s instrument. Jesus, knowing Judas’ intentions, at one point called him the devil (Jn 6:70). In fact, those who carry out the desires of the devil are also considered his sons (Jn 8:44).

The perfect tense of *beblēkotos*, βεβληκότος (“having cast”) indicates that the result of the devil’s work continued in the present. It was under such a circumstance that Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. The devil’s objective, introduced by the conjunction *hina*, ἵνα (“in order that”), is for Judas to hand Jesus over. According to the synoptic Gospels, the work of the devil in Judas’ heart had already moved him to go the chief priests prior to the last supper and negotiate a price for his Master (Mt 26:14-16; Mk 14:10; Lk 22:3-6).

29 John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 82.

c. Verse 3

**“knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands”**

This is the second occurrence of the participle *eidōs*, εἰδὼς (“knowing”). The clause that it introduces parallels and expands on the first *eidōs*, εἰδὼς clause in verse 1. The two dependent *hoti*, ὅτι (“that”) clauses reveal Jesus’ knowledge of things surpassing this physical realm. First, Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands. This truth is stated on a number of occasions in the Gospel. It teaches that Jesus, although He was in the flesh, had in fact received authority over all things. It is these hands of this sovereign Lord that washed the feet of the disciples—an utter incongruity that is essential to the footwashing.

The idea that the Father had given all things to Jesus is intimately tied to salvation. John the Baptist taught in John 3:35 that the Father loves the Son and had given all things into His hand. This universal authority which the Father has given is an authority to save: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn 3:36). Likewise, in His prayer to the Father, Jesus said, “As You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him” (Jn 17:2). Because the authority the Father had given to the Son is foundational to salvation, Jesus prefaced His great commission with the declaration of this universal authority: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” (Mt 28:18, 19). Therefore, the statement about Jesus’ knowledge that the Father had given all things into His hands, stated here at the beginning of footwashing, necessitates a sacramental view of Jesus’ footwashing. Jesus’ authority as the Redeemer, coupled with His unremitting love for His own, underlie Jesus’ action of washing His disciples’ feet. To miss the salvific aspect of footwashing is to miss its fundamental meaning.

**“and that He had come out of God and was going away to God,”**

This is the second aspect of Jesus’ knowledge the author wishes to point out. Jesus had come from God and was going to God. This clause parallels what is stated in verse 1, that Jesus’ hour had come for Him to go out of this world toward the Father. The repetition and elaboration of this thought highlight the fact that Jesus’ divine origin and destiny are themes integral to the narrative.

“He had come out of God” (ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθεν) goes beyond the spatial sense. When Jesus said to the Jews, “I proceeded forth and came from God” (Jn 8:42), the idea is that He was one with the Father and was sent by Him. To believe and know surely that Jesus had come from the Father was to acknowledge and accept His divinity (Jn 16:27, 28, 30; 17:8; cf. Jn 3:2).

*Hypagō*, ὑπάγω (“go away”), when used of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, is also a theological term. The word represents Jesus’ departure from this world. Jesus said in John 7:33 and 16:5, “I am going to Him who sent me.” Similarly, Jesus said that He was going to the Father in John 16:10 and 16:17. In chapter 8, when He drew a distinction between Him and the Jews, Jesus said that they did not know and they could not go where He was going (Jn 8:14, 21, 22). After the last meal with His disciples, Jesus spoke the same words to the disciples, although in a completely different light (Jn 13:33, 36). To the disciples, Jesus’ going away actually brought them hope. They would see the living Lord again in a little while (Jn 14:19). They knew the way where Jesus was going (Jn 14:4). Although where He was going they could not follow Him now, they would follow Him afterward (Jn 13:36).

d. Verse 4

**“He rose from dinner,”**

Jesus now moved into action with full knowledge of His mission. As we have been told in verse 1, His action is characterized by love. Jesus rose from dinner. The timing

is significant. The footwashing took place during dinner.<sup>30</sup> Bernard helps us understand the social background: “Where sandals are worn, the feet get dusty and tired, and it was a courtesy of hospitality to arrange that water was available for washing them (Lk 7:44; cf. Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judg 19:21; 1 Sam 25:41; 1 Tim 5:10).”<sup>31</sup> However, dinner was already underway when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. This means that the washing was neither for the removal of dirt from the feet nor a customary sign of hospitality. Jesus’ act was one of a kind.

“laid down the garments,”

*Himation*, ἱμάτιον can mean clothes in general (when used in the plural). Specifically, it denotes the outer garment in contrast to the tunic (Mt 5:40; Lk 6:29). The plural is used in John 13:4 and 13:12. This could mean, as Morris suggests, that Jesus had stripped to a loin cloth, just like a slave.<sup>32</sup> If this was the case, then Jesus’ act was an utter self-debasement.

The choice of the word *tithēsin*, τίθησιν (“he placed” or “he laid down”) seems to be deliberate. If the author had wished to describe the action of taking off the garments, he would have used *apotithēmi*, ἀποτίθημι (cf. Acts 7:58) or *periaireō*, περιαιρέω, words for removing a garment or a veil (cf. Gen 38:14; 1 Sam 18:4; Neh 4:23; 2 Cor 3:16). But he focuses instead on the act of placing the garments. Bible commentators such as Barrett and Brown have observed the close parallel in language between Jesus’ actions here and His words about laying down His life (Jn 10:11, 15, 17, 18).<sup>33</sup> This applies to the corresponding action of taking His garments. The word *lambanō*, λαμβάνω (“take”) in John 13:12 is also found in John 10:17, 18, where Jesus said that He would take up His life again. If such a connection exists, then

30 If the Last Supper was also the Passover meal, then we may understand the temporal note in 13:1 to mean that Jesus washed the disciples feet after dinner had begun but before they ate the Passover lamb.

31 J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, Paged continuously., ed. Alan Hugh McNeile (New York: C. Scribner’ Sons, 1929), 2:459.

32 Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*. Rev. ed. The new international commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 547.

33 C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John : An Introduction With Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 439; Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 551.

Jesus' action here prefigures His willing sacrifice. Even if we do not go that far in interpretation, it is not difficult to see the symbolic meaning in His action. By placing His outer garments, Jesus laid aside His identity as the Lord and the Teacher and took the form of a slave.

**“having taken a towel, He girded Himself.”**

*Lention*, λέντιον (“towel”), a loanword from the Latin *linteum*, is not found elsewhere in the NT. But it is attested in *Vitae Aesopi* (A.D. 1), where it mentions that a woman, preparing to wash another person's feet, girded herself with a towel.<sup>34</sup>

The word *diazōnnyμι*, διαζώννυμι (“gird”) appears also in the following verse. Outside of the footwashing narrative, this word appears only in one other place, where we read that Peter girded himself with an outer garment and plunged into the sea after hearing that it was the Lord who had been speaking to them (Jn 21:7). According to Bernard, the towel was fastened to the shoulder in order to leave both hands free.<sup>35</sup>

e. Verse 5

**“Then He poured water into the basin,”**

The verb *ballō*, βάλλω has a wide range of meaning. While its basic meaning is “throw,” the word can denote the pouring of liquid. In the LXX, it is used for pouring soup (Judg 6:19), and in the NT, pouring wine (Mt 9:17; Lk 5:37, 38). An example of this usage that closely parallels the present passage is found in *Vitae Aesopi* (A.D. 1): βάλε ὕδωρ εἰς τ. λεκάνην καὶ νίψον μου τοὺς πόδας (“pour water into the basin and wash my feet”).<sup>36</sup> Here, the word applies to pouring water for footwashing.

34 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, “Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker,” 3rd ed., 592 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

35 J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, Paged continuously, ed. Alan Hugh McNeille, 2:459 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1929).

36 *Vi. Aesopi* W 61 p. 92, 29f P.

“Water” is given theological meaning in John. At times it is associated with baptism. John the Baptist declared that he “baptized with water” (Jn 1:26, 31, 33), and it is recorded that John baptized at Aenon because there was much water there (Jn 3:23). “Water” in Jesus’ words about being born of water and Spirit is a reference to the water of baptism (Jn 3:5; cf. Tit 3:5; Col 2:12). The blood and water that flowed from Jesus’ side became the fountain of cleansing (Jn 19:34; cf. Eph 5:25, 26). The living water that Jesus gives stands for the promised Holy Spirit (Jn 4:10-15; 7:38, 39). Elsewhere, water served as preludes in Jesus’ signs (Jn 2:7, 9; 4:46; 5:7). Here, in the footwashing narrative, water again has a central function.

*Niptēr*, νιπήρ (“basin”) is related to the verb *niptō*, νίπτω (“wash”) and is therefore a vessel used for washing usually translated as “basin.” It occurs in the NT only in this verse, but it is attested in Greek literature.<sup>37</sup>

#### **“and He began to wash the feet of the disciples”**

The author depicts two things that Jesus began to do (*ἔρξατο*, ἤρξατο followed by two clauses with infinitive verbs). First, he began to wash the feet of the disciples. As discussed in the word study section, *niptēin*, νίπτειν denotes partial washing, whether it is of the face, the hands, or the feet. It is in contrast with *louein*, λούειν (verse 10), which generally means the washing of the person (i.e., to bathe). The fact that it was the disciples whom Jesus washed confirms that *tous idious*, τοὺς ἰδίους (“His own”) in verse 1, those whom Jesus had loved and now loved to the ultimate were Jesus’ followers.

#### **“and to wipe them dry with the towel with which He had been girded.”**

The second action Jesus began to do was to wipe with the towel, and the narrator specifies that the towel was that

37 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, “Based on Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker,” 3rd ed., 674 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).



which Jesus had fastened around Himself with. All of the occurrences of the word *ekmassein*, ἐκμάσσειν (“wipe”) in the NT pertain to the drying of the feet. Besides what is mentioned in this verse, it is used in a previous narrative about Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet for His burial (Jn 11:2; 12:3), and in the Lukan account in which the sinful woman washed Jesus’ feet with her tears (Lk 7:38, 44).

Lest we should overlook the magnitude of Jesus’ actions, it is helpful to pause for a moment and take in what was happening. Borchert describes what it would have been like at a dinner where footwashing was performed:

...at the meal they were undoubtedly reclining (not sitting) with their heads facing the center and their feet stretched out behind them. They supported themselves on one elbow (primarily the left) and reached for food with the right hand. The participants at the meal could ignore the one washing their feet.<sup>38</sup>

It was in such a manner that Jesus rose from dinner to wash His disciples’ feet. Touching the feet was deemed to be a menial task which even a Hebrew slave should not be required to perform.<sup>39</sup> According to the Mishnah, the rabbinic student was under an obligation to serve his teacher, and, if necessary, to wash his feet as slaves had to do for their masters and wives for their husbands.<sup>40</sup> This explains why John the Baptist, alluding to his inferior status, proclaimed that he was not worthy to even loose Christ’s sandal straps (Jn 1:27). What Jesus did defied all common sense and social norms. In the story of the footwashing, the sovereign Lord over all things became as a slave out of His perfect love for those who were His own.

38 Gerald L. Borchert, vol. 25B, *John 12-21*, The new American commentary, New International Version (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 80.

39 *Mekhilta* on Exodus 21:6

40 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 8:327-328.

2. Verses 6-11

The narrator now zooms in on Jesus and Simon Peter. He captures Peter's drastic reactions as well as Jesus' dialogue with him. The words of Christ as recorded in this section confer sacramental meaning upon His act of footwashing and firmly establish its necessity and purpose.

a. Verse 6

**“Then He came to Simon Peter.”**

This section begins with the note that Jesus then approached Simon Peter. This description indicates that Jesus washed the disciples one after another. He did not symbolically wash only one selected disciple for the purpose of demonstration, but performed the same actions for each individual. He loved His own not just collectively but, all the more, personally.

**“He said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’”**

Peter had apparently been watching in astonishment what Jesus was doing to the other disciples. He could not believe that Jesus was now going to do the same for him. He addressed Jesus as “Lord,” emphasizing his higher status. The present tense of *nipteis*, νίπτεις (“You are washing”) can be considered a conative present (i.e. it denotes an attempted but incomplete action).<sup>41</sup> Peter questioned, in fact challenged, what Jesus was about to do.

The unusual order of the words in Greek is striking. The pronouns *sy*, σύ (“you”) and *mou*, μου (“of me”), placed together at the beginning of the question, amplify Peter's incredulity over the reversal of roles—the teacher washing the disciple's feet. In effect, he was saying, “You are going to wash my feet?” Peter's passionate protest here reminds us of the way he likewise took Jesus aside to rebuke Him when Jesus was foretelling His death (Mt 16:21, 22; Mk 8:32, 33).

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 167.

b. Verse 7

**“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand afterwards.’”**

Jesus answered Peter’s objection. *Oida*, οἶδα and *ginōskō*, γινώσκω are used predominately in the sense of knowing someone or something. But, as is the case here, it may also denote comprehension or understanding (cf. Mk 4:13; Jn 8:43; Acts 8:30). Peter did not understand what Jesus was doing now, but he would understand it afterwards. *Meta tauta*, μετὰ ταῦτα may mark a time after certain specific events, and is thus translated as “after these things.” If this is the intended meaning, “these things” would be what were to soon take place as mentioned in verse 1, namely, the events leading up to Jesus’ going away to the Father. Consistent with this interpretation are the prospective remarks in the Gospel of the disciples’ acquiring understanding after Jesus’ resurrection and glorification (Jn 2:22; 12:16). Nevertheless, *meta tauta*, μετὰ ταῦτα sometimes simply means “afterwards” without reference to any specific event (e.g., Lk 18:4). This latter meaning would also be suitable in the context of this verse.

Notice that Jesus repeated the pronouns in Peter’s question. Peter had asked, “are *you* washing *my* feet?” Jesus responded with “What *I* am doing *you* do not understand now.” Doing so adds an emphatic tone to the words “I” and “You.” Out of amazement, Peter drew a distinction between himself, the disciple, and Jesus, the Master. In turn, Jesus acknowledged this distinction and contrasted Himself, the One performing the action, and Peter, the one who could not yet grasp its significance. This distinction between the divine and human perspectives is reminiscent of Jesus’ words to His mother in John 2:4, where Jesus also drew a distinction between *emoi*, ἐμοὶ (“Me”) and *soi*, σοί (“you”). Here, in the footwashing narrative, the emphatic distinction between “I” and “You” contrasts the work of the sovereign Lord and the perplexity of a disciple. The One who washed the feet was in fact far above the one who was washed.

Despite Peter's inability to grasp the meaning of the Lord's action at the moment and his utter confusion at what confounded all senses, Jesus assured him that he would come to understand it later on. In essence, Jesus was asking Peter to accept by faith what was incomprehensible. The lack of understanding should not impede his obedience. Trust in the Lord and His words bridges the unknown of the present and the certainty of the future.

c. Verse 8

**“Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’”**

Jesus' words of assurance did not mitigate Peter's disapproval of what Jesus was doing. With the strongest language, he refused to let Jesus wash His feet. *Ou mē*, οὐ μὴ with the aorist subjunctive or future indicative is the most definite form of negation regarding the future.<sup>42</sup> The double negative may be translated “by no means.” Examples of this abound in the NT (Mt 5:18; Mk 13:2; Jn 10:28; etc.). Peter had spoken with the same tone when he rebuked the Lord (οὐ μὴ ἔσται σοι τοῦτο, “This will never happen to You!” Mt 16:22) and when he vowed that he would never deny the Lord (οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι, “I will never deny You!” Mt 26:35; Mk 14:31).

As if the double negation is not strong enough, Peter added *eis ton aiōna*, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, “forever.” For him, to have Jesus wash his feet was forbidden under any circumstance and at any time, even to eternity. The combined use of *ou mē*, οὐ μὴ and *eis ton aiōna*, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα occurs only once outside of John (“I will never eat meat” 1 Cor 8:13) but six times within John. Besides the present verse, all five occurrences of this expression are the words of Christ concerning eternal life (“he shall never thirst” Jn 4:14; “he shall never see death” Jn 8:51, 52; “they shall never perish” Jn 10:28; “he shall never die” Jn 11:26). Such a language leaves no doubt over the certainty of what is stated and excludes any possibility for change.

42 Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 184.

Peter used the same language in his refusal to be washed by the Lord. The position of the genitive pronoun *mou*, μου (“my”) suggests that Peter’s feet are the center of attention.<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, this implies that Peter deemed himself to be most unworthy to receive Jesus’ washing. On the other hand, the connotation may be similar to that of Peter’s words on another occasion: “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be” (with the emphatic ἐγώ, “I”; Mk 14:29). If this is what is implied, Peter was declaring that even other disciples might accept Jesus’ washing, his feet Jesus should never wash.

Peter’s violent protest and oath shed more light on the uniqueness of Jesus’ actions. Not only were they unprecedented, they were unacceptable by any human measure. Typical of his staunchness on principles, Peter would never permit his Master of such condescension.

**“Jesus answered him, ‘Unless I wash you, you are not having a part with Me.’”**

The solemnity of Jesus’ response matched the staunchness of Peter’s refusal. Unless Jesus washes him, he has no part with Him. Here, Jesus stated the necessity of His footwashing in no uncertain terms.

The protasis “unless I wash you” directly addresses Peter’s rejection of Jesus’ washing. The consequence cannot be more severe. According to the analysis in the word study section, *meros*, μέρος may denote a portion or a share. To have a part with someone is to be identified with that person and to share in his destiny (Mt 24:51; Lk 12:46). Having a share in the father’s inheritance means to receive the portion that is given to the son (Lk 15:12). To have a share in the first resurrection (Rev 20:6) or in the tree of life and the holy city (Rev 22:19) alludes to a person’s inclusion in the kingdom of God and His salvation. On the contrary, those who have a part in the lake of fire have no place in God’s kingdom but is eternally lost (Rev 21:8).

43 Pierpont, W. G. “Studies in Word Order: Personal Pronoun Possessives in Nominal Phrases in the New Testament.” *START*, 15, 1986, p. 8-25.

In essence, Jesus delivered the ultimatum that if He did not wash Peter, Peter would be excluded from Him. He would not be identified with Jesus or relate to Jesus in any manner. Such a state of final separation would be the complete opposite of being a member of *tous idious*, τοὺς ἰδίους (“His own”) mentioned in verse 1. To refuse Jesus’ love is to reject His ownership and to declare having no part with Him. To reject Jesus’ washing is to reject the Father who had sent Him (Jn 13:20), thereby denying His divine authority (Jn 13:1, 3). Such a notion brings to mind the frightening verdict from the Lord to those who do not do the will of the Father in heaven: “I never knew you!” (Mt 7:23). The present tense of *echeis*, ἔχεις (“you are having”) is also worth our attention. The serious consequence of refusing Jesus’ washing is not only in the future but is immediate: “You are having no part with me.”

Jesus’ words to Peter thus clearly and definitively laid down the purpose of His footwashing—to have part with Him. It is in connection with this thought that on the same occasion Jesus told the disciples, “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Lk 22:29-30). Having received Jesus’ footwashing and partaken in His flesh and blood, the disciples were formally endowed with Christ’s kingdom and granted a place of honor with Him. Further implications of having a part with Christ and union with Him will be seen in the discourse subsequent to the footwashing and in His high-priestly prayer. Having a part with Jesus means having a place in His Father’s house and the hope of being received by Christ so that we may be where He is (Jn 14:2, 3). Having a part with Jesus means sharing His life (Jn 14:19). Having a part with Jesus means being a branch of the true vine and the opportunity to abide in Christ (Jn 15:5-10). Having a part with Jesus means having peace in Him and victory over the world (Jn 16:33). Having a part with Jesus means having eternal life (Jn 17:2, 3). Having a part with Jesus means the hope of being with

Him where He is to behold His glory (Jn 17:24). On the other hand, rejection of the offer to have a part with Jesus would have meant exclusion from a relationship with Him altogether.

There is one other important point. Jesus said, “If I do not wash you” rather than “If you do not have your feet washed.” The emphasis is on Jesus and His action, not on Peter’s acceptance of the washing. In other words, the result of having a part with Jesus depends on the effect of Jesus’ washing rather on the recipient’s act of accepting the washing. In view of the sacramental nature of footwashing, it is necessary to bear in mind that the effect of the footwashing originates from Christ’s gracious work.

d. Verse 9

**“Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also the hands and the head!’”**

The complete reversal of Peter’s position could not have been more drastic. Whereas he had just vowed to never let Jesus wash his feet, he now asked the Lord to wash not only his feet, but his hands and his head as well. This is further indication of the gravity of Jesus’ words concerning the relationship between washing and having a part with Him. Recognizing the terrible consequence of refusing Jesus’ washing, Peter asked Jesus to do more than just footwashing, lest there be the slightest chance that he would not have a part with his Lord. He assumed that the greater the extent of the washing, the more he would be assured of a part with Jesus. This is because he did not understand the meaning of footwashing, something we will continue to discuss in subsequent verses.

Peter’s request to wash his hands may have derived from its religious significance. As we have observed in the word study section, the Aaronic priests were required to wash their hands and feet before their ministry at the tabernacle (Ex 30:18-21). The washing of hands also served as a symbolic gesture of declaring one’s innocence (Deut 21:6). The

unwashed hands of a man was capable of defilement (Lev 15:11). The psalms speak figuratively of the handwashing as an act of cleansing (Ps 26:6; 73:13). The author of Mark provides us with some background on the tradition of washing of hands: “For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash...” (Mk 7:3-4). It was over this tradition that the scribes and Pharisees questioned Jesus (Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-23).

The request to wash the head may have been due to the simple reason that it was the only other exposed part of the body. Thomas’ suggestion that Peter’s request that his head be washed expresses that the head represents the person could have some validity.<sup>44</sup> But the washing of the head does not have clear biblical roots, even though there are references to the anointing on the head or placing dust and ashes on the head. It would have been unlikely for Peter to conjure up so quickly such a theological significance for the washing of the head apart from a related tradition.

e. Verse 10

**“Jesus said to him, ‘The one who is bathed does not have a need except to wash the feet. On the contrary, he is wholly clean.’”**

The divergence among the numerous textual variants reveals attempts to resolve a difficult reading. For a detailed discussion on the textual issues of this verse, see Excursus: Textual Notes. Basically, a group of variant readings makes no reference to footwashing. The other group of readings, however, includes the need to wash the feet. Besides the external evidence presented in the excursus, the interpretation of the meaning of the text in its context, as we will observe, lends further weight to the present reading.

<sup>44</sup> John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 96-97



Who is *ho leloumenos*, ὁ λελουμένος (“he who is bathed”), and what is this bath? Without a doubt, Jesus was speaking in analogous terms. The analogy of a bath serves to convey a truth beyond itself, for “analogy,” by definition, is the comparison of one thing to another. Schnackenburg cites examples in John in which the speaker states a general fact to convey a truth by means of an analogy.<sup>45</sup> An example of this is the passage where Jesus employed the contrast between a slave and a son to convey a truth about slavery to sin (Jn 8:34-36). What is ultimately in view is not slavery in the ordinary sense but the domination of sin. By the same token, Jesus was certainly not thinking of an ordinary bath when he said to Peter that the washing of his hands and his head were not necessary. But what is it that the disciples already had that a bath can be an analogy of? A careful study of the word *louein*, λούειν (“bathe”) demonstrates that when used figuratively, it has to do with spiritual cleansing from sin (see the section, Key Words and Phrases). Specifically, this cleansing takes place in baptism. In Acts 22:16, where the related compound verb *apolouō*, ἀπολούω “wash away” is used, the connection with washing and baptism cannot be more explicit. The perfect tense of *leloumenos*, λελουμένος (“is bathed”) also supports this interpretation. In Greek, the perfect tense represents the present state resultant upon a past action.<sup>46</sup> The choice of the perfect tense in this verse coincides with the abiding effect of cleansing that comes from the completed action of baptism.

Some commentators who side with the shorter variants that exclude mention of footwashing in this verse cite P. Oxy. 840, a fourth-century document as evidence that *louein*, λούειν and *niptein*, νίπτειν are synonyms. In short, the resulting reading would be “He who is washed (of his feet) does not have a need, but is wholly clean.” In other words, *ho leloumenos*, ὁ λελουμένος refers to the footwashing Jesus was performing (This inference is also based on the shorter

45 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 21.

46 J. Gresham Machen and Dan McCartney. *New Testament Greek for Beginners*. 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 242.

reading, which does not have εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι, “except to wash the feet.”). According to this interpretation, Peter did not need to have his hands and head washed because the footwashing makes the person wholly clean. However, equating *louein*, λούειν and *niptein*, νίπτειν based on the cited document is dubious. Furthermore, the distinction between *louein*, λούειν as a word for the bathing of the whole body and *niptein*, νίπτειν as denoting partial washing is evident in classical Greek, the LXX, and the NT.<sup>47</sup>

Thomas correctly points out that the bath mentioned here has reference to the death of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> Scripture teaches unequivocally that it is in His own blood that the Lord Jesus washed us from our sins (Mt 26:28; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:12-14; 13:12; 1 Pet 1:18, 19; 1 Jn 1:7; Rev 1:5; 5:9). This truth, however, does not contradict the doctrine that in baptism our sins are washed away. In fact, the water of baptism and the blood of Christ are brought together as one on the cross. When the soldier pierced Jesus’ side, immediately blood and water came out (Jn 19:32-35). This fulfills the prophecy that in the day when they look on the Messiah whom they pierced, a fountain shall be opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zech 12:10; 13:1). Today, the Spirit testifies that Jesus Christ has come to us through water and blood (1 Jn 5:6). The blood of Christ, which cleanses our conscience (Heb 9:14), does so when we are baptized. For this reason Peter writes that baptism saves us through the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet 3:21).

Certain commentators, such as Bultmann,<sup>49</sup> see a connection between the washing that cleanses as mentioned here and Jesus’ teaching in Jn 15:3 that the disciples were clean because of the word which He had spoken to them. The connection between the words of Christ and cleansing, however, does not exclude the cleansing that takes place in baptism. Here in John 15, *logon*, λόγον is used synonymously with *rhēma*, ῥῆμα (Jn 15:7). This brings immediately to mind

47 For a thorough discussion of this issue, see Thomas, 97-99.

48 Thomas, 100-101.

49 Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Gospel of John : A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 470-471.

“cleansed with the washing of water by the word” (καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι) in Eph 5:26, an allusion to baptism. Baptism is Christ’s cleansing by means of the water in word. The words of Christ promise and result in the effect of cleansing through the water of baptism. Nevertheless, a distinction needs to be made between the context of John 13:10 and 15:3. Whereas *leloumenos*, λελουμένος (“is bathed”) in the footwashing narrative pertains to actual washing, the cleansing mentioned in John 15 makes no reference to washing, but refers to abiding in the words of Christ.

Jesus’ words implied that all of the disciples had been baptized. Even though we do not have any accounts of the baptism of the disciples per se, we do know that the baptism for the remission of sins preached by John was an essential part of preparing for the coming of Jesus (Mt 3:1-6; Mk 1:4-5; Lk 3:3-6; Jn 1:26-28), and its impact was far-reaching (Mt 3:6; Mk 1:5). Those disciples who were formerly the disciples of the Baptist undoubtedly had been baptized by him. Jesus Himself was baptized (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22). Afterwards, Jesus and His disciples baptized in Judea while John continued to baptize in Aenon (Jn 3:22, 23). It is possible that Jesus first baptized His disciples during this period. Whether it was administered by John, Jesus, or His disciples, baptism was widespread as part of ushering in the kingdom of God. Therefore, it should not be surprising that all of Jesus’ disciples had been baptized at one point or another.

The words οὐκ ἔχει χρεῖαν (“he does not have a need”) are in response to Peter’s request for the Lord to also wash his hands and head. Here, νίψασθαι (“to wash”) and τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν (“the hands and the head”) are omitted and is understood from the immediately preceding verse. In short, Jesus indicated that the person who has had a bath does not need to wash his hands and his head.

The clause “on the contrary, he is wholly clean” (ἀλλ’ ἔστιν καθαρὸς ὅλος) provides the reason why it was not necessary for Jesus to wash Peter’s hands and head. He who is washed

in baptism is wholly clean. As discussed in the word study section, *katharos*, καθαρός (“clean”) in the NT primarily pertains to inner, spiritual purity. The act of cleansing, represented by the verb *katharizō*, καθαρίζω (“cleanse”), is associated with the washing of baptism. Christ cleansed and sanctified the church with the washing of water by the word (Eph 5:26). The blood of Christ cleanses our conscience (Heb 9:14), and this cleansing of the conscience takes place in baptism (1 Pet 3:21).

*Holos*, ὅλος (“whole”) denotes totality, whether it’s a reference to time (Mt 20:6), space (Rev 3:10), groups of people (Mt 26:59), or things (1 Cor 5:6). When alluding to a person, *holos*, ὅλος may be used to indicate the entire body (Mt 5:29, 30; 1 Cor 12:17; Jas 3:2, 3, 6). In Jn 7:23, Jesus claimed to have made a whole man well (ὅλον ἄνθρωπον ὑγιῆ ἐποίησα). Perhaps as enlightening are the demeaning words of the Pharisees to the man healed of his blindness: “you were born entirely in sin” (ἐν ἁμαρτίαις σὺ ἐγεννήθης ὅλος; Jn 9:34). These supporting verses on the meaning of *holos*, ὅλος help us understand the extent of cleanliness Jesus was speaking of. The washing supplied in baptism cleanses the entire person, and this cleansing is complete. No additional washing for cleansing is necessary, including partial washing of the hands and the head.

**“except to wash the feet.”**

The clause has resulted in much discussion on the purpose and effect of footwashing. The complexity lies in the question of how it relates to the preceding clause about not having a need (“the one who is bathed does not have a need,” ὁ λελουμένος οὐκ ἔχει χρεῖαν) and to the subsequent clause about being wholly clean (“on the contrary, he is wholly clean,” ἀλλ’ ἔστιν καθαρὸς ὅλος).

We will first examine the relationship between the present clause and the one that follows it. Does footwashing result in being wholly clean? The syntactical construction does not permit us to attribute “he is wholly clean” (ἔστιν καθαρὸς ὅλος) to “to wash the feet” (τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι). In other

words, the sentence does not state that a person is wholly clean through the washing of the feet. The conjunction *all'*, ἀλλ' indicates that "on the contrary, he is wholly clean" (ἀλλ' ἔστιν καθαρὸς ὅλος) is antithetical to the preceding clause, "the one who is bathed does not have a need" (ὁ λελουμένος οὐκ ἔχει χρείαν), instead of the present clause. Thus, "He who is bathed does not have a need" and "on the contrary, he is wholly clean" are considered one thought. "Except to wash the feet" (εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι) serves to qualify the previous clause, not to function as the cause of the complete cleansing stated in the subsequent clause. Therefore, it would not be valid to conclude based on the proximity of "except to wash the feet" (μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι) and "on the contrary, he is wholly clean" (ἀλλ' ἔστιν καθαρὸς ὅλος) that footwashing is for cleansing.

Next, the relationship between the present clause and the preceding clause requires attention. "Except" (εἰ μὴ) implies a connection between "has a need" (ἔχει χρείαν) and "to wash" (νίψασθαι). In other words, he who is bathed does not have a need (i.e., to wash the hands and the head), except [the need] to wash the feet. Thus, even though the state of complete cleansing does not derive from footwashing but from the washing in baptism, a person who has been baptized still has the need to wash his feet. The need for footwashing, however, is to be distinguished from the need for washing the hands and the head. In the view of Peter and Jesus, washing the hands and the head would have been for the purpose of cleansing. But because of the complete cleansing received when the believer is washed in baptism, these additional acts of cleansing would be redundant. Not so with footwashing. Footwashing is needed, but not for the cleansing which the spiritual bath of baptism has already accomplished.

It is also important to take note of the close connection between footwashing and baptism based on this verse. While footwashing is not for the purpose of making up for any insufficiency in baptism, it is still needed after a person

is washed in baptism. The association of *louein*, λούειν, “washing of the whole person” and *niptein*, νίπτειν, “partial washing” places footwashing in a definite relationship to baptism. A fuller discussion of the significance of footwashing in relation to baptism will be forthcoming in a later chapter.

**“and you are clean, but not all.”**

Jesus declared that the disciples were clean. The conjunction *kai*, καὶ (“and”) indicates that this thought continues from the previous sentence. Jesus had just stated, by means of an analogy, that a person who is bathed is wholly clean. Now, he applied this analogy to the disciples and affirmed that they were likewise spiritually clean. This again confirms that the former analogy of *louein*, λούειν and *niptein*, νίπτειν pointed to a deeper spiritual reality, namely, the bath in baptism the disciples had already received and the washing of feet the Lord was now performing for them.

However, Jesus also noted that not all of the disciples were clean (literally, “but not all”). The narrator gives the reason in the following verse.

f. Verse 11

**“For he knew the one who was handing him over.”**

This comment echoes what is stated in verse 2. The devil had motivated Judas to hand Jesus over. Once again, we are told of Jesus’ transcendent knowledge, and His knowledge led Him to speak the previous words. As mentioned before, the theme of Judas’ betrayal is prominent in the narrative in anticipation of Jesus’ imminent death. It is troubling indeed to see darkness looming ominously while a washing of love and humility was being carried out.

**“Because of this He said, ‘You are not all clean.’”**

The narrator completes the explanation of Jesus’ statement by quoting it again. Jesus’ remark that not all of the disciples are clean was based on His knowledge of the impending betrayal.

True cleanliness as taught in the NT proceeds from the heart. Thus Jesus stressed the importance of inner cleansing over outward cleansing (Mt 5:8; 23:25-27; Lk 11:39). When God chose the Gentiles, Peter acknowledged that their acceptance of the gospel was a sign that God had cleansed their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9). We have examined in the previous verse that a person's cleanliness comes from the washing in baptism, which cleanses his conscience (Eph 5:26; 1 Pet 3:21; cf. Heb 9:14; 10:22). However, spiritual cleansing does not end with baptism. In fact, the Bible teaches Christians to keep their cleanliness and cleanse themselves from every impurity (1 Cor 5:7; 2 Cor 6:17; 7:1; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:7; 2 Tim 2:21; Jas 4:8). By practicing righteousness, we can guard the cleanliness we have received (Rev 19:8). When we commit sins, we need to confess our sins, and the blood of Christ will still cleanse us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7-9). Therefore, we understand from the biblical perspective that a person may become unclean even after he has been washed in baptism. This was the case with Judas. Even though he had been cleansed of his old sins (cf. 2 Pet 1:9), he chose to live in sin (Jn 12:4-6), thereby continuing to present himself to uncleanness (cf. Rom 6:19). His indulgence in his greed, taken hold of by the devil, finally led him to betray the Lord. He had forfeited the state of cleanliness that he had received in baptism.

### 3. Verses 12-20

While speaking to Peter in verse 10, Jesus shifts to the second person plural pronoun *hymeis*, ὑμεῖς (“you”), thereby starting to address all of the disciples. Now, in the last section of the passage, Jesus explained to the disciples the significance of the footwashing he had just performed, bound them with the command to wash one another's feet, and endorsed the washing with His own authority.

a. Verse 12

**“Then, when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and reclined again, He said to them, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you?’”**

The dependent clause depicts Jesus’ actions in reverse order from that of verse 4. “He reclined again” (ἀνέπεσεν πάλιν), which contrasts with “he rose” (ἐγείρεται), indicates that Jesus had been reclining with the disciples during dinner prior to the footwashing and that the disciples were in this posture when Jesus was washing their feet. This reinforces our understanding of the subservient role Jesus had assumed.

In verse 7, Jesus had reassured Peter that he would understand later what Jesus was doing. Now, Jesus continued this thought and asked the disciples if they understood what He had just done. Grammatically, the sentence may also be an imperative: “Understand what I have done.” Either construction serves the same purpose. Jesus’ question (or command), which introduces this section, implied that He intended to explain now the significance of the footwashing. On the one hand, the immensity of Christ’s love for His own is far beyond what the human mind could possibly grasp. On the other hand, Jesus wanted His disciples to know the important meaning of His footwashing so they could do the same unto one another in like manner and attitude. Therefore, Jesus’ earlier promise to Peter that he would understand was fulfilled, at least in part, when He explained to them about what He had just done. Otherwise, Jesus’ question here would have been meaningless. Yet, again, this does not exclude the view that the disciples would gain a deeper insight and appreciation for this magnificent act after Jesus’ glorification and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit.

The perfect tense of *πεποιῆκα, πεποίηκα* (“I have done”) expresses the present state resultant upon Jesus’ earlier actions. The dative case of the pronoun *hymin, ὑμῖν* (“to you”) indicates that Jesus’ action was done upon the



disciples and it had a lasting impact on them. In other words, the effect of the footwashing on the disciples was not limited to the moment the washing took place, but continued to the present. The disciples' relationship with Jesus resulting from His sovereign act of love and humility was to be an enduring effect.

b. Verse 13

**“You call me ‘the Teacher,’ and ‘the Lord,’ and you say well, for [that is what] I am.”**

Teaching was an essential mark of Jesus' ministry (Mt 4:23; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; 21:23; 22:16; Mk 10:1; Acts 1:1; etc.). Therefore, He was naturally addressed as “Teacher,” a term of deference and one that represents His ministry of teaching (Mt 8:19; 12:38; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; Mk 4:38; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; Lk 3:12; 7:40; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; Jn 8:4). At times *didaskalos*, διδάσκαλος (“teacher”) is used with the article in reference to Jesus (Mt 9:11; 17:24; 23:8; 26:18; Mk 5:35; 14:14; Lk 6:40b; 8:49; 22:11; Jn 11:28). Furthermore, this term, when applied to Jesus, has a deeper significance than what the term usually implies. Speaking out against the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus told the multitudes not to be called “Rabbi” or teachers, for there is one Teacher, the Christ, just as there is one Father, who is in heaven (Mt 23:8-10). Thus, *ho didaskalos*, ὁ διδάσκαλος (“the Teacher”) is also a unique term of address reserved for Jesus the Christ that sets Him apart from Jewish Rabbis and other earthly teachers.

*Kyrios*, κύριος (“lord”), however it is used, is generally a term for addressing someone in a position of authority. It may denote either an owner or a master (Mt 20:8; 21:40; Mk 12:9; 13:35; Lk 20:13, 15). While in the vocative case it might have been occasionally used in a generic sense to mean “sir” (cf. Jn 4:11; 5:7), *kyrios*, κύριος most often represents the deity of Jesus when used by those who believed in Him. The title “Lord” carries a christological connotation, and this is especially true in the Fourth Gospel (Jn 6:68; 11:27; 20:28). It is in this sense that we may interpret Peter's calling of Jesus as

“Lord” in verses 6 and 9 of this passage. To believers, Jesus is our owner and master. To Him we owe total submission. Therefore, the analogy of master and slave, as Jesus depicted in verse 16, is an appropriate illustration of our relationship with Him (cf. Jn 15:20).

Although Jesus took on the form of a servant, He did not deny His identity as the Teacher and the Lord but affirmed it with the words “and you say well, for I am” (καὶ καλῶς λέγετε· εἰμὶ γάρ). Even while He served in such condescension, He was still the One whom every being must honor and worship.

c. Verse 14

**“Therefore, if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet,”**

“Therefore, if” (εἰ οὖν) indicates that the present clause is based on the reason provided in the previous clause and that it anticipates an apodosis.<sup>50</sup> Jesus acknowledged His superior status as the Lord and the Teacher and stated that He had deigned to wash His disciples’ feet despite His superior status. This noble example of humility becomes the basis for the imperative that followed.

The idea here, however, goes beyond humility. The terms “the Lord” and “the Teacher” connote Jesus’ higher authority. What binds the disciples to obey Jesus’ command is not just His moral example of humility, but, even more importantly, His divine authority as the One who issued the command. This point, which subsequent verses will elaborate, is crucial for understanding the necessity and significance of footwashing in the church community today.

**“you also must wash one another’s feet.”**

*Opheilō*, ὀφείλω denotes being indebted in a financial sense or being under obligation to meet certain expectations. When the latter is in mind, the word, followed by an infinitive verb, may be translated as “ought to” or “have to.”

50 For other examples of the use of εἰ οὖν, see Mt 6:23; Lk 11:36; 12:26; Jn 18:8; Col 3:1; Phlm 17.

Christ's example and commission place His disciples under an obligation to wash one another's feet. It is a mandatory act. In John 19:7, where the Jews insisted that Jesus must die according to their law, *opheilō*, ὀφείλω indicates what is required by law. Luke 17:10 uses the word in the context of a slave's obligation toward his master. The first epistle of John teaches that the magnificent love of God, demonstrated in Christ's personal sacrifice, makes us indebted to love and sacrifice for our brothers (1 Jn 3:16; 4:11). These examples reveal two elements that may constitute the binding force expressed by *opheilō*, ὀφείλω: 1) a higher authority, and 2) a moral example. Both of these elements are relevant to the necessity of footwashing. As a citizen is obligated by law and a slave is bound by duty to his master, we have a mandate from our Lord and Teacher to wash one another's feet. Furthermore, Christ's example of love and humility also motivates us to imitate Him by washing one another's feet.

A similar form of imperative with *allēlōn*, ἀλλήλων ("one another") is seen in Jesus' command to love one another (Jn 13:34; 15:12; cf. Rom 12:10; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 4:11). Other such examples in the NT are the exhortations to "receive one another" (Rom 15:7); "greet one another" (Rom 16:16; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14); "wait for one another" (1 Cor 11:33); "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2); "be kind to one another" (Eph 4:32); "submit to one another" (Eph 5:21); and "pray for one another" (Jas 5:16).

The word *allēlōn*, ἀλλήλων ("one another") suggests that footwashing is to be practiced within the community of believers. All believers are under the Lord's mandate to wash each other's feet.

The present tense of verb "wash" (νίπτειν) here indicates repeated or continual action.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, washing one another's feet is not a one-time action. Believers need to continue to carry out this command.

51 Machen, J. Gresham, and Dan McCartney. *New Testament Greek for Beginners*. 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2004), 184.

d. Verse 15

**“For I gave you an example,”**

This clause parallels the first clause of verse 14. The example that Jesus gave refers to the fact that He, being the Lord and the Teacher, washed His disciples’ feet. The word *hypodeigma*, ὑπόδειγμα is used in James 5:10 in a positive sense of the prophets’ example of suffering and patience. On the other hand, Hebrews 4:11 and 2 Peter 2:6 cite the examples of the fall of the disobedient Israelites and of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The reference in Hebrews to the tabernacle as *hypodeigma*, ὑπόδειγμα is instructive. The earthly tabernacle and the works of service were copies of heavenly things, and thus Moses was instructed to make the tabernacle in complete accordance with what he saw on the mountain (Heb 8:5; 9:23). Thus, *hypodeigma*, ὑπόδειγμα, which can be translated as “example,” “model,” or “pattern,” denotes something to be imitated or replicated.

In the footwashing narrative, what is the example or pattern Jesus had given? His enduring love and utmost humility are certainly models we must imitate. However, the imitation also includes the act of footwashing and not just the attitude it conveys, for in the preceding verse we have a clear command from the Lord to wash one another’s feet.

**“in order that just as I did to you, you also might do.”**

*Hina*, ἵνα (“in order that”) indicates the purpose of what is stated in the previous clause. Jesus gave the disciples a pattern in order that they might do according to what He had done to them. Three times in the narrative Jesus speaks of what He was doing or had done with the verb *poieō*, ποιέω (“do”). In verse 7, Jesus assured Peter that even though Peter did not comprehend what He was doing, he would understand it afterwards. In verse 12, Jesus asked all the disciples if they understood what He had just done. Here, in verse 15, He expected the disciples to do just as He had done. In all instances, Jesus is speaking of the act of footwashing as well as the magnificent qualities it embodies. Therefore, the

*hypodeigma*, ὑπόδειγμα (“example”) of the previous clause alludes specifically to Jesus’ act of footwashing, not merely the attitude behind it. These words of the Lord Jesus serve as the basis of the sacrament of footwashing. He mandates His disciples to wash the feet of new believers according to the example He has given.

e. Verse 16

**“Truly, truly, I say to you:”**

This form of speech is unique to the Fourth Gospel, and its numerous occurrences (25 times) are remarkable. It is used twice in the present passage alone (cf. verse 20). It is an expression that introduces a most solemn declaration. It is of little wonder, then, that Jesus spoke in this manner when He revealed His identity (Jn 8:58; 10:7), and even more frequently, when He proclaimed the way of eternal life (Jn 1:51; 3:3, 5; 5:24, 25; 6:47, 53; 8:51). Bernard points out that “truly, truly, I say to you” (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν) always carries a reference to what has gone before—either a reply to an observation, or an explanation and expansion of something that has already been said.<sup>52</sup> This fact is significant for the discussion of the present verse. The truth that Jesus was about to solemnly declare pertained to His former injunction to do according to His example.

**“A slave is not greater than his master; neither is an apostle greater than the one who has sent him.”**

Jesus stated these two parallel maxim-like sayings in the most solemn fashion to expound on the weightiness of His commission. Matthew 10:24 and John 15:20 record a similar saying by Jesus when speaking about the inevitability of persecution for His disciples. Luke 6:40 speaks of the relationship between a disciple and his teacher to illustrate the truth that the result of a man’s work can only be as good as the man himself. The word common to both sayings is *meizōn*, μείζων (“greater”), which contrasts a superior status

52 J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, Paged continuously., ed. Alan Hugh McNeile (New York: C. Scribner’ Sons, 1929), 1:67.

and an inferior one. The idea behind these sayings, in the context of Jesus' footwashing, is that the disciples, who are slaves and apostles, can never presume to rise above the command of their Master and the One who had sent them. They have an obligation to obey unconditionally.

The notion of sending is essential in the Fourth Gospel. God sent John to baptize (Jn 1:33); the Father sent Jesus the Son (Jn 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 37; 6:38, 39, 44; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44, 45, 49; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5); the Father and the Son would send the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7); and Jesus sent the disciples as the Father had sent Him (Jn 20:21). Here, in Jesus' command to wash one another's feet, the idea of sending comes to the fore and is mentioned twice (here and in verse 20). Sending implies a mission from a higher authority and the necessity of faithful obedience. This is the exact thought behind the commission to wash the feet of other disciples. In the same way that Jesus sent the disciples to go into the whole world to baptize and to teach, He also sent them to wash the feet of believers. It is important to also point out that an *apostolos*, ἀπόστολος ("apostle") necessarily represents the one who had sent him. It is likewise so when we perform footwashing in the community of faith. Christ has sent His church to wash the feet of the disciples. Hence, the one who washes does so on behalf of the Lord and with His divine authority.

f. Verse 17

**"If these things you know, blessed are you if you do them."**

In this instance, *ei, ei* ("if") relates to a present reality rather than a possible condition.<sup>53</sup> As such, it may be translated as "since" or "inasmuch as." Jesus had taught the disciples what they needed to know. What remained was for them to put their knowledge into action.

We may understand what "these things" (ταῦτα) refers to by reviewing Jesus' words to His disciples concerning the

53 Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 189.

need for footwashing. Not accepting Jesus' washing would result in not having a part with Him (8); he who has had a bath needs to have his feet washed (10); if Jesus, being the Lord and the Teacher, washed His disciples feet, they ought to also wash one another's feet (14); Jesus had given them a model for them to imitate (15); a servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him (16). Whereas Peter was not able to understand what Jesus was doing, he and the rest of the disciples now know (οἶδατε) the importance and significance of Jesus' washing as well as the mandate for them to do the same. While Jesus' words "you will know after this" in verse 7 may include a fuller knowledge after His glorification, Jesus indicated that they already knew what they needed to do.

Now, having known these truths, the disciples must act on them by accepting the task of a servant and an apostle, emulating Jesus' perfect example of self-giving, and administer footwashing unto other disciples. Jesus promised them that blessing would follow obedience. This pattern is similar to the great commission, in which Jesus likewise promised His continual presence with the disciples if they fulfilled the mission entrusted to them (Mt 28:19, 20).

*Makarios*, μακάριος ("blessed") can have the general meaning "happy" or "good." This state of wellbeing is most often the result of God's reward for those who are in His kingdom (Mt 5:3-10; Lk 6:21; 12:37, 38; 14:14; 1 Pet 4:14; Rev 14:13; 20:6; 22:14). As is the case here, blessedness is derived from doing the word of God (Lk 11:28). Thus, *makarios*, μακάριος in the Bible is repeatedly connected with a person's actions. Unlike *ei*, εἰ ("if" in the sense of "since") earlier in the sentence, which indicates present reality, *ean*, ἐάν ("if") leaves the possibility open. In other words, the blessedness promised here is contingent on whether the disciples actually carry out Jesus' command.

Jesus' words of blessing once again underscore the weight of His command. Three times in this section Jesus commanded footwashing. First, He based His command on His authority

as their Lord and Teacher (14). Then He stated His expectation for them to do what He had done for them according to the example He had demonstrated (15). Lastly, He promised blessedness for carrying out the commission (17). The preponderate call to action behooves believers to actually put footwashing into practice in the church.

g. Verse 18

**“I am not speaking about all of you. I know whom I have chosen.”**

As He had done in verses 10b and 11, Jesus again qualified His words of commission and blessing. Just as Judas was excluded from those who were clean, he was likewise excluded from the blessed command to the community of faith. “Whom I have chosen” is a reference to the twelve apostles handpicked by Jesus (Jn 6:70; Lk 6:13). God’s election is not only a mark of privilege but also involves some greater purpose (Jn 15:16; Acts 1:2; 1 Cor 1:27, 28; Eph 1:4; Jas 2:5). Thus, the word *apostolos*, ἀπόστολος (“apostle”), which Jesus had mentioned in verse 16, denotes someone who has been sent to carry out a mission. It was for a divine mission that Jesus had called the twelve. However, Judas had forsaken his calling for his own gain.

As highlighted in the setting, the mention of Jesus’ foreknowledge is crucial to the narrative and for recognizing His divinity. Here, once again, we see the word *oída*, οἶδα (“know”), and this time, it was Jesus who spoke. Jesus had full knowledge of everyone He had chosen, including what laid ahead in their future. As mentioned in John 6:70, Jesus was fully aware that one of those whom He had chosen would be the betrayer. He was not a helpless victim of circumstances but the sovereign Lord over all things. This fact is yet another reminder that His institution of footwashing was out of divine initiative and authority.



**“But that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘The one eating my bread lifted his heel against me.’”**

Remarks about the fulfillment of Scriptures serve to highlight God’s sovereign purpose as well as to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah the prophets spoke about. We are reminded here that even Jesus’ betrayal by one of His chosen was a fulfillment of what was written in the Scriptures.

The quotation is taken from Psalm 41:9. The text in the Fourth Gospel is a departure from the LXX<sup>54</sup> and was probably the author’s own translation of the Masoretic Text (MT), since the expression of the lifting of the heel is in the MT. *Pterna*, πτέρνα (“heel”), which occurs only here in the NT, translates the Hebrew *‘āqēb*, עֲקֵב. The verb form, עָקַב, literally means “seize someone by the heel”<sup>55</sup> and is used to denote betrayal (cf. Ps 49:6). Bishop relates how pointing the sole of one’s feet at someone was an impolite gesture in oriental culture and suggests that the expression “lifting up the heel” implies something even deeper, such as contempt, treachery, and even animosity.<sup>56</sup>

The parallel statement in Luke 22:21 has Jesus saying, “But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table.” Here, reference is made to the one eating bread. Eating bread at the same table was a symbol of covenant and fellowship (Gen 26:26-31; 31:54; 2 Sam 9:10, 11; Gal 2:11-12). “My bread” (μου τὸν ἄρτον) indicates that the one who lifted up his heel was the guest at the table. It was the one who offered him bread that he disdained and betrayed. Instead of *ho esthiōn*, ὁ ἐσθίων (“the one eating”) as found in the LXX, the author uses *ho trōgōn*, ὁ τρώγων (“the one eating”), a term repeated four times in John 6 with reference to the one who partakes of Jesus’ flesh (Jn 6:54, 56-58). We may thus infer

54 The LXX has “καὶ γὰρ ὁ ἀνθρώπος τῆς εἰρήνης μου, ἐφ’ ὃν ἤλπισα, ὁ ἐσθίων ἄρτους μου, ἐμεγάλυνεν ἐπ’ ἐμὲ πτεργισμόν” “For my close friend, on whom I placed confidence, the one eating my bread, was committing a great treachery against me” (Ps 40:10).

55 Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J. Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Volumes 1-4 combined in one electronic edition., electronic ed. (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999, c1994-1996), 872.

56 Eric F. F. Bishop, “‘He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.’ Jn xiii. 18 (Ps xli. 9).” *The Expository Times* 70, (1958), 881-883.

that the footwashing took place during the last supper, during which the Holy Communion was also instituted.

We can hardly miss the connection between “feet” and “heel.” While Jesus washed the feet of each disciple as a final act of love and a gesture of utmost humility, Judas was also about to lift up his heel against the One who had just washed his feet. Whereas the disciples received a part with Jesus by accepting the washing of feet, Judas’ feet were about to depart from the fellowship with Jesus and walk into darkness.

h. Verse 19

**“From now I say to you before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I AM.”**

Jesus explained that the reason for foretelling the impending betrayal is that the disciples would believe in time that He is the “I AM.” However startling was the thought of betrayal by one of Jesus’ own, Jesus was in perfect control of all things and made even the most hideous act serve His purpose.

Faith as the goal and purpose is a central theme in the Gospel (Jn 1:7; 3:16; 11:15, 42; 14:29; 17:21; 20:31). Here, faith is achieved through the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction. Similar statements are also recorded in John 14:29 and 16:4. In the prophetic books, we are told that foretelling of the future is the prerogative of God. Only the LORD is able to declare from the beginning what is to come. This foreknowledge sets Him apart from useless idols and leads the people to believe that He is the LORD God (Isa 41:26; 48:5; Ezek 24:24). In the same way, when all that Jesus had foretold takes place, the disciples will put their faith in Him.

Specifically, Jesus’ disciples would believe “that I AM” (ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι). We may discern two types of *egō eimi*, ἐγὼ εἰμι declarations by Jesus that are unique to the Fourth Gospel. First, there are the seven “I am” pronouncements, and these all have predicates that reveal His identity in relation to believers (e.g., “I am the bread of life” in Jn 6:35, 51 and “I am the good shepherd” in Jn 10:11, 14). Another type of *egō*

*eimi*, ἐγὼ εἰμι declarations are those without any predicate to follow. These are also known as the absolute *egō eimi*, ἐγὼ εἰμι statements. Besides this instance in 13:19, the other three occurrences are all in chapter 8 (“for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins,” 8:24; “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM,” 8:28; “before Abraham was, I AM,” 8:58). Anyone familiar with the LXX would have recognized that Jesus’ declaration of *egō eimi*, ἐγὼ εἰμι harked back to God’s self-revelation in the OT. For example, in Isaiah 43:10, the LORD spoke to His people, “That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I AM (ἐγὼ εἰμι). Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.” Therefore, Jesus in essence revealed Himself as the everlasting and only God who is over all things, and thus the disciples will put their faith in Him when all that He had foretold come to pass.

Jesus’ clear disclosure of His identity as the LORD God is paramount with respect to His institution of footwashing. Time and again in this passage, we have seen that Jesus’ divine authority underlies His example and imperative to the disciples to administer footwashing. In due time, when the disciples come to faith in the crucified and exalted Christ, they would also gain a full understanding that the divine institution of footwashing was prepared beforehand for salvation, and that by accepting the washing commissioned by the Lord, believers may come to take part in Him.

i. Verse 20

**“Truly, truly, I say to you: the one receiving whomever I send receives Me, and the one receiving Me receives the One who has sent Me.”**

As a final note, Jesus again made a most solemn proclamation. The keywords in this verse are “receive” (λαμβάνω) and “send” (πέμπω). Clearly, the focus has shifted from the administration to the reception of footwashing. He who receives the one Jesus sends receives Him, and he who receives Him receives the One who had sent Him. In verse 16, where the previous “truly, truly” (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν) expression

occurs, we have learned that those who are sent to perform footwashing (the slaves and apostles) do so based on a higher authority. In that verse we also saw for the first time in the passage the word *pempō*, πέμπω (“send”). Now, in verse 20, Jesus laid His emphasis upon the receiving of this sending. In other words, every disciple who accepts the footwashing from the one sent by Jesus acknowledges Jesus’ divinity and yields to the authority He has received from His Father. If a believer confesses that Jesus is the “I AM,” he must receive the washing He had commissioned. As such, Jesus required not only the administration but also the reception of footwashing. It is when believers obey both of these expectations that the mission entrusted by their Lord and Teacher is accomplished.

#### F. EXCURSUS: TEXTUAL NOTES

Several places in the Greek text of the footwashing passage present some text-critical issues. Most instances of divergent readings do not result in significant difference in meaning as far as the doctrine of footwashing is concerned. But two issues are noteworthy. In particular, the variants found in the manuscript witnesses of the phrase “except to wash the feet” in John 13:10 deserve extensive discussion because they result in very different readings. We shall examine in turn these two text-critical issues.

##### 1. γινομένου (“while taking place,” verse 2)

The first instance of textual variation has two different readings. The aorist middle participle “γενομένου” (“having taken place”) is found in  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$   $\aleph^2$  A D K  $\Gamma$   $\Delta$   $\Theta$   $f^{1,13}$  33. 565. 700. 892. 1424. l 844  $\mathfrak{M}$  lat. This reading places the main verb of the sentence “ἐγείρεται” (“he rose” in verse 4) and the entire footwashing event after the dinner, unless we understand “γενομένου” (“having taken place”) to indicate the completion of the serving of the supper. The variant chosen by *Novum Testamentum Graece*, *Nestle-Aland* 28, “γινομένου,” (“while taking place”) indicates that the footwashing event took place while dinner was underway. This reading is supported by  $\aleph^*$  B L W  $\Psi$  070. 579. 1241 *pc* d *r*<sup>1</sup>. “γενομένου” (“having taken place”) is supported by the

Alexandrian witness P66 and the 7th century correction of **Ⲱ**<sup>57</sup>. The other witnesses include those of western and Caesarean text types as well as the Majority text. In comparison, “γινόμενον” (“while taking place”) is witnessed by the original reading of **Ⲱ** and additional manuscripts of the Alexandrian text type, such as B, L, W, and Ψ. Considering that the context of the passage clearly indicates that the events occurred while dinner was still in progress (cf. verses 4 and 26), we may conclude that “γινόμενον” (“while taking place”) is the original reading, which is attested to by more numerous reliable witnesses. Metzger’s Textual Commentary is also in favor of this variant.<sup>58</sup>

2. εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι (“except to wash the feet,” verse 10)

The text-critical work of this key phrase is fundamentally important to the doctrine of footwashing. Several variant readings are presented to us. While some of them do not differ in meaning, others produce very different readings.

The variants and their supporting witnesses are as follows:

- a. νίψασθαι (**Ⲱ** aur c vg<sup>st</sup>; Or<sup>com</sup>): “to wash”
- b. νίψασθαι εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας μόνον (D): “to wash the head, except only the feet”
- c. εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας μόνον νίψασθαι (**ⲡ**<sup>66</sup> **Θ** (1424) *pc* sy<sup>s,p</sup>): “except to wash only the feet”
- d. ἢ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι (**ⲡ**<sup>75</sup> A C<sup>3</sup> f<sup>1</sup> **ⲙ** sy<sup>h</sup>): “than to wash the feet”
- e. The entire phrase is absent in 579
- f. εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι (B C\* (K) L W Ψ f<sup>13</sup> 892 *al* it vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>h</sup>; Or<sup>txt</sup>): “except to wash the feet”

Variants b, c, and f have in common the words εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας (“except the feet”), indicating that the one who has had a bath does not have a need (to be washed), except to wash the feet.

Variant d substitutes the particle ἢ for εἰ μὴ. In this context, ἢ

<sup>57</sup> Aland, Kurt et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece. 28th Edition*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012. Print.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 204

is used to denote comparison, in the sense of “than.”<sup>59</sup> As such, the verse may be understood as “He who has had a bath has no (other) need than to wash the feet.” This reading agrees in meaning with b, c, and f.<sup>60</sup> The addition of μόνον (“only”) in readings b and c emphasizes Jesus’ words that washing is needed for none other than the feet.

Variant e leaves out the whole phrase, including mention of τοὺς πόδας (“the feet”) as well as the verb νίψασθαι (“to wash”). Read together with the previous verse, Jesus would be simply responding to Peter’s request, that it was not necessary to wash the hands and the head. The text would be silent on whether the washing of feet is needed for he who has had a bath.

Variant a makes no reference to τοὺς πόδας (“the feet”) but retains νίψασθαι (“to wash”). The entire sentence is thus ὁ λελουμένος οὐκ ἔχει χρείαν νίψασθαι (“he who is bathed does not have a need to wash”). This reading produces yet quite another meaning from the previous readings mentioned. If adopted, the text would indicate that he who has had a bath has no need for any kind of washing. It essentially removes the necessity of footwashing altogether.

Variant a is found in the excellent  $\aleph$  (4th century), an Alexandrian witness; the Latin Codices aur (7th century) and c (12th/13th century); an edition of the Vulgate (4th century), Vulgata Stugutartiensis; and Origen’s commentary (3rd century). Although the witnesses are generally early, they are few in number to carry sufficient weight. Of these, only  $\aleph$  represents the more reliable Alexandrian text type.

Manuscript 579 (13th century) is the only known witness that omits this phrase entirely (Variant e). While it belongs to the second Alexandrian family,<sup>61</sup> by itself, this witness is inadequate to carry much weight. Variant b, where we find reference to

59 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, “Based on Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker,” 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 432.

60 Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition: a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 204.

61 Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 313.

την κεφαλὴν (“the head”), likewise has the support of only one witness, and is therefore not to be adopted.

This leaves us with three variations that attest to the necessity of footwashing: c, d, and f. Looking at the witnesses combined that support these three variant readings, the weight of external evidence is decidedly in favor of an original text that indicates that it is necessary to wash the feet. Among the witnesses are  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$  (ca. 200),  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  (3rd century), B (4th century), C\*<sup>3</sup> (5th century), L (8th century), W (5th century), and 892 (9th century), which all belong to the Alexandrian family of texts. Of these, the latter four support the variant reading f, εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι (“except to wash the feet”), which is likely the earliest text. In addition, this variant is also attested by numerous other manuscripts that differ from the Majority text. This is one main reason the Textual Commentary adopts this reading.<sup>62</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland 28 likewise opts for this text.

Because of the divergent views commentators hold on what constitutes the original text, it is important to look carefully at the internal evidence as well. Many commentators appeal to one of the rules of textual criticism, that the shorter reading is preferred (*lectio brevior portior*), and argue in favor of variant a, ὁ λελουμένος οὐκ ἔχει χρεῖαν νίψασθαι (“the one who is bathed does not have a need to wash”). The argument essentially states that the addition of εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας (“except the feet”) is due to the scribe’s attempt to reconcile this verse with the context in light of Jesus’ solemn declaration that Peter would have no part with Him unless He washed him.

However, just as likely is the possibility that the omission of εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας (“except the feet”) was an error in transmission.<sup>63</sup> In fact, the omission may even have been intentional because it seemed difficult to reconcile it with the following phrase, ἀλλ’ ἔστιν καθαρὸς ὅλος (“but he is wholly clean”).<sup>64</sup> In this case, the rule that the more difficult reading is preferred (*lectio difficilior*

62 Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the *United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament* (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 204.

63 *Ibid.*, 204.

64 *Ibid.*, 204.

*potior*) applies. Thus, internal evidence does not necessarily lean in favor of the shorter reading.

All things considered, the preponderance of the weight of external evidence of the longer reading with the likelihood of unintentional or intentional omission of the phrase in the shorter reading, it is best to stand with Metzger and *Novum Testamentum Graece* and retain the reading εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι (“except to wash the feet”).



# Chapter 2

## OTHER REFERENCES TO FOOTWASHING IN THE BIBLE

The purpose of this survey on biblical and secular references to footwashing is not to conduct a comprehensive study of footwashing in general. Rather, our main concern is how Jesus' footwashing in John 13 compares with other practices of footwashing, and whether the latter may help us gain a better understanding of the former. Therefore, we will not discuss each reference in great depth, but will concentrate mostly on discerning the different types of footwashing in biblical times and the respective meaning of each.<sup>65</sup>

### A. CULTIC FOOTWASHING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The LORD decreed that Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and their feet in water from the bronze laver when they went into the tabernacle of meeting or when they came near the altar to minister (Ex 30:17-21). In accordance with the LORD's command, Moses placed the laver between the tabernacle and the altar and put water there for washing. Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons would wash their hands and their feet with water from the laver whenever they went into the tabernacle or came near the altar (Ex 40:30-32).

Later, in the temple built by Solomon, "the sea" (הַיָּם) replaced the laver of the tabernacle and was used for the priests to wash in (2 Chr 4:6). Josepus thus describes the function of the sea:

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed survey, see John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 26-58.

Now, he appointed the sea to be for washing the hands and the feet of the priests when they entered into the temple and were to ascend the altar;<sup>66</sup>

This requirement for the washing of the hands and feet was specifically for priests. It was a preparatory washing before service at the tabernacle or temple, and is to be distinguished from the purification from uncleanness in the ordinary life of an Israelite.

Is it valid to draw a parallel between the priestly washing and Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet? Scripture does tell us that believers are chosen priests, and we are to serve our God (1 Thess 1:9; Heb 9:13-14; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:5, 6; 7:15; 22:3). However, the partial washing (νίπτειν) of the hands and feet by the priests is nowhere mentioned in the NT. Therefore, there is hardly any biblical basis that the washing of the feet by priests has direct connection to Jesus' footwashing. Furthermore, there are definite differences between these two washings.

1. When Peter asked Jesus to wash not only his feet, but his hands and head as well, Jesus replied that the washing of hands and head is not necessary for the one who has had a bath because he is wholly clean. Whereas priests in the OT must wash both the hands and the feet, the washing of hands is excluded in Jesus' washing.
2. While the OT decree for the priests was explicitly in the context of ministry at the tabernacle or temple, Jesus did not indicate in any way that His footwashing was for the consecration of the disciples. If any inference can be made, we may say that "having a part" with Jesus may be liken to the priests in the OT having a part in the ministry. Even so, this does not establish a clear link between the partial washing of the priests and Jesus' footwashing.

<sup>66</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, Includes index* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1987), Ant 8.87.

## B. WASHING IN A METAPHORICAL SENSE IN GREEK CULTURE

The washing of hands and feet was also found in ritual settings in Greco-Roman times.<sup>67</sup> Its ceremonial background gave rise to related metaphors. Erasmus, in his gigantic compilation of adages, included the saying ἀνίπτοις ποσὶν ἀναβαίνειν (“to enter with unwashed feet”):

To enter with unwashed feet, is to attack an important task confidently but without experience, as though in a profane and irreverent attitude of mind. The metaphor comes from the ceremonial of sacrifice, in which the rule was that everything provided must be clean and newly washed. Lucian in his *Life of Demonax*: ‘But he did not enter on this with unwashed feet, as the saying goes,’ that is, raw and inexperienced. Again, in the *Teacher of Public Speaking*, he criticizes those who approach the teacher’s task ‘with unwashed feet,’ meaning, not equipped with a good education. Aeneas the sophist in one of his letters: ‘Most men force their way onto this holy ground with unwashed feet, as the saying goes.’ Aulus Gellius in the *Nights*: ‘With unwashed feet, as they say, and with unwashed language he criticizes the style of a distinguished author.’ Macrobius in book 1 of the *Saturnalia*: ‘They pass by with unwashed feet.’ He is thinking of the teachers of literature who ignore the obscure learning concealed in Virgil’s poetry.<sup>68</sup>

The ritual use of washing the hands and the feet in Greek culture should not be used to interpret Jesus’ footwashing because there is no such biblical basis. However, the fact that the expression “unwashed feet” had become a metaphor shows that the washing of feet, whether its actual practice or connotation, was certainly not foreign to those who lived under the influence of Greek culture.

## C. FOOTWASHING FOR PERSONAL COMFORT AND HYGIENE

In 2 Sam 11:8, David instructed Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” Much discussion has taken place around the meaning of washing the feet in this story. In view of David’s plot to conceal his sin, commentators see the instruction to wash the

67 John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (London; New York: T & Clark International, 2004), 42-44.

68 Erasmus av Rotterdam, and R. A. B. Mynors. *Collected Works. Vol. 32 Adages I Vi 1 to Ix100*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1989.

feet as a circumlocution for sexual intimacy or some allusion to self-purification. However, David might have simply meant for Uriah to go home and refresh himself, having just returned from the battlefield.

Another reference to footwashing that has a similar connotation is in the Song of Solomon:

I have taken off my robe; How can I put it on again?

I have washed my feet; How can I defile them? (Song 5:3)

In a poetic depiction, the lover knocks on the door of his beloved, yet she hesitates because she has gone to bed. That she has washed her feet indicates that she has already retired for the night. To get down to open the door for her lover would soil her feet again. We may discern here a common practice to wash one's feet clean at the end of the day before going to bed.

Ample evidence outside of the Bible indicates that footwashing was a common part of the daily Greek and Roman life for personal hygiene. In Apuleius' *Apology*, he argued that cleaning one's teeth was as important as washing one's feet:

I should be obliged, therefore, if my critic Aemilianus would answer me and tell me whether he is ever in the habit of washing his feet, or, if he admits that he is in the habit of so doing, whether he is prepared to argue that a man should pay more attention to the cleanliness of his feet than to that of his teeth.<sup>69</sup>

Sudhoff has documented paintings and drawings of individuals washing their feet.<sup>70</sup> Thomas also mentions texts referring to tripods used for footwashing and the archeological discovery of footwashing as further evidence that support the practice of footwashing for hygienic purposes.<sup>71</sup>

The reference in the Song of Solomon speaks of defiling the feet after washing them. We may infer that washing the feet in ordinary life was for the purpose of cleansing. While it is tempting to see relevance of this in Jesus' footwashing, we need to bear in mind

69 Cited according to the translation of H.E. Butler, Apuleius : *Apology* - Section I, [http://www.chieftainsys.freeseerve.co.uk/apuleius\\_apology01.htm](http://www.chieftainsys.freeseerve.co.uk/apuleius_apology01.htm)

70 K. Sudhoff, *Aus dem antiken Badewesen. Medizinisch-kulturgeschichtliche Studien an Vasenbildern* (Berlin: Allgemeine Medizinische Verlagsanstalt, 1910).

71 John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 45-46.

Jesus' words in the narrative of John 13. Jesus clearly taught that he who is bathed is wholly clean, and as such it was not necessary for Him to wash Peter's hands and head. In Jesus' mind, footwashing was not meant for cleansing from filth the way that bathing was. Even though footwashing is closely tied to bathing, it goes beyond the purpose of cleansing. The only explicit statement we have in terms of the purpose of Jesus' footwashing is that the consequence of not receiving Jesus' washing is not having a part with Him.

#### D. FOOTWASHING AS A FORM OF HOSPITALITY

Several instances of footwashing in the Bible took place in the context of hospitality. The host offers the guests water for washing their feet. Often times, a meal was to be served after the footwashing.

Genesis 18 contains the narrative of the LORD's appearance to Abraham. Abraham saw the three men, ran to meet them, and bowed down on the ground, pleading to the LORD, saying:

My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant. (Gen 18:3-5)

Here, footwashing is clearly a gesture of hospitality for the purpose of refreshing the guest after a journey. Abraham's exact words in Hebrew were **וַיִּרְחֹצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם** ("and wash your feet"). *Wərahāšû, וַיִּרְחֹצוּ* is a second person plural imperative verb, indicating that the guests were to wash their own feet with the water that was brought to them. The LXX, however, has *καὶ νιψάτωσαν τοὺς πόδας ὑμῶν* ("and let them wash your feet"). *Nipsatōsan, νιψάτωσαν* is a third person plural, implying that Abraham's servants would wash the feet of the guests. If the MT was the original, one possible explanation for the discrepancy could be that the LXX deemed it inappropriate for Abraham to ask the LORD to wash His own feet.

When the two messengers arrived in Sodom in the evening, Lot, who was sitting at the gate, saw them, stood up to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. He said to them,

Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way. (Gen 19:2).

Like Abraham, Lot also pleaded for an opportunity to receive the messengers. The offer of water for footwashing is similarly a gesture of hospitality. Both the MT and the LXX use the second person plural verb for “wash,” which means that the guests were to wash their own feet. The purpose of washing the feet is also to refresh oneself after a journey before retiring for the night.

Genesis 24 records Abraham's servant visiting at the house of Laban. Laban provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. He also set food before him to eat (Gen 24:32, 33). *Lirhōs*, לָרְחֹץ (“to wash”) is in the infinitive, and it is thus not clear who would be washing their feet. The LXX uses the infinitive verb *nipsasthai*, νίψασθαι (“to wash”) in the middle voice, which means that the guests were to wash their own feet. Note that the washing of feet was followed by a meal.

When the steward of Joseph's house had brought Joseph's brothers into the house for a banquet, he gave them water (Gen 43:24). The Hebrew words רָגְלוֹתֵיהֶם וַיִּרְחֻצוּ (“and they washed their feet”) could mean either the brothers of Joseph washed their own feet, or the slaves at Joseph's house washed their feet, although from the immediate context we should understand “they” as referring to Joseph's brothers. However, the LXX has καὶ ἤνεγκεν ὕδωρ νίψαι τοὺς πόδας αὐτῶν (“and he brought water to wash their feet.”). The natural way to understand the sentence with the aorist active infinitive verb “to wash” is that it was the steward who washed their feet.

In the account of the Levite and his wife's terrible death, the old man in Gibeah invited them to stay for the night. We are told: “So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank” (Judg 19:21). Here, too, the washing of feet is mentioned as part of the hospitality they received, and the washing was followed by a meal. In this case, it is clear from both the Hebrew and the Greek that the guests washed their own feet.

In *Joseph and Aseneth*, an apocryphal writing that scholars generally consider to be dating from the first century B.C.E. and the second century C.E., we read of Joseph being received as a guest at the house of Pentephres (the name for Potiphar in the LXX): “And Joseph came into Pentephres’s house and sat down on a seat; and he washed his feet, and he placed a table in front of him separately, because he would not eat with the Egyptians, for this was an abomination to him” (7.1).<sup>72</sup> Joseph washed his feet before he began the meal. We may infer that water had been offered to him for footwashing as part of the reception.

The NT has an indirect reference to footwashing as a custom of hospitality. While Jesus was eating as a guest at the house of Simon the Pharisee, a woman who was known as a sinner brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with her tears. She then wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the fragrant oil (Lk 7:36-38). The word for “wash” in this passage is *brechō*, βρέχω (“wet” or “rain”) rather than *niptō*, νίπτω, and in place of water she used her own tears. The woman’s actions far exceeded what a host would normally offer a guest, and thus this footwashing was most extraordinary. What interests us in particular are Jesus’ words to Simon: “You gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head” (Lk 7:44). ὕδωρ μοι ἐπὶ πόδας οὐκ ἔδωκας (“water upon my feet you did not give to me”) tells us that Simon did not offer Jesus even an ordinary gesture of hospitality; that is, pouring water on Jesus’ feet or for Jesus to wash His own feet. It is also noteworthy that Jesus viewed the woman’s actions, including wetting His feet with her tears, as arising out of her great love for Him.

Footwashing as a form of hospitality is also part of the Greek culture. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Penelope bid her maidservants to wash the feet of Ulysses, who had disguised as a beggar:

And now, you maids, wash his feet for him, and make him a bed on a couch with rugs and blankets, that he may be warm and quiet till morning.<sup>73</sup>

72 *Joseph and Aseneth*, translated by David Cook, <http://www.markgoodacre.org/aseneth/translat.htm#VII>

73 Homer, *The Odyssey*, The Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.19.xix.html>

When Ulysses insisted that he would accept washing only from an old and respectable woman, Penelope asked Euryclea, who was Ulysses' childhood nurse, to assume the task. This scene is depicted in a well known vase painting.<sup>74</sup>

Another historical evidence of footwashing is in Herodotus' records about Amasis, who was a Pharaoh of Egypt. He relates how Amasis broke a golden vessel for footwashing and made a statue of a god out of it: "He possessed many fine things, among which was a golden vessel in which he and his guests used to wash their feet."<sup>75</sup> These words reveal that the washing of feet was offered to guests as part of hospitality.

Reference to footwashing being offered at a banquet is also found in Plutarch's works. He relates how Phocion noticed the luxury at the banquet he and his son Phocus had been invited to, he admonished his son:

And when he went to the banquet and saw the general magnificence of the preparations, and particularly the foot-basins of spiced wine that were brought to the guests as they entered, he called his son and said: "Phocus, do not let thy companion ruin thy victory."<sup>76</sup>

The numerous biblical and secular references cited confirm that footwashing was an act of hospitality in biblical times both in the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. How does this fact help us understand the meaning of Jesus' footwashing? The narrative in John 13 does not mention hospitality as part of the meaning of Jesus' act of love. However, some connection between footwashing as a form of hospitality and the meaning of Jesus' footwashing is not impossible. Jesus' footwashing was an act of love for His own (Jn 13:1), and through the footwashing the disciples could share a part in Jesus (Jn 13:8). Bible commentators have observed the parallel between footwashing and Jesus' words in Luke 22:27 that He was as the One who served. Luke places this incident in the context of

74 Perseus Digital Library Project. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University, <http://old.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ima.ge?lookup=1993.01.0668&type=vase>.

75 Herodotus, Samuel Shirley, James S. Romm, *On the war for Greek freedom: selections from the Histories* (Hackett Publishing, 2003), 55.

76 Plutarch, Perrin, Bernadotte, *Plutarch's Lives* (London: W. Heinemann; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919), 190-191



the last supper. When the disciples were disputing as to which of them should be considered the greatest, Jesus said to them:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Lk 22:25-30)

Jesus, the one “who sits at the table,” was like the host of a banquet. Yet He became as one who serves. This humble Servant now bestowed upon the disciples the kingdom He had received from His Father so that they may eat and drink at Christ’s table in His kingdom. If Jesus’ condescension as a servant is a reference to the footwashing account in John 13, then we may understand that Jesus’ footwashing was an act of welcoming His disciples to eat and drink at His table in His kingdom. “The Lord’s table” is a term Paul employed for the Holy Communion (1 Cor 10:21).

Eating and drinking in Christ’s kingdom also reminds us of Jesus’ words at the Lord’s supper: “for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Lk 22:16) and “for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Lk 22:18). As discussed earlier, the Lord’s supper most probably took place after the footwashing.

When we put together these elements, we have an imagery of Jesus, as the host of the banquet, stooping to wash the disciples so that they may eat and drink at His table. If footwashing was generally understood as an act of hospitality, it would have been natural for the disciples to also view Jesus’ act in such a light. But this is not to say that Jesus’ footwashing was an ordinary washing before a meal. Not only did Jesus’ washing take place during, not before, the meal, Jesus’ action as a servant defied all social norms. However, translated to the spiritual realm, Jesus’ footwashing before the institution of the Holy Communion may be viewed as a

spiritual act of reception into His banquet. Rejection of His washing would result in not having a part with Him at all.

If we carry this thought further to Jesus' imperative to the disciples, we may also understand washing one another's feet as teaching the mutual acceptance of Christians in Christ's kingdom. Just as Christ receives us we also ought to receive one another, as Paul teaches in Romans:

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. (Rom 15:1-7)

Although we do not need to press the point that footwashing is Christ's spiritual act of hospitality in His kingdom, the association of footwashing in general with hospitality does help us appreciate the significance of having a part with Jesus through His washing of love.

#### **E. FOOTWASHING AS SERVITUDE**

The different types of footwashing we have examined thus far (i.e., ritual purity, personal hygiene, and hospitality) mostly involved washing of one's own feet. However, there were times when footwashing was performed by someone else. In such cases, the washing would usually be delegated to slaves. Even when the person who performed the washing was not a slave, he or she would assume a subservient role. Ample evidence both within and outside of the Bible demonstrates this aspect of footwashing.

1 Samuel 25 records the story of David and Abigail. When David learned of Nabal's death, he sent for Abigail and proposed to her to take her as wife. Abigail 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 Sam 25:41). Abigail accepted David’s proposal by calling herself David’s maidservant and placing herself in a position even lower than that of her David’s servants. She expressed her willingness to submit to David by stating her readiness to wash the feet of his servants. Thus, footwashing was clearly the work of slaves.

*Testament of Abraham*, a pseudepigraphic text of the OT that probably dates to the first century B.C.E. or C.E., relates Michael the archangel’s visit to Abraham to announce his death. As the story goes, Abraham said to Isaac his son,

My son Isaac, draw water from the well, and bring it me in the vessel, that we may wash the feet of this stranger, for he is tired, having come to us from off a long journey. And Isaac ran to the well and drew water in the vessel and brought it to them, and Abraham went up and washed the feet of the chief captain Michael.<sup>77</sup>

The footwashing in this account was no doubt a hospitable act. What distinguishes it is that the footwashing was not performed by a slave but by the host himself. Abraham took the role of a slave to wash Michael’s feet not merely to welcome the guest but also as a gesture of honoring the archangel sent from God.

We also find mention of footwashing as an act of servitude in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Aseneth, out of her love for Joseph, prayed to God for Joseph and to grant her to serve him all her life:

But to thee, my Lord, do I entrust him; for I love him more than mine own soul. Preserve him in the wisdom of thy grace, and give me to him as a servant, so that I may wash his feet and serve him and be his slave for all the seasons of my life. (Jos. Asen. 13:11-12)<sup>78</sup>

Aseneth was willing to be Joseph’s servant, and footwashing is mentioned as an expression of such servitude. Incidentally, this is an example of volunteering to wash another’s feet as an act of love.

77 Translated by W.A. Craigie. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 9. Edited by Allan Menzies. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1007.htm>>

78 *Joseph and Aseneth*, translated by David Cook, <http://www.markgoodacre.org/aseneth/translat.htm#XIII>

As the story developed, Joseph and Aseneth were soon to be married. Joseph came to her father's house and Aseneth welcomed him.

And Aseneth said to him, "Come, my lord, come into my house;" and she took his right hand and brought him inside her house. And Joseph sat down on her father Pentephres's seat, and she brought water to wash his feet; and Joseph said to her, "Let one of your virgins come, and let her wash my feet." And Aseneth said to him, "No, my lord, for my hands are your hands, and your feet my feet, and no one else shall wash your feet;" and so she had her way and washed his feet.<sup>79</sup>

Regardless of the verity of the story of Joseph and Aseneth, the references to footwashing indicate that it was viewed as an act of service.

As discussed in the word study section, actions toward a person's feet were often symbolic of surrender or obeisance. Two places in the Psalms speak figuratively of actions of this type, particularly with implicit reference to footwashing as a sign of subjugation. Psalm 58:10 promises vindication for the righteous:

The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance;  
He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked

The washing of feet in this verse is washing with blood rather than water, obviously as a hyperbole to portray the utter defeat of the wicked. In Psalms 108 and 60, God proclaims His sovereign rule over Israel and her neighbors:

Moab is My washpot;  
Over Edom I will cast My shoe;  
Over Philistia I will triumph.  
(Ps 108:9; also 60:8).

Although it is not explicitly stated what the "washpot" is for, the mention of "My shoe" in the parallel line suggests that it is a basin for footwashing. The idea here is that Moab and Edom would be brought low and subjugated.

Touching the feet was considered by Jews to be such a menial task that it is among the works that Jewish slaves should not be

79 Ibid.

required to perform.<sup>80</sup> Pe'ah, the second tractate of Seder Zera'im of the Talmud, tells of a story about Rabbi Ishmael to illustrate the extent to which one must honor his father and mother, and the story is about his refusal to let his mother wash his feet:

R. Ishmael's mother came and complained against [her son] before our rabbis. She said to them, "Rebuke Ishmael my son, for he does not treat me with respect!" At that moment our rabbis' faces flushed [with embarrassment]. They thought, "Is it possible that R. Ishmael would not treat his parents with respect?" [So] they said to her, "What did he do to you?" She said, "When he left the [scholars'] meeting place I wanted to wash his feet and drink the water, but he wouldn't let me, [thereby showing me disrespect]!" They said to [Ishmael], "Since this is her wish, this is [what you must do as a mode of] honoring her."<sup>81</sup>

Rabbi Ishmael's refusal to let his mother wash his feet was apparently out of his respect for her, although his filial piety was actually judged to be dishonoring his mother. This story shows that in the mind of a Jew, washing someone else's feet was a lowly task.

Similarly, in the Greco-Roman world, footwashing was viewed with disdain and delegated to slaves. As we have seen earlier in Homer's *Odyssey*, Penelope ordered her maidservants to wash the feet of Ulysses. Ulysses, however, would not permit it but said that he would accept it only if there was an old woman servant in the house who could perform the task. Hence Penelope asked Euryclea the elderly servant to wash his feet.<sup>82</sup>

Thomas extensively documents sources in which footwashing is mentioned as an obligation assigned to slaves. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate this fact. Herodotus described the fall of Miletus and recorded a prophecy once spoken about its fate:

Then shalt thou, Miletus, so oft the contriver of evil,  
Be, thyself, to many a least and an excellent booty:  
Then shall thy matrons wash the feet of long-haired masters;  
Others shall then possess our lov'd Didymian temple.<sup>83</sup>

80 Mekhilta on Exodus 21:6

81 Roger Brooks, *Peah* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 50.

82 Homer, *The Odyssey*, The Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.19.xix.html>

83 Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, The Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.6.vi.html>

According to Herodotus, this prophecy came true: “Such a fate now befell the Milesians; for the Persians, who wore their hair long, after killing most of the men, made the women and children slaves.”<sup>84</sup> We may see from Herodotus’ descriptions that the washing of feet by the women of Miletus was a symbol of their subservience.

In *Pompey*, Plutarch records how Favonius served Pompey on their voyage after Pompey had suffered a defeat:

At supper time, the master of the ship having made ready such provisions as he had aboard, Pompey, for want of his servants, began to undo his shoes himself, which Favonius noticing, ran to him and undid them, and helped him to anoint himself, and always after continued to wait upon, and attended him in all things, as servants do their masters, even to the washing of his feet and preparing his supper.<sup>85</sup>

This passage is explicit about the washing of the master’s feet belonging to the work of servants.

It is evident from the numerous examples that whether it is for comfort or a gesture of hospitality, washing another person’s feet was a humbling act of service expected of someone inferior. Recognizing the extremely lowly nature of washing someone else’s feet is essential to appreciating Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet. The narrative in John 13 repeatedly brings out Jesus’ condescension. Jesus had come from God and was going back to God. He was the I AM, the omniscient Lord whose hands governed all things, even things not yet. He laid down His life only to take it up again and to live eternally. He was their Lord and their Teacher. Such was the One who assumed the work fit only for a slave: He laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel, poured water into a basin, washed the feet of each of His own disciples who were reclining at the table, and dried them with the towel. His actions were beyond human comprehension, and thus we can hardly blame Peter for his repulsion. Jesus, after washing their feet, spoke concerning what He had just done: “You call me ‘the Teacher,’ and ‘the Lord,’ and you say well, for [that is what] I am. Therefore, if I,

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Plutarch, *Pompey*, Ancient Greek Online Library, <http://www.greektxts.com/library/Plutarch/Pompey/eng/810.html>

the Lord and the teacher, washed your feet..." (Jn 13:13, 14). As the Lord and the Teacher, He was by no means obliged to wash His disciples' feet. But the fact that He did so was the most humbling yet most noble act, and this became the foundation of the commission to believers. Therefore, only if we consider the subservient nature of Jesus' footwashing can we begin to grasp the magnitude of His actions.

#### **F. VOLUNTARY FOOTWASHING OUT OF AFFECTION OR VIRTUE**

While footwashing was normally the duty of slaves, we do find exceptions in literature where individuals volunteered to wash the feet of another. These instances of footwashing stemmed from love, loyalty, or respect.

The Babylonian Talmud specifies the duties of a wife. It states that if the wife had brought the husband four bondwomen, she may lounge in easy chair. However, "she should nevertheless fill for him his cup, make ready his bed and wash his face, hands and feet."<sup>86</sup> The washing of feet here is listed together with other homemaking responsibilities that were by no means demeaning. It is evident that, in this case, the washing of feet would be performed out of the wife's affection for her husband rather than by coercion.

Cited earlier, the example of Rabbi Ishmael and his mother may also be viewed in the same light. The mother considered it an honor to wash her son's feet, probably because of who he was as well as out of love for her son. Even though footwashing was a lowly task, and for this reason Rabbi Ishmael refused to let her wash him, she willingly put herself in that humble position.

Plutarch addressed his friend Clea in *The Morals* concerning the virtues of women. He cited examples of women worthy of praise in various locales. This was what he had to say about the young women of Cios:

It was a custom among the maids of Cios to assemble together in the public temples, and to pass the day together in good fellowship; and there their sweethearts had the felicity to behold how

86 Kethuboth 61, [http://www.come-and-hear.com/kethuboth/kethuboth\\_61.html](http://www.come-and-hear.com/kethuboth/kethuboth_61.html)

prettily they sported and danced about. In the evening this company went to the house of every particular maid in her turn, and waited upon one another's parents and brethren very officiously, even to the washing of their feet.<sup>87</sup>

These maids were not slaves in any manner, yet they would honor each other's parents and brethren by going as far as washing their feet. Plutarch regarded such an act of service, which was done out of respect, as a virtue.

We have made a prior reference to Favonius, who washed the feet of Pompey and served him while they were aboard a ship. Even though he was an aristocrat, not a slave, he performed this act of humility for Pompey out of his loyalty.

Clement, writing about seeking perfection in love, devoted a chapter to how women as well as men are capable of perfection. Among the numerous examples of honorable women He mentioned is the daughter of Cleobulus:

The daughter of Cleobulus, the sage and monarch of the Lindii, was not ashamed to wash the feet of her father's guests.<sup>88</sup>

"Not ashamed" implies that washing the feet of guests was usually deemed to be something too lowly for the host to do. But as a virtuous daughter and out of love for her father, Cleobulus' daughter willingly volunteered for the humble service.

These examples of self-debasement are certainly relevant to our discussion of Jesus' footwashing. Just as these noble individuals offered to wash the feet of others out of affection or virtue, Jesus washed His disciples' feet even though He was their Lord and Teacher. The Bible clearly tells us that He loved His disciples. Therefore, the footwashing as depicted in the narrative was indeed an act of love. One thing that the examples have in common is that in the cases where a person chose to wash the feet of another, the ones receiving the acts of service were either worthy of honor and respect or were in a position where love was due them. On the contrary, the disciples whose feet Jesus washed had neither the

87 Plutarch, *The Morals*, vol. 1, Trans. William W. Goodwin, The Online Library of Liberty, [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1211&chapter=91421&layout=html&Itemid=27](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1211&chapter=91421&layout=html&Itemid=27)

88 Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. II: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Fathers of the second century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 432.



status nor the merit to warrant such acts of self-debasement from their Lord and Teacher. Jesus loved and served even the undeserving, and this selfless giving was embodied in His footwashing.

#### **G. WASHING THE FEET OF SAINTS IN 1 TIMOTHY 5:10**

References to footwashing in the NT are scanty. This passage in 1 Timothy is the only mention of footwashing outside of John 13, if we do not include the exceptional story of the sinful woman wetting Jesus' feet with her tears in Luke 7. Paul instructed Timothy concerning widows in the church, and one of the conditions for enrolling a widow is that she had washed the feet of saints (1 Tim 5:9, 10). The footwashing in this context is unique in several aspects, and thus requires some explanation.

The Greek text and a fairly literal translation of these two verses are provided below:

Χήρα καταλεγέσθω μὴ ἔλαττον ἑτῶν ἑξήκοντα γεγονυῖα,  
ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή,  
ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς μαρτυρουμένη,  
εἰ ἑτεκνοτρόφησεν,  
εἰ ἐξενοδόχησεν,  
εἰ ἀγίων πόδας ἐνίψεν,  
εἰ θλιβομένοις ἐπήρκεσεν,  
εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολούθησεν.

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years old  
wife of one man  
in good works she is being testified  
if she brought up a child/children  
if she showed hospitality  
if she washed feet of saints  
if she gave relief to afflicted ones  
if she followed all good works

These two verses are within Paul's instructions on providing for widows in the church. Paul stated that widows who have children or grandchildren should be cared for by their own families. Those who may be enrolled (i.e., provided for by the church) must meet the requirements listed in verses 9 and 10.

The passage does not provide any explanation on the meaning of washing the feet of saints, but the context does give us some indication. The two occurrences of “good works” (ἔργοις καλοῖς and ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ) enclose a set of four conditions, one of which is that the widow had washed the feet of saints. Therefore, washing the feet of saints was considered to be among the good works. If we look at the four conditions listed, they all pertain to some type of provision of service. On this basis, the footwashing mentioned here should not be a reference to the sacrament of footwashing, since Scripture does not consider the administration of sacraments a good work to be rendered.

This footwashing is also not representative of hospitality in general because it is distinct from the work of showing hospitality (ἐξενδοχῆσεν), which was mentioned immediately before it. *Hagiōn, ἁγίων* (“saints”) in the NT is a designation for believers in general (cf. Acts 9:13, 32; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1, 2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 2:19; 3:8; Phil 4:22; Col 1:4, 26; Heb 6:10). Hence, the washing of feet mentioned here is restricted to within the community of faith. It is likely that it is a reference to a special type of hospitality, namely the reception of saints. While the washing of feet as a general form of hospitality would have been delegated to slaves, washing the feet of the saints would have been an act of love taken up by believers. The third epistle of John speaks about such a kind of hospitality. The elder expressed his joy in knowing from the brethren that Gaius had been walking in the truth. He then commended Gaius:

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. (3 Jn 5-8)

Several points in these words deserve attention. *Hypolambanō*, ὑπολαμβάνω in verse 8 denotes receiving someone as guest. According to the elder, it was a “work” because of the verb *ergazomai*, ἐργάζομαι in verse 5 (*ergazomai*, ἐργάζομαι means “engage in activity that involves effort, work”). The people whom Gaius

would labor to receive were “the brothers and these strangers” (τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους). In short, the work that Gaius had been doing was receiving strangers who were also brothers. These were itinerant ministers of the truth, who depended on the hospitality of believers while they served in the ministry. By receiving such ministers, the believers became *synergoi*, συνεργοὶ (“coworkers”) for the truth (verse 8).

In light of 3 John, therefore, it is possible that the footwashing in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 represented a special type of hospitality believers offered to traveling ministers. Such a service would have been rightly called “good works.” In distinction from hospitality in general, this type of good work constituted a direct participation in the preaching and teaching of the truth.

This special footwashing could have stemmed from, or even be viewed as a compliance to Christ’s command to wash one another’s feet, since it does embody love and humility among believers. If so, this passage would be the closest cross-reference to Jesus’ footwashing, to which we will now turn.

# Chapter 3

## SIGNIFICANCE AND NECESSITY OF JESUS' FOOTWASHING

In the final analysis, we will incorporate the results of our study to arrive at a systematic and comprehensive understanding of Jesus' footwashing, as recorded in John 13. Drawing from our studies on the word, syntactical, and structural levels, and combining what we have gathered through a clause-by-clause exposition of the narrative, we will come to some conclusions about what Jesus' footwashing that night means to us today.

At this point, a brief discussion on the meaning of "sacraments" is in order, since whether footwashing is a sacrament is a question of primary importance. "Sacrament" was originally from the Latin *sacramentum*, which in turn is the translation of the Greek *mystērion*, μυστήριον ("mystery"). Early church fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine used the term for rites of the church such as baptism and the eucharist.

While *mystērion*, μυστήριον is a biblical word, the term "sacrament" as it has been applied to Christian rites as well as its theological definition are not found in the Bible. Therefore, it is not necessary to adhere to them absolutely. Nevertheless, the NT does indeed teach us rites that meet the following conditions: 1) They instituted by Christ; 2) They are necessary for salvation; and 3) Christ had commissioned the church to observe them. Through these rites, commonly known as "sacraments," Christ imparts His salvation to the believers. Baptism and the Holy Communion are among such institutions. The issue that concerns us in this study is whether footwashing is also in the same category, which for convenience we shall call sacraments. These are the two fundamental questions we must answer:

1. Did Christ establish footwashing as an external sign to be carried out by the church?
2. Is footwashing effective and necessary for salvation?

Only after we have determined that footwashing is a sacrament can we proceed to discuss the nature of its effect as well as how Scripture expects it

to be administered and received.

#### **A. THE OCCASION OF JESUS' FOOTWASHING**

As mentioned before, many of the themes in the "book of Jesus' hour" are seen in the footwashing narrative, and they converge in the introductory verses. In terms of the timing of the footwashing event, the author speaks in the introduction of the arrival of Jesus' hour, His going away to the Father, and the devil's influence on Judas' heart. In the narrative, we are made keenly aware that the time for Jesus' death and His return to glory had come. It was at this particular moment within the divine council that Jesus washed the disciple's feet. Therefore we must locate the meaning of Jesus' footwashing in His death and resurrection. This premise is key to our discussion on the nature, effect, and commission of footwashing.

It is obvious from the rich theological intimations in the solemn introduction that the author deems the setting to be critically important to the entire narrative. He informs us of the timing of the footwashing, not only within the ordinary human timeline but, even more importantly, from the omniscient divine perspective. Through this divine perspective we the readers are able to look into the future as well as things in the spiritual realms.

We are told first of all that the footwashing was before the Feast of the Passover (Jn 13:1). The mention of the Passover in the temporal note is more than simply dating the event. The Passover was a prominent feast of the Jews since its institution at the time of Exodus. It served as a memorial of God's mighty deliverance of His people. Central to the feast was the slaughtering of the paschal lamb, the blood of which protected the Israelites from judgment. This motif is crucial in the portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, the only gospel that records the Baptist's proclamation that He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29, 36). Having been sent to the world that the world may be saved through His death, Jesus became the ultimate fulfillment of the paschal lamb. The setting of the footwashing in the Passover meal is all too vivid a reminder of Jesus' identity and His forthcoming sacrifice. Yet the picture is not a gloomy one, for through His death

and resurrection He shall accomplish salvation for mankind. The effect of footwashing is possible because of this greatest act of deliverance.

The theme of Jesus' departure is reinforced by the comment that Jesus knew that His hour had come for Him to transfer out of this world toward the Father (Jn 13:1). "Jesus' hour," a key concept in John, connotes God's foreordained timing, particularly with regards to His going away and glorification. The entire gospel had been building up to the arrival of this hour. In the introductory section of the gospel, we read that Jesus was the true light coming into the world (Jn 1:9). While He was in the world, He was light of the world (Jn 9:5). Now that He had finished His ministry on earth for which He had been sent to do, He was going to leave this world to return to the Father. It was with full knowledge that the time had come for God's will to be accomplished that Jesus proceeded to wash His disciples' feet. In these final moments, Jesus instituted the footwashing and the Holy Communion as His last works before the cross. Jesus' footwashing, therefore, is much more than merely an example of humble service. Rather, it should be understood in light of Jesus' death and glory as well as the work He must fulfill before His passion.

The narrator also informs us that the footwashing took place while dinner was underway (Jn 13:2). We have already considered the order of events in relation to the footwashing. According to John, Jesus hinted at the betrayal as well as the identity of the betrayer throughout the footwashing narrative, and He finally revealed who His betrayer was after the footwashing. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus revealed Judas as the betrayer on the occasion of the Lord's supper. This means that the footwashing most likely occurred right before the institution of the Holy Communion. As has been discussed before, if we were to view footwashing in light of its function as a form of hospitality before a meal, then we have Jesus washing His disciple's feet before they partook of the Communion. Through the footwashing Jesus prepared them spiritually and received them into His banquet. Now that they had been granted a share in Him, they were able to take part also in His body and His blood.

Next, we learn that the timing of footwashing was related to Judas' betrayal. The narrator enables us the reader to look into the heart of Judas and see the work of the devil. He tells us that the devil had already placed the evil intention into the heart of Judas (Jn 13:2). The theme of betrayal runs through the entire narrative. Having declared that the disciples were clean, Jesus added that not all of them were clean, and the author clarifies that He was speaking of the betrayer (Jn 13:10-11). Later, after promising that the disciples would be blessed if they obey the command of footwashing, Jesus again made a note of the betrayer, who had lifted his heel against Him in fulfillment of the Scriptures (Jn 13:18, 19). This prelude of the coming darkness once again underscores the connection between footwashing and Jesus' death.

Lastly, the introduction gives us a glimpse of Jesus' transcendent knowledge. Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come out of God and was going away toward God (Jn 13:3). This statement builds on the first *eidōs*, εἰδώς ("knowing") clause in verse 1, which says that Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to transfer out of this world toward the Father. Not only was Jesus in tune with God's timing for completing His work on earth and going to the Father, He was also fully aware of His heavenly origin to which He must now return so that those who believe in Him may have the hope of being with Him (cf. Jn 13:36). What is more, Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands. Rooted in this universal sovereignty is Jesus' authority to save those who believe in Him and to grant them eternal life (Jn 17:2). With the power of salvation in His hands Jesus moved to wash His disciple's feet. Thus, there is a vital link between the grace of eternal life and footwashing.

Jesus' omniscience governed the timing of His actions. His decision to act was not by chance nor due to circumstances beyond His control, but was deliberate according to His sovereign will. Even Judas' betrayal was within Jesus' knowledge and would turn out to serve His purpose. This is evident from the repeated use of the word "know" (οἶδα and its derivatives) in the narrative. Jesus knew the one who was handing Him over (Jn 13:11), and He also knew whom He had chosen (Jn 13:18). But the betrayal must take place

so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Through His prescience Jesus foretold of these things to the disciples so that when they do take place, the disciples may know that He is the eternal God who is over all things. Thus, Jesus chose to wash the feet of His disciples with such perfect knowledge, control, and timing, and He had a divine purpose to accomplish through the footwashing.

One more comment needs to be made about the timing of footwashing in relation to the larger context of John. The placement of the narrative at the beginning of the “book of Jesus’ hour” is remarkable. From this moment forward, the gospel moves definitively towards Jesus’ going away into glory. Starting with chapter 13, Jesus turned His attention from the public to only His disciples. Some of the lengthiest discourses in John are found in the subsequent three chapters. Through teachings, predictions, encouragement, and prayer, Jesus prepared His disciples to face what laid ahead. However, Jesus’ footwashing stands at the forefront of His farewell ministry to the disciples. In contrast to the discourses and prayer that followed, the footwashing narrative centers on Jesus’ unique action. In none of the subsequent teachings of Jesus did He illustrate His words with a symbolic action, expound on the meaning of the action itself, and command the disciples to do likewise. Thus, to say that Jesus’ footwashing was purely for the didactic purpose of illustrating humility and sacrifice would to overlook and grossly undervalue the significance of the action that Jesus was performing for each of the disciples. Jesus’ footwashing was not simply to teach certain truths but was essential on its own terms.

## **B. THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF JESUS’ FOOTWASHING**

We have already observed that John 13:1-5 consist of two parallel syntactical constructions, and the second construction expands on the first. Both constructions have the same sequence: 1) the timing; 2) the precondition; and 3) Jesus’ action. In the first construction, Jesus’ action was described as “He loved them to the ultimate” (Jn 13:1). This action parallels and is elaborated by the corresponding actions in the second construction, “He rose from dinner, laid down the garments, and having taken a towel,



He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and He began to wash the feet of the disciples and to wipe them dry with the towel with which He had been girded.” What this observation tells us is that Jesus’ footwashing, along with its related actions, was His way of loving His disciples to the ultimate. In other words, Jesus loved them to the ultimate by washing their feet. Recognizing this point in the narrative is profoundly significant to a proper understanding of footwashing.

Some commentators view verse 1 as an introduction to the entire “book of Jesus’ hour” and therefore interpret the words “He loved them to the ultimate” as referring to His death on the cross. However, the two parallel constructions are joined by the conjunction *kai*, καὶ (“and”), which means that the author wants us to read them as one thought. If we remain faithful to the text, then we are not permitted to disconnect the words “He loved them to the ultimate” from Jesus’ action of footwashing.

While there is no doubt that there is no greater expression of God’s love for us than the death of Jesus on the cross for us, the words in John 13 are not spoken in such terms. “He loved them to the ultimate” does not mean that this action of love was so great that even the sacrifice on the cross could not exceed it. Rather, as we have noted, these words are viewed in relation to the preceding clause: “having loved His own who were in the world.” The love of Jesus that the Scripture has in view here is specifically Jesus’ love for His own while He was still with them, and we need to distinguish this from the love demonstrated in His death. *Eis telos*, εἰς τέλος, which may be translated as either “to the end” or “to the uttermost,” was with reference to Jesus’ continual love up to His final moments. While Jesus was in the world, He never ceased to love those who were His own. Now that the hour had come for Him to be received into glory, He would love them with this one final and ultimate act of love. This crowning act of love was washing each disciple’s feet.

A common interpretation posits that Jesus’ footwashing was symbolic of His greatest love on the cross. Thus Schnackenburg writes, “In the washing of the feet, Jesus’ ultimate giving of himself to his own (see 15:13) was, according to the evangelist, made symbolically present and the whole significance of the washing of the feet

was to point forward to the death of Jesus and the whole of the community founded on him (see 13:7)”<sup>89</sup> Haenchen likewise views the footwashing as a graphical representation: “The footwashing which he is about to perform ... is the anticipation of the cross and expresses the meaning of the cross graphically as a deed of Jesus.”<sup>90</sup> Thomas concurs, stating that footwashing foreshadows Jesus’ supreme love on the cross.<sup>91</sup> However one might phrase it, the view that footwashing is purely a symbol, foreshadow, or graphical representation of Jesus’ love on the cross, is a departure from what the Scripture actually says. A representation of love can hardly qualify as love, not to mention a crowning act of love. If footwashing only served as a pointer of Jesus’ love, then the action of footwashing had no effect or purpose beyond being a symbol. However, we have demonstrated that the narrative considers the washing of Jesus’ disciple’s feet His crowning act of love toward them. Jesus’ ultimate love to the disciples in His final moments could not have been simply showing them a graphical representation of His death. Based on the words of Scripture, we must see a divine purpose in the act of footwashing, which justifies it being called an act of ultimate love.

By the same token, we may also rule out the interpretation that Jesus’ footwashing was primarily a lesson on humility and love. While teaching by illustration may be considered a form of love toward the students, we cannot but question whether a lesson about humility and love by graphical representation can be accurately termed “He loved them to the ultimate.” We are told in the preceding clause: “having loved His own who were in the world...” Throughout Jesus’ ministry on earth, He had always loved those who were His own. It was with the same kind of love that He now loved them once more. This act of love was not for a show. He did not wash them only to teach them a lesson. If that had been His intention, washing the feet of just one disciple would have sufficed to demonstrate the importance of humility and love. But He washed

89 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 14.

90 Haenchen, Ernst, Robert Walter Funk, and Ulrich Busse. *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21*. Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 102.

91 John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 81.

each disciple because He loved each of them, and His love for each of them necessitated washing each one's feet.

Furthermore, if Jesus' washing was merely an illustration, then when He commanded His disciples to do the same, He would have been asking them to also teach the importance of love and humility by illustration. But it was not so. On the contrary, His example for the disciples was one of actual service and love through which the disciples received His grace of eternal life. We administer footwashing today for the same purpose, to love our fellow believers by bringing them the grace of Christ. Jesus' footwashing certainly had a symbolic dimension, but it was more than a symbol. Only if footwashing actually has a deeper spiritual effect of salvation on the disciples beyond being a symbol, which is in fact the case as we will see, can we rightly call it Jesus' crowning act of love toward His own. The love of Christ goes much further than conveying the knowledge of His truth. His love encompasses His grace as well as His truth (cf. Jn 1:14, 16-17). When Jesus washed the disciples' feet that night, He truly loved them and served them. And it was necessary for Him to wash each disciple in turn because Jesus' action concerned the spiritual life of each disciple. Through such an act of love He imparted His saving grace upon them, gave them a new spiritual status, and granted them an eternal destiny with Him.

#### C. THE EXTERNAL ACTIONS OF JESUS' FOOTWASHING

According to Scripture, love, as represented by the Greek word *agapaō*, ἀγαπάω, is not merely a feeling toward someone nor the profession of this feeling. Rather, love must be expressed in action. God loved the world by giving His only Son (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:10). God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for His friends (Jn 15:13), and by this we know love, because Christ laid down His life for us (1 Jn 3:16; Eph 5:2). Therefore, God's love is characterized by giving of Himself for us. In the same way, God expects us to love Him and others through our actions (Jn 14:15, 21; 2 Jn 6; 1 Jn 3:17, 18; Lk 6:27). Jesus' footwashing confirms this truth. It was God's love in action. Jesus not only loved the disciples in His heart or in His

words, but all the more with His action. During His final moments with His disciples, Jesus loved them to the ultimate by washing their feet. Hence, the concrete act of Jesus' footwashing, as described in John 13, is important and deserves our close attention.

Jesus' action of footwashing consists of two aspects, namely, the external visible action and an internal spiritual effect. This is the character and essence of a sacrament. Just as the incarnate Word reveals God whom we cannot see, in a sacrament the outward visible thing or event embodies God's invisible grace. In baptism, for example, the immersion of the person in water brings about the effect of the washing away of sins. Likewise, in the Holy Communion, partaking the bread and the juice is in effect partaking the body and blood of Christ. It is the same way with footwashing. We will first consider Jesus' outward action of footwashing as depicted by the narrative.

While dinner was in progress and everyone was reclined, Jesus rose up and laid down His garments. After taking a towel, He girded Himself (Jn 13:4). Through the actions of rising, laying down His garments, and girding Himself with a towel, Jesus relinquished His role as the master at the table and took on the form of a slave. As discussed in the commentary section, if Jesus had indeed stripped to a loin cloth as a slave would have, then by this action He would have utterly demeaned Himself in the presence of the disciples. This would have been unthinkable without true humility from the heart. As shocking as Jesus' actions were, they were wholly consistent with His attitude and manner as the Son of Man, just as He had told the disciples, "I am among you as the One who serves" (Lk 22:27); "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). In the same way He laid down His garments, He would also eventually lay down His very life. At the last supper, Jesus actually served the disciples the way a slave would serve his master, and in the footwashing there is also the picture of Jesus' death, which is the utmost expression of Jesus' humility and self-giving.

The narrative then tells us that Jesus poured water into the basin. This was in preparation for the footwashing. "He began to wash the feet of the disciples and to wipe them dry with the towel with

which He had been girded" (Jn 13:5). The verb "began" introduces two infinitive verbs: "to wash" and "to wipe." Washing the feet of the disciples and wiping them dry constitute the core of the foot-washing event. Whereas the preceding actions leading up to this were done once, Jesus washed and dried the feet of every disciple who was present, one disciple after another. The words in verse 6, "He then came to Simon Peter" confirms that Jesus washed each of them in turn.

We need to give special attention to the act of washing, since Jesus' ensuing exposition and command centered on this single act (see Jn 13:8, 10, 14). In a sacrament, the external action or object corresponds to the spiritual reality that takes place. For example, Paul explains that beyond the action of being baptized is the spiritual effect of being baptized into the death of Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3). The partaking of the cup and the bread during the Holy Communion is not merely an outward action but is in fact the communion of the blood and the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). By the same token, the act of washing in the sacrament of footwashing also has significance beyond the physical action. In the case of footwashing, as we will see in the following section, the act of washing results in Christ's inclusion of His believers in Him. By washing His disciples' feet, Jesus the master takes the form of a slave to receive His disciples into his banquet table.

#### **D. THE SPIRITUAL EFFECT AND NECESSITY OF JESUS' FOOTWASHING**

We will now look beyond the external sign to the spiritual effect in Jesus' footwashing. We will first answer the question of whether Jesus' footwashing during the last supper had any spiritual effect beyond being a physical footwashing. If through His footwashing Jesus' intention was to provide His disciples some refreshment in the role of a slave during His last supper with them, this would have certainly been a true act of love. However, the context of the passage does not permit such an interpretation of the footwashing. We have noted the fact that Jesus rose during dinner to wash His disciple's feet. This was unc customary, where footwashing would have taken place before rather than during a meal. More

importantly, Jesus' own words gave His footwashing a sacramental meaning, which sets it apart from a customary washing.

Jesus said to the disciples after the washing, "If I, then your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet..." (Jn 13:14). These words implied that Jesus' footwashing was out of the norm. Peter certainly recognized that for a teacher to wash his disciple's feet was unacceptable by any standard. Thus He vehemently objected. Jesus acknowledged Peter's astonishment, saying, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (Jn 13:7). Because Jesus' actions were contrary to all senses, He expected that Peter would not understand what He was doing.

When Peter insisted that Jesus should never wash his feet, Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you are not having a part with Me." These words of Christ are fundamental to the sacramental view of footwashing. Jesus' ultimatum did not need more clarification. If He did not wash Peter, Peter would have no part with him. The consequence was immediate, as indicated by the progressive tense: "you are not having a part with me." On no other occasion had Jesus ever declared such an ultimatum to any particular disciple for not accepting His loving service. Borchert's comment on the force of Jesus' statement is fitting: "Jesus' response was like a firm courtroom verdict that gave the offender a straightforward alternative that admits no bending. It was a strict either/or that had to be accepted or rejected, and the consequences were clearly evident."<sup>92</sup>

As has been discussed in the commentary section, not having a part with Jesus meant complete and final severance from Him. Rejecting Jesus' action of love was rejecting Him as Lord. Even though Peter was already one of Jesus' own, as we may infer from verse 1, He would still be cut off from the One to whom he belonged if Jesus did not wash Him at that moment. The direct relationship between Jesus' footwashing and Peter's eternal destiny could not have been stated more clearly. Peter's drastic and immediate reversal of his position further shows how much his relationship with Christ was at stake in the matter.

<sup>92</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, Vol. 25B, John 12-21. *The new American commentary, New International Version* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 81.

Why was Jesus' footwashing necessary, without which Peter would be cut off from Him? Commentators have offered explanations for such a serious consequence, but many of these explanations come short of the true meaning of Jesus' solemn words. Bernard, for instance, views Peter's refusal as a refusal of Jesus' call to ministry:

So to decline the call of ministry, to which every disciple is called, is to have no part with Christ, to be no partner of His, for His work was pre-eminently a work of ministry... Peter's refusal to allow his Master to minister to him was really to reject that principle of the dignity of ministry and service which was behind the work of Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

Jesus knew that Peter did not understand the meaning of His action. For Peter to have no part with Jesus for not accepting a call he did not understand as such would have been an unjustifiable punishment. It is obvious that Peter still did not understand the meaning of the washing after Jesus' warning, because he immediately asked Jesus to also wash his hands and his head. Jesus would have explained that the footwashing was a call to ministry if that was what He wanted Peter to accept. But in reality, the passage does not support this interpretation.

Some commentators do not interpret the words "not having a part with me" as a direct consequence of not having Jesus' footwashing. Schnackenburg writes:

It would be wrong to infer more from Jesus' suggestion than the fact that his giving of himself in death and the saving activity of that death are represented in this "washing"... The washing of the disciple's feet is interpreted in the Christological and soteriological sense as a symbolic action in which Jesus makes his offering of himself in death graphic and effective, not in a sacramental manner, but by virtue of his love, which his disciples experience to the extreme limit (see v. 1)<sup>94</sup>

Put more simply, Schanckenburg suggests that the reason Peter must accept the footwashing was that it was symbolic of Jesus' love. Morris similarly interprets Jesus' ultimatum as referring to something other than the act of footwashing:

93 J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*. Vol 2, Edited by Alan Hugh McNeile (New York: C. Scribner' Sons, 1929), 461.

94 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 19.

“Washing” in the Johannine manner will have a double meaning. In the context it must refer to the washing of the feet. Unless Peter submits to the feet washing he may not eat with Jesus. But Jesus means more. A literal washing of the feet is not necessary before one can be a Christian. The words point us to a washing free from sin that only Christ can give. Apart from this washing no one can be Christ’s<sup>95</sup>

According to both of these interpretations, Jesus would have been saying to Peter that unless Jesus loved him and washed his sins away through His death on the cross, Peter would be having no part with Him. These interpretations, therefore, strip the footwashing itself of any spiritual effect to become something no more than a symbol of Jesus’ love and cleansing. This is a distortion of Jesus’ words. Jesus did not say to Peter, “unless I love and cleanse you, as my footwashing symbolizes, you are not having a part with me.” Instead, Jesus said, “Unless *I wash you*, you are not having a part with me” (Italics added for emphasis). Nowhere in Scripture is the word *níptō*, νίπτω (“partial washing”) used of Jesus’ love or cleansing from sins. Yet the consequence stated by Jesus is directly related to the act of *níptō*, νίπτω, which in the context of the narrative is none other than the washing of feet that Jesus was performing on the disciples. Additionally, Jesus made repeated references to the act of footwashing with the word *poieō*, ποιέω (“I do”). He told Peter, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand after this” (Jn 13:7). After the footwashing, He said to the disciples, “Do you know what I have done to you?” (13:12). Then He said, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (13:15). In all instances Jesus drew attention to the very act of footwashing and stressed the necessity of this act.

Morris suggests that by saying that Peter would not be able to eat with Jesus if Jesus did not wash him, Jesus in fact was speaking metaphorically, that he would not be Christ’s if Jesus did not wash away His sins. This view is problematic also. First of all, Jesus did not say that Peter could not eat with Him unless He washed his feet, and thus the first layer of the double meaning that Morris had

<sup>95</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*. Rev. ed. The new international commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 548.



in mind does not exist in the text. Secondly, a phenomenon cannot function as a metaphor if it is not understood even by common sense to begin with. If Jesus' footwashing was a customary washing, Peter's refusal should have been applauded rather than be the basis for not being able to eat with Jesus. No disciple would be disqualified from eating with his lord and teacher if his lord and teacher did not wash his feet. Hence, Jesus' ultimatum was certainly not using His footwashing as a metaphor and had nothing to do with being able to eat with Jesus at the dinner. We must take Jesus' words to mean what they actually say. If Jesus did not literally wash Peter's feet, Peter would have no part with him.

If, by the words "Unless I wash you, you are not having a part with me" Jesus was speaking only figuratively to mean something other than His footwashing, then Peter would not have been guilty for refusing to let his feet be washed. Peter never indicated that he would not let Jesus love him and wash away his sins. If footwashing only represents some other spiritual reality but does not contain the reality, then rejecting footwashing would not be the same as rejecting Jesus' love and remission of sins. However, Jesus' words were spoken in direct response to Peter's refusal of footwashing. Ultimately, we cannot avoid the question that, if Peter had continued to refuse Jesus' footwashing despite Jesus' words, whether he would have actually had no part with Jesus. If the answer is affirmative; that is, if Peter's continuous refusal would have meant exclusion from Jesus, then the dire consequence Jesus spoke of must be the immediate result of not washing his feet. Jesus' words about having a part with Him, spoken in the context of Peter's refusal to be washed, simply cannot be separated from His footwashing. We cannot but come to the conclusion that in Jesus' footwashing was the grace of salvation, without which Peter would have had no part with Jesus. On the other hand, by accepting Jesus' footwashing, the disciples would have a part with Jesus.

As soon as Peter heard Jesus' words about the dreadful consequence of not having a part with Jesus, he changed his position completely. Instead of refusing to accept footwashing, he now requested Jesus to wash his hands and his head as well. But in reply, Jesus answered, "The one who is bathed does not have a need

except to wash the feet. On the contrary, he is wholly clean.” (Jn 13:10).

As mentioned previously, Jesus was using bathing and footwashing in the ordinary sense as an analogy of something spiritual. We will first discuss this saying on the ordinary level. A person who is bathed is wholly clean because he would not leave any part unwashed. However, as he prepares to eat or retire for the night, he washes his feet. Whether its purpose is for hygiene or comfort, footwashing is not for cleaning the way bathing is for cleaning, since he is already fully clean. Using this daily practice as an analogy, Jesus spoke about the necessity of footwashing.

We have demonstrated that bathing (λούω or λουτρόν) in the Bible, when taken to a spiritual level, is a reference to baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Applying the analogy of bathing, a person who has been washed of his sins in baptism does not need to be washed again through another sacrament that involves the washing of the hands and the head. The reason Jesus gives is that the person is wholly clean (“καθαρὸς ὅλος”). The remission of sins in baptism is total and complete. No part of the believer is unclean after He has been washed in baptism. But according to Jesus, a person who is bathed and is wholly clean still needs to wash his feet. This statement establishes the necessity of footwashing as a sacrament for all believers. Besides the spiritual effect received in baptism, footwashing is still necessary for a spiritual effect that is distinct from the effect received through baptism. Thus, Jesus’ words to Peter concerning the consequence of not having Jesus’ footwashing were not meant for Peter only, but for all who have been washed of their sins in baptism. As believers who have been baptized into Christ, unless Jesus washes our feet, we are not having a part with Him.

In light of Jesus’ words in verse 10 that the one who is bathed does not have a need except to wash the feet, the common view that Jesus’ footwashing was only a lesson on humility cannot be sustained. According to this view, the point of the narrative is to teach us to serve one another in humility rather than to command footwashing for salvation. Such a stance merely focuses on one aspect of the passage, which is the act of washing another person. But it

overlooks the truth of verse 10, which sets a requirement on “the one who is bathed,” namely, every believer who has been washed in baptism. The one who is bathed “does not have a need”—that is, the need to wash his hands and his head, referring to what is in verse 9. “Except the feet to wash” indicates that the one who has been baptized has no further need except one, and that is for his feet to be washed. The focus of Jesus’ words here is on the person who is receiving the footwashing. This necessity as stated by our Lord behooves all believers to meet this need by having their feet washed. As much as humility and service are important, the need to have our feet washed must not be neglected.

If a believer is already wholly clean through the washing in baptism, why is there a need for him to accept another washing? If footwashing is necessary, what is its spiritual effect? We need to return to Jesus’ words to Peter: “Unless I wash you, you are not having a part with me.” Although stated negatively, these words comprise the clearest statement on the effect of footwashing. Through Jesus’ footwashing the believer has a part with Jesus. On the contrary, if the Lord does not wash a believer through His footwashing, he would have no part with Jesus. Therefore, through His footwashing Christ offers believers His saving grace of allowing them to have a part in Him.

After He had washed the disciples’ feet, Jesus asked them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?” (Jn 13:12). The perfect tense verb *πεποιῆκα, πεποίηκα* (“I have done”) is noteworthy. The Greek perfect tense expresses the present state resultant upon a past action. In addition, the dative case of *hymīn, ὑμῖν* (“to you”) expresses a relationship between the subject and the object, and in this sentence it denotes that the disciples were receiving the action from Jesus. Jesus refers to His footwashing as something He had done to the disciples. We may infer from the perfect tense and the dative case in Jesus’ words that the footwashing Jesus had just performed had an enduring effect on the disciples and was not a simple demonstration. The disciples now stood in a new relationship with the Lord resulting from what Jesus had done to them. Specifically, having received Jesus’ footwashing, the disciples had received a lasting part in the Lord.

We have already studied the meaning of having a part with the Lord Jesus in the commentary section. To have a part with the Lord is to be identified with Him and to have a share in Him. The implications of this are magnificent. Believers whose feet have been washed shall have a part in everything that Christ is and have. Having a part with Christ enables us to abide in Him and be with Him in His glorious kingdom eternally. Every spiritual blessing in Christ is given to us, for in Him we have obtained an inheritance (cf. Eph 1:3-12).

The grace imparted through footwashing is rooted in Jesus' death. Because our Lord Jesus Christ died, we may live together with Him (1 Thess 5:10). Behind His humble act of washing His disciples' feet stood His ultimate act of humility in laying down His life and dying on the cross—behind His act of love stood the greatest demonstration of His love through personal sacrifice. For this reason, the death and love of Jesus have such a prominent place in the footwashing narrative. In a sacrament, the grace that is given to believers through the sacrament issues from Christ's atoning death, and this is true of the sacrament of footwashing.

Furthermore, the effect of footwashing is founded on Jesus' divine authority. Time and again throughout the footwashing narrative we are reminded of Jesus' identity as God. Jesus' words and actions were all prompted by His surpassing knowledge. He came from God and was returning to God. He was the Lord and the Teacher, and to Him His disciples belonged. He is the I AM, the eternal God who is sovereign over all things. The Father had given all things into His hands so that He had the authority to grant eternal life. It is the hands of the Lord who is over all things that washed the feet of the disciples and endowed on them a share in His eternal life.

Since the narrative of John 13 is the only passage in the Bible that expounds on the sacrament of footwashing, it shall be the sole basis for defining the effect of footwashing. All other attempts to elaborate on its effect must not go beyond Jesus' own words. Bearing this in mind, we may explore further the relationship between the outward sign of footwashing and the inward effect of having a part with Jesus.

One question we will address at this point is whether there is spiritual cleansing in the washing of feet. We have seen in the OT regulations that the washing of hands and feet was required of priests before their service at the temple or tabernacle. The punishment for failing to wash themselves was death (Ex 30:17-21). While we may call this an act of purification or consecration, Scripture does not explicitly state that the washing of hands and feet were acts of cleansing. There is also no basis in Scripture that views the washing of hands and feet by priests foreshadows the sacrament of footwashing. Not only so, Jesus excluded the washing of hands from the sacrament.

In the Song of Solomon, the beloved said to her lover, “I have washed my feet; How can I defile them?” (Song 5:3). The implication here is that footwashing before bed was for the cleanliness of the feet. Would it be valid, then, to consider Jesus’ footwashing as an act of spiritual cleansing, since the feet may indeed be soiled after a bath? In other words, could the sacrament of footwashing be for the effect of washing away post-baptismal sins? To answer this question, we need to return to Jesus’ own interpretation of footwashing.

The Lord certainly established a connection between bathing and footwashing. *Louō*, λούω, the word for bathing, represents the washing of the whole body, whereas *nīptō*, νίπτω denotes partial washing. The one who is bathed still needs to wash his feet. However, this “need” is not a need for cleansing, for the person who is bathed is wholly clean. When Peter asked the Lord to wash his hands and his head, he made no distinction between the washing of hands and head with the washing of feet. In Peter’s mind, the more washing, the more secure his part in Jesus would be. But Jesus drew a clear distinction between the two types of washing. The washing of hands and head in Jesus’ view would be for the purpose of cleansing,<sup>96</sup> which is not necessary for the believer, who is bathed and is wholly clean. The washing of feet, however, is still necessary for the believer. Therefore, while baptism is for the remission of sins, footwashing is not for the same purpose.

96 In Ps 73:13 we see a parallel between the washing of hands and cleansing of heart. This implies that the washing of hands is for the purpose of cleansing.

It is true that a person who is bathed may lose his state of cleanliness. Judas is a case in point. Even though he was among the disciples, he had allowed Satan to take over his heart. Therefore, Jesus said to the disciples concerning Judas, "You are clean, but not all of you" (Jn 13:10, 11). However, the state of uncleanness that Judas was in was not lifted through the washing of feet. Even though he presumably also received Jesus' footwashing, he was bent on his intention to deliver Jesus to the authorities. Scripture teaches that in order for us to be cleansed from all sin, we need to walk in the light and confess our sins (1 Jn 1:7-9). In the community of Christians, we are to confess our sins to one another, pray for one another, and help those who have wondered to turn back to the truth (Jas 5:15-20). In the absence of any biblical reference on footwashing as a means of cleansing of sins, we ought not assign the spiritual effect of cleansing to the sacrament of footwashing.

If any resemblance is to be perceived between the external action of footwashing and the inward spiritual effect of having a part with the Lord, we may say that just as footwashing provided refreshment to the sojourner with weary feet before he sat down as a guest to enjoy the meal served by the host, through footwashing Christ personally receives us into His kingdom so we may have part with Him and be able to eat and drink at His table in His kingdom (Lk 22:30; cf. 1 Cor 10:21). When He instituted the Holy Communion, Jesus said to His disciples, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Mt 26:29). God Himself declared that those who are able to take part in the final marriage supper are blessed (Rev 19:9). Therefore, in the same way that the Holy Communion anticipates this eschatological banquet, footwashing also anticipates Christ's final welcoming of us into His kingdom (cf. 2 Pet 1:11).

# Chapter 4

## JESUS' COMMAND AND COMMISSION OF FOOTWASHING

After He had washed the disciples' feet, taken His garments, and reclined again, Jesus said to the disciples, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (Jn 13:12). Grammatically, the question could as well have been an imperative: "Understand what I have done to you." Jesus wanted His disciples to understand what He had just done to them so that they may obey His ensuing command.

The implications of Jesus' action are to be understood on two levels: symbolic and sacramental. This distinction is crucial to the discussion on the command and commission of footwashing. On the symbolic level, Jesus' footwashing represented His love, humility, and acceptance toward His disciples. On the sacramental level, it brought the disciples into a saving relationship with Christ. Based on these two aspects, Jesus commanded two kinds of footwashing: 1) mutual footwashing and 2) sacramental footwashing. We will now discuss each in turn.

### **A. MUTUAL FOOTWASHING**

Jesus said to His disciples, "You call me 'the Teacher,' and 'the Lord,' and you say well, for [that is what] I am. Therefore, if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also must wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:13-14). When alluding to the footwashing He had just performed, Jesus first turned the disciples' attention to His identity. He was their Teacher and Lord. He deserved their honor and service. But despite His exceedingly higher status, He became as a slave to wash the disciples' feet. This action represented the utmost humility and love.

We have seen previously that “the Lord” and “the Teacher,” when applied to Jesus, were christological titles. Therefore, His identity as the Lord and the Teacher also implied His divinity. The one who had just washed them had come from God and was returning to God. He was the one who held power over all things. Although Jesus took up the form of a servant when He washed their feet, He was nevertheless God in the flesh, the one Lord and Teacher they must obey and worship.

Based on His identity as the Lord and the Teacher, Jesus issued the command to wash one another’s feet. *Opheilō*, ὀφείλω, followed by an infinitive verb, may be translated as “ought to” or “have to,” and denotes an obligation on the part of the subject of the verb. As noted in the commentary section, the word implies a duty that one cannot refuse or break. The disciples were now under an obligation to wash one another’s feet because Jesus had established the precedence. If the Lord and the Teacher deigned to wash the lowliest parts of the disciples even though they were far inferior, no disciple can think he is too dignified to wash his fellow disciples’ feet. Jesus’ prime example has bound us under the obligation to wash one another’s feet.

The word *allēlōn*, ἀλλήλων (“one another”) suggests first of all that the footwashing is to be practiced among disciples. We have seen similar imperatives that involve actions towards “one another.” These include Jesus’ command to love one another (Jn 13:34; 15:12; cf. Rom 12:10; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 4:11) and the exhortations to “receive one another” (Rom 15:7); “greet one another” (Rom 16:16; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14); “wait for one another” (1 Cor 11:33); “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2); “be kind to one another” (Eph 4:32); “submit to one another” (Eph 5:21); and “pray for one another” (Jas 5:16). All of these commands and exhortations are given to believers, and are to be practiced in the community of believers. By the same token, Jesus’ command to wash one another’s feet was directed to His disciples. Not only so, the word *allēlōn*, ἀλλήλων also implies that Jesus’ command is given to every believer. In all of the instances cited above where the command involves an action toward one another, the command is for each believer. Every



believer who has received Jesus' footwashing (the sacrament of footwashing) is under the obligation to wash other believers' feet.

Furthermore, like the other similar commands, the command to wash one another's feet needs to be put into continual practice. This is supported by the present tense of the infinitive verb *niptein*, *νίπτειν* ("to be washing"), suggesting that the washing is to continue or be repeated. As long as the community of believers remains, this command will continue to apply. It is our Lord's wish for His followers to imitate His example and learn to do unto our brethren what He has done to us.

A close parallel to Jesus' command to wash one another's feet is the command to love one another. After the footwashing, when Judas had left the scene of the last supper, Jesus spoke again about His imminent departure and said to the disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34, 35). Jesus was deeply concerned for the unity of believers after His departure, and He earnestly wanted the disciples to let the love they have received from Him permeate among them. So He commanded them to love each other just as He had loved them. His own example compelled the disciples to do likewise. The structure of this command is identical to that of the command to wash one another's feet, and the command to love one another encompasses the command to wash one another's feet. Recall that Jesus loved the disciples by washing His disciples' feet. There is thus a connection between the two commands. Each time we wash one another's feet, we remember how Christ has also loved us and received us, and we are prompted again to love and accept one another in the same manner. If we truly wash one another's feet according to the Lord's command, thereby ever growing in our love for one another, then we are in fact fulfilling His wish towards us.

## **B. THE SACRAMENT OF FOOTWASHING**

Before the disciples carried out Jesus' command to wash one another's feet, they had first received Jesus' footwashing. In the same way, before we wash one another's feet, we also need to first

receive Jesus' footwashing. Obviously, Jesus is no longer present with us in the flesh to wash our feet today. But the term "Jesus' footwashing" is used here to distinguish this footwashing from the mutual footwashing we have just discussed. All along, we have been focusing our attention on Jesus' footwashing that night during the last supper. Later, we will look at how we may receive Jesus' footwashing today.

The primary distinction between Jesus' footwashing and our washing of each other's feet is that Jesus' footwashing is a sacrament whereas mutual footwashing is not. Several important elements characterize the sacrament of footwashing. Before we go further, it is helpful to look at the following comparison chart:

JESUS' FOOTWASHING	MUTUAL FOOTWASHING
Sacrament	Not a sacrament
Received once	Received repeatedly
Administered on the Lord's behalf	Practiced in imitation of the Lord
Purpose: have a part with Christ	Purpose: practice Christ's love and humility
Received as from the Lord	Received as from fellow believers

After commanding the disciples to wash one another's feet (Jn 13:14), Jesus turned the disciples' attention again to His footwashing, saying, "For I gave you an example, in order that just as I did to you, you also might do" (Jn 13:15). *Hypodeigma*, ὑπόδειγμα ("example") denotes a pattern or a model to be replicated. This example not only consists an attitude of love and humility, but also the act of footwashing. In the example Jesus gave, Jesus washed the feet of each disciple and wiped their feet with a towel. This fact cannot be glossed over. The sacrament of footwashing is built on His personal example. Thus, we cannot interpret Jesus' words as only a figure of speech for humble and loving service. In contrast, in cases where Jesus gave a command in a figurative language, such as the command to abide in Him as branches of the vine just as He abides in the Father, He did not conduct a physical demonstration the way He did with footwashing. Nowhere in the Gospels is there

any instance of Jesus performing a symbolic action as an example and then asking the disciples to do the same figuratively.

We may consider the Holy Communion as a parallel to footwashing. When Jesus said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves” and “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk 22:17, 19), referring to His own action of taking the cup, breaking the bread, and giving it to the disciples, He expected the disciples to remember Him by actually taking the cup and breaking the bread and partaking of it, rather than doing so in a figurative sense. This was also the understanding of the early Christians (1 Cor 11:23-29). In this case, Jesus’ command involves doing exactly what He had done. If the Holy Communion is thus understood, practiced, and received by the church, there is no valid reason why the command of footwashing, which Jesus’ specifically mandated based on His own example, should be taken figuratively.

We have already explored the symbolic aspect of footwashing. By washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus had set an example of love, acceptance, and humble service. From this symbolic act came the command for us to wash one another’s feet. Therefore, mutual footwashing reminds, teaches, and prompts us to embody Jesus’ love and humility in the community of believers. However, Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet was more than symbolic. It was also effective for salvation. As discussed before, Jesus’ footwashing could hardly be an act of love if it did not have any spiritual effect on the disciple. But Jesus loved the disciples by washing their feet so they could have a part in Jesus. Since Jesus’ footwashing enables the believer to have a part with Him, everyone who has been washed in baptism must have his feet washed also. Only after Christ has washed his feet does he go on to wash other believers’ feet. This one act, effective in imparting saving grace and establishing the believer’s relationship with Christ, is the sacramental aspect of Jesus’ footwashing. The spiritual effect of salvation in Jesus’ footwashing sets apart the sacrament from mutual footwashing. For the believer who has been baptized, having a part with Christ comes not by washing other believers’ feet, but by receiving the sacrament Jesus established and commissioned. In

the subsequent verses, Jesus elaborated on this initial sacramental footwashing, which precedes mutual footwashing.

### C. THE COMMISSIONING OF THE SACRAMENT

Jesus enclosed His final words on footwashing with two “truly, truly” statements, the overarching idea of which is that Jesus has commissioned His disciples to administer footwashing. The expression “truly, truly, I say to you” marks a solemn declaration, and both times in this passage it was used by Jesus in reference to the commission of footwashing and the authority behind the commission. To underscore the weight of the commission, Jesus again used a general truth as a way of illustrating a spiritual reality as He had done in verse 10. He told the disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you: a slave is not greater than his master; neither is an apostle greater than the one who has sent him” (Jn 13:16). The slave and apostle in this context refer to the one who has been given the commission to administer footwashing. He performs footwashing on behalf of the Lord Jesus, who is his master and the one who has sent him.

Incidentally, Jesus also used this form of expression in the Fourth Gospel when speaking of the necessity of the sacraments of baptism and the Holy Communion for eternal life. He said to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5)<sup>97</sup>. In like manner He said to the Jews concerning eternal life through partaking of His flesh and blood, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and you drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves” (Jn 6:53).<sup>98</sup> Just as He had spoken with this expression about the necessity of baptism and the Holy Communion, He now spoke with the same expression about the necessity of the sacrament of footwashing. Since footwashing is necessary for the believer who has been washed in baptism in order to have a part with the Lord, the commission to wash the feet of believers is necessary.

<sup>97</sup> This is a direct translation of the Greek.

<sup>98</sup> This is a direct translation of the Greek.

As noted in the commentary section, statements that open with the “truly, truly, I say to you” expression are either replies to or elaborations on something that has been said before. In this instance, Jesus’ declaration expands on His command to the disciples to do as He had done. As the repeated keyword *meizōn*, μείζων (“greater than”) suggests, the point of emphasis is that he who has been commissioned to administer footwashing is not greater than He who has commissioned it. Unless we recognize footwashing as an ordinance by the Lord, we would not understand why in a context of humble and loving service the Lord would emphasize the relative status of slave and master as well as apostle and the one who has sent him. The disciples, who are slaves and apostles, are by no means greater than their Lord, who has sent them with the commission. They must obey unconditionally. The idea of sending now comes to the fore, as can be seen in the words “apostle” (ἀπόστολος) and “send” (πέμπω). This thought is carried forward to the concluding statement, which also begins with the same solemn expression, “Truly, truly, I say to you: The one receiving whomever I send receives me, and the one receiving Me receives the One who has sent Me” (Jn 13:20). Just as the Father had sent Him (cf. Jn 13:3), the Lord Jesus had sent the disciples with a commission.

We have seen how the passage repeatedly stresses Jesus’ authority. This is an important prelude and backbone to the footwashing event. The narrative reminds us of Jesus’ heavenly origin, His return to glory, His omniscience, and His sovereignty (Jn 13:1, 3, 18). He is the I AM, the eternal God who sees and controls even over things yet to take place (Jn 13:19). As the Son of Man, He had received in His hands authority from the Father, to grant eternal life to those who have been given to Him (Jn 13:3; cf. 17:2). This is the Jesus who stooped to wash the disciples’ feet and sent them to administer footwashing. Therefore, behind the act and commission of footwashing stands the authority directly given from above.

By means of comparison, we may consider the authority behind the great commission, including the commission to baptize. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and sent them into the world to make disciples of all nations. At the beginning of

this commission was Jesus' declaration of the universal authority He had received: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). This universal authority is the impetus of the commission, as can be seen in the words that follow: "Go, therefore, and make disciples..." (Mt 28:19). The disciples were to carry out the commission with Jesus' divine authority, without which salvation would not be possible. Because Jesus had been given the authority to grant eternal life, and He is ever present with the church through the Holy Spirit, the sacrament of baptism the church performs has the spiritual effect of salvation. Therefore, Jesus' authority is foundational to His commission as well as the sacraments administered by the church. We see the same divine universal authority behind the sacrament of footwashing. Jesus, the I AM, the One who had come from God and returned to God, and into whose hands the Father had given all things, now sent the disciples forth to administer the sacrament of footwashing.

Without the divine commission, footwashing could not be considered a sacrament. Only if the messenger has been sent can he act on behalf of the one who had sent him. Likewise, unless the church has been sent from above to administer footwashing, footwashing can only be merely a rite at best, without any effect of saving grace. But because Christ personally instituted footwashing by example and sent His disciples to administer footwashing, footwashing becomes an act carried out on the Lord's behalf. By virtue of the authority from the Lord Himself, footwashing administered by the church are effective for salvation, enabling the recipients to have a part with the Lord. The same principle underlies baptism and Holy Communion, both of which are commissioned by the Lord to the church to bring forth saving grace. Through the Holy Spirit, the church exercises the authority from God when she administers the sacraments on the Lord's behalf (cf. Jn 20:21-23). Therefore, when the church sealed with the promised Holy Spirit administers the footwashing sacrament, it has the same spiritual effect that Jesus' footwashing had when He washed the disciples on the night of the last supper.

#### D. THE RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT

In the introduction section of the footwashing narrative, we are told that Jesus, having loved His own who were in the world, loved them to the ultimate. Footwashing was Jesus' act of love toward His own who were in the world. *Tous idious*, τοὺς ἰδίους (literally "the own ones") connotes private possession. While the whole human race is considered Christ's own (Jn 1:11), this term is also applied particularly to Jesus' followers, who are in a special relationship with Christ (cf. Jn 10:3, 4). These were those whom the Father had given Jesus out of the world (Jn 17:6, 9). The context of the footwashing passage confirms this, for it was the disciples of Jesus who were present at the dinner who received Jesus' footwashing. The Lord Jesus also said, "I know whom I have chosen" (Jn 13:18), implying that these were the twelve disciples whom Jesus had selected. Hence, unlike baptism, which the Lord Jesus commanded to be administered to everyone in the world who believes and wishes to be a disciple (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15, 16), footwashing is to be received only by those who are already Jesus' disciples.

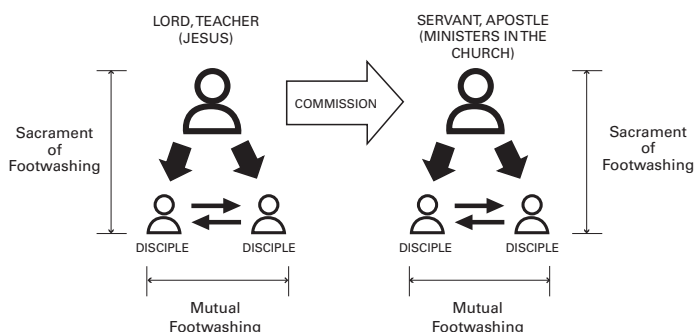
Furthermore, the Lord's words that he who is bathed does not have a need except to wash the feet teach us that footwashing is to be received by everyone who has been washed from their sins in baptism. Thus, the need to receive footwashing does not only apply to the disciples who were at the dinner that night, but to every believer who has been baptized into Christ. This doctrine is also inherent in the Lord's command to the disciples to administer footwashing. In the church today, therefore, believers need to receive the sacrament of footwashing after they have been baptized.

When receiving footwashing, the believer must recognize that it is administered on Christ's behalf. According to Jesus, the one who performs the sacrament of footwashing is an "apostle" (ἀπόστολος; Jn 13:16), a word that denotes a person who has been sent to carry out a commission, and he does so according to the commission and with the authority of the One who has sent him. Finally, Jesus spoke concerning the recipient of footwashing, "Truly, truly, I say to you: The one receiving whomever I send receives me, and the one receiving Me receives the One who has sent Me" (Jn 13:20).

Receiving the one who has been sent to perform footwashing is receiving the Lord Jesus and His Father. And if footwashing is indeed carried out on the Lord's behalf, it has the spiritual effect of having a part with the Lord, for the Lord Himself brings about His grace through the sacrament. Therefore, the recipient of footwashing ought to believe that he is in fact receiving Christ's grace of salvation through the sacrament and accept it in faith.

## E. CLOSING COMMENTS ON JESUS' COMMAND AND COMMISSION

As a summary, the diagram below represents the two types of footwashing the Lord Jesus ordained.



Based on His own example of washing His disciples' feet, Jesus set in motion two kinds of footwashing He wanted His disciples to carry out. First, the disciples needed to imitate Jesus' humility by washing one another's feet. In so doing, they may learn to love and accept one another just as Christ has loved and accepted them. Second, the disciples must administer the sacrament of footwashing to those who have been cleansed through baptism in the same way that Jesus had washed their feet. The spiritual effect of this sacrament is that the recipient of footwashing may have a part with Christ. This commission is given to the church in every generation.

Jesus' footwashing consisted of two seemingly contradictory aspects, namely humility and authority. The interplay between these two aspects is evident throughout the passage. On the one hand, the Lord and the Teacher took the form of a servant to engage in a



most humbling act. On the other hand, the eternal I AM, in whose hands is authority over all things, granted saving grace to the disciples and commissioned them to do the same on His behalf. From these two aspects of Jesus' footwashing came the two types of footwashing. In imitation of Jesus' love and humility in His footwashing, we have the obligation to also wash one another's feet and learn the qualities demonstrated by Jesus. Having been sent by Christ, the church must conduct the sacrament of footwashing for believers who have just been cleansed through baptism so that they may have a part with Christ.

Coupled with Jesus' command and commission is a promise of blessing. Jesus said, "If these things you know, blessed are you if you do them" (Jn 13:17). The first "if" introduces a statement about present reality and may be translated as "since" or "inasmuch as." The Lord had explained the significance of His footwashing and required His disciples to do the same. By now, they already knew what they must do. The second "if" is conditional. The disciples would be blessed if they put their knowledge into action. Knowledge of the meaning and purpose of footwashing must be followed by obedience, and obedience is followed by blessing. Having studied the footwashing established by Jesus, what remains is that we actually put this knowledge to practice.

#### **F. EXCURSUS: ADMINISTRATION OF FOOTWASHING BY JESUS' DISCIPLES**

As mentioned in the introduction of this book, a main objection for including footwashing as a sacrament is the absence of any historical record in the NT of the apostles' washing the feet of converts. If footwashing is essential to salvation, and if it was practiced widely in the early church, why do we not find any evidence of its actual administration in the Bible? Does not the NT's silence prove that Jesus' command of footwashing was never meant to be practiced literally? This is a serious objection that deserves attention and an answer.

Rejecting a doctrine based on the absence of historical account of its actual practice is argument from silence. Such assertions do not stand as a sound argument and cannot serve as grounds for merely

interpreting the Lord's command of footwashing figuratively. If we were to search for written accounts of what the NT church upheld as essential beliefs and in fact practiced, we would soon realize that they are indeed scanty and difficult to find. For example, there seems to be no evidence at all that the early Christians believed and preached that Jesus was born of a virgin. It may be even more surprising that Paul makes no mention of this essential Christian doctrine in any of his letters. Similarly, Paul's well known doctrine that all Scripture is God-breathed is universally regarded today as a basic Christian dogma. But there is no record in the NT whatsoever of this being accepted uniformly by all the churches everywhere. Nevertheless, the lack of written accounts of the church's acceptance and proclamation of these fundamental beliefs in no way puts in doubt their central place in the Christian faith.

It is important to bear in mind the nature of the NT writings. References to historical events are found primarily in the Gospels and Acts. The remaining NT books, mostly letters written to the churches or individuals, may occasionally recall certain events or mention something that Christians generally practiced. But the purpose of these letters is not to preserve a written record of the practices of the early church. Given that the Gospels are dedicated to the life of the Lord Jesus, we are left with Acts as the sole historical source that provides a glimpse of the practices of the early church. Even so, the author of Acts makes no claim that he is providing a systematic presentation of the dogma and practices of the early church. Had the intention of Acts been to serve as written records of how each of the basic beliefs of the early church was practiced and proclaimed, the omission of accounts of footwashing would indeed be difficult to explain. However, the focus of Acts is the fulfillment of Jesus' words to His disciples that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (see Acts 1:8). In short, the NT writings are not meant first and foremost to be a historical record of how the early Christians put their faith in Christ into practice.

Nevertheless, based on the written account in John 13 we may infer that the early church practiced footwashing according to the Lord's command. The placement of the footwashing narrative in

the Fourth Gospel at the beginning of 'the book of Jesus' hour' is a strong testament of its crucial place in the entire Gospel. It is certainly not an incidental inclusion. As we have seen in our extensive examination of the passage, the Gospel account depicts not only Jesus' institution of the sacrament but also conveys its significance and necessity. Furthermore, the passage concludes with the Lord's unequivocal injunction upon the disciples to do as He had done. The Lord sent His disciples to administer footwashing on His behalf and pronounced blessing on the disciples if they were to carry out the commission.

We know that the Gospels were received and read by early Christians and ultimately recognized as inspired writings. It is inconceivable, therefore, that the church believed the written record of John 13 to be an accurate account of Jesus' commission but did not actually put the Lord's explicit command of footwashing into practice. The passage's vivid description of Peter's staunch refusal to accept the Lord's washing and Jesus' ultimatum on the consequence of not being washed by the Lord would certainly also have left a deep impression on the first readers that washing the feet of others, while defying social norms, is Jesus' demand on His disciples.

In explaining the necessity of His footwashing, Jesus stated that the one who is bathed needs only to have his feet washed (Jn 13:10). Thus, He made a crucial connection between the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of footwashing. In other words, footwashing may be viewed as being closely related to baptism so much so that one who is baptized ought to receive footwashing as well. In light of the Lord's explanation of the need for footwashing in relation to baptism, we may assume that church always washed the feet of those who were baptized. It ought not surprise us, then, that the accounts of baptism in the Bible did not also explicitly mention the sacrament of footwashing that followed baptism. Similarly, we may also assume that the baptized believers partook of the sacrament of the Holy Communion even though accounts of their baptism omitted mention of the Holy Communion.

In conclusion, the absence of accounts of the practice of footwashing in the early church should not be the basis for denying its

actual practice in the early church. The fact that the Lord's action of washing His disciples' feet and His command to do likewise are recorded in the Fourth Gospel in such detail and unconditional terms is sufficient evidence that the Lord's disciples continued to carry out the Lord's command from the very beginning of the church.

# Chapter 5

## TEACHINGS DERIVED FROM FOOTWASHING

While Jesus' footwashing was more than serving a didactic purpose, it nevertheless teaches Christians rich lessons about the attitude and deed of Christ, our relationship with Christ, and our fellowship with one another. The spiritual effect in footwashing extends beyond the sacrament itself into the daily life of believers, and by putting the lessons learned in footwashing into practice, we may also appreciate more the grace we have received.

### A. JESUS' LOVE AND HUMILITY

The sacrament of footwashing is a sacrament of love. The narrative tells us explicitly in its introduction that Jesus' footwashing was an action of love: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the ultimate" (Jn 13:1). Jesus' love toward those who are His own is special, as is evident especially in the chapters in John recording Jesus' final hours with His disciples. Standing at the beginning of Jesus' lengthy farewell discourses is this magnificent act of love, enabling the disciples to have a share in Him and to abide in Him. Throughout His ministry, Jesus loved His disciples, guiding them, training them, and watching over them. Now, the time had come for Him to return to the Father. He loved them to the end by preparing them spiritually through washing their feet. In fact, His love was not only for the disciples who were with Him at the time, but also for all who would believe in Him. Therefore, He instituted and commissioned the sacrament of footwashing so that through the hands of His disciples He would continue to incorporate all believers into Himself.

Jesus' love toward the disciples was not just in words, but more importantly, he loved with action (cf. 1 Jn 3:18). Before commanding His followers to love one another, He first loved them through His actions (cf. Jn 15:12). He chose the lowliest form of service as the external action in the sacrament to endow on the disciples the most glorious spiritual status of having a part with Christ. It is such a powerful reminder of the humility of Christ, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:6-8). Time and again, the footwashing narrative reveals Jesus' divinity, His omniscience, His authority, and His status as the Lord and the Teacher. Yet in stark contrast we see Him willingly assume the position and task of a slave, washing His disciples' feet as they were reclining at the dinner table. Such a perfect picture of love through humble service deeply impresses on our hearts. As we obey the command to wash one another's feet or administer footwashing to new believers, and as our feet are being washed, we need to ponder on the incarnate and crucified Christ, through whose utter humility and death on a cross we have been made heirs of God's kingdom.

#### **B. HAVING A PART WITH THE LORD**

Through the sacraments, believers enter into a new spiritual relationship with Christ. Thus, through baptism we put on Christ and become His (Gal 3:26-29), and through the Holy Communion we abide in the Lord and He in us (Jn 6:56). This new status also applies in the sacrament of footwashing. Based on the meaning of the expression "have a part," to have a part with the Lord means to have a place in Christ, to be identified with Him, and to have a share in His kingdom. It is indeed an honor and privilege to be accorded this status in Christ.

It is significant that Jesus' footwashing stood at the beginning of His lengthy final discourses with His disciples and His prayer to the Father. From the discourses and the prayer, we can learn much about the spiritual blessings the disciples of Jesus receive through

having a part with the Lord. The Lord assured His disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn 14:2, 3). Because Jesus had granted the disciples a part in Him through footwashing, a place in the Father’s house would be reserved for them. Jesus continued, “And where I go you know, and the way you know” (Jn 14:4). Since Jesus Himself is the way, the believer who has a part with Christ is able to come to the Father. Today, we likewise have received this precious promise through the sacrament of footwashing.

As partakers in Christ, the disciples would not be left orphans even after Jesus’ going away but would receive the indwelling Spirit (Jn 14:16-18). They would live because Jesus lives (Jn 14:19). This spiritually abundant life is also ours today because of our place in Christ. As a branch is a part of a vine, we have been made branches of the true vine, Jesus Christ, and have the opportunity to abide in Him. The result is a spiritual life that bears much fruit (Jn 15:1-5). This is a blessing that we have received because Christ has first loved us (Jn 15:9). Therefore, footwashing, the sacrament of Christ’s love, opens the door for us to a bountiful life in Christ.

Having a part with Christ ultimately means receiving His eternal life. By receiving Jesus’ footwashing, the disciples acknowledged that Jesus was from God and received Him as well as the Father who had sent Him (cf. Jn 13:1, 3, 20). Through such faith in Him, they received eternal life (Jn 17:2, 3, 7, 8, 25). In the same way, we may also have eternal life by accepting Him in faith. Being Christ’s, we shall receive the glory from Christ, the glory that the Father had first given to Him (Jn 17:22), and we will be with Him where He is to behold His glory (Jn 17:24).

### **C. THE HANDS THAT WASH OUR FEET**

The hand in Scripture is a symbol of power and dominance. Used anthropomorphically, the hand of God represents God’s great might, invoking fear toward Him (Deut 3:24; Josh 4:24; 2 Chr 6:32; Isa 28:2). With His hand the LORD laid the foundation of the earth and stretched out the heavens (Isa 45:12; 48:13). With His hand He exercises universal sovereign reign the way a potter

commands total control over the clay of his hands (Jer 18:6-10). Therefore, Jehoshaphat prayed, saying, "O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (2 Chr 20:6). When He stretches out His hand, no one can thwart His purpose (Isa 14:27). It is with this almighty hand that He struck Egypt (Ex 3:20; 14:31). When He stretches out His hand in judgment (Judg 2:15; 1 Sam 12:15; Isa 9:12; Jer 21:5; Ezek 16:27), no one can deliver out of His hand or withstand the blow of His hand (Deut 32:39; Job 19:21; Ps 38:2; 39:10; Isa 43:13). It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31).

We are told at the beginning of the footwashing narrative that the Father had given all things into Jesus' hands (Jn 13:3). The cosmic power and authority that is in the hand of the Almighty was now in the hands of Jesus. With this knowledge Jesus rose to wash His disciples' feet. Are we able to fathom the depth of Christ's humility when we realize that the very hands that created the heavens and the earth, rule over all nations, accomplishes God's inviolable purpose, inflict terrible judgment, now poured water into a basin, washed the feet of the disciples, and dried their feet with a towel? These very hands touched the lowliest parts—a task that was fit only for slaves. If Jesus' hands, which held the power and authority over all things, were able to wash the feet of the disciples, what reason do we have for not using our hands to wash the feet of our brethren?

The hand that rules and judges all nations is also the hand of love. With His mighty hand God delivered His people from bondage and led them out of Egypt (Ex 7:4; 13:14; 32:11; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:19). Thus, in the face of oppression the Psalmist cries out to the Lord, "Arise, O LORD! O God, lift up your hand! Do not forget the humble" (Ps 10:12). The Lord's hand is a hand that redeems His people, and it never shortens or becomes powerless to save (Isa 50:2; 59:1). As God's people, we may acknowledge that we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand (Ps 95:7). God also divides His inheritance with His hand and gives it to His people as possession forever (Isa 34:17). Despite the people's



rebellion, God patiently holds out His hands all day long (Isa 65:2; Rom 10:21). He also protects His people, covering them in the shadow of His hand (Isa 51:16). In His mighty and loving hands we have complete assurance for our soul, as the psalm declares, "Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth" (Ps 31:5).

When Scripture states that the Father had given all things into Jesus' hands, it is with a particular reference to Christ's authority to grant eternal life (cf. Jn 17:2). With these hands of salvation and love Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Just as God granted the people their share of God's inheritance with His hand (Isa 34:17), Jesus likewise imparted with His hand an everlasting part with Him to the disciples when He washed their feet. The universal authority of salvation also lies behind the commission to baptize (Mt 28:18, 19). Because of the authority Christ had received, baptism in His name results in the remission of sins. In the same fashion, the commission to administer footwashing is rooted in Christ's redemptive power, through which we may receive a portion of His eternal heritage. Into His hands we may trust our soul, for the mighty and loving hands that washed our feet will continue to guard our feet to the end.

#### **D. THE FEET THAT HAVE BEEN WASHED**

We have seen in the word study section that the feet represent a person's standing, conduct, and way of life. Through the Lord's footwashing, we have received a glorious standing as heirs of His kingdom. This marvelous grace of salvation is as what the psalm proclaims about God's deliverance, "He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps" (Ps 40:2). Christ has redeemed us from our predicament and planted our feet firmly in Him. His loving action of washing our feet teaches us that He wants us to remain in Him all our lives. Let us, therefore, abide in His love (Jn 15:9).

To abide in the love of Christ is to let His words abide in us and to keep His commandments (Jn 15:7, 10). We need to keep our feet in the way of God, letting God's word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). God's word will set us apart even as we

stand in the world (Jn 17:15-19). Since our feet have been washed by the Lord, we ought to walk in Him (Col 2:6). No longer walking as the rest of the Gentiles walk (Eph 4:17), we should walk as in the daylight and in a manner worthy of God, who has called us into His own kingdom and glory (Rom 13:13; Eph 4:1; 5:8; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12).

The devil, the deceiver, is full of schemes and seeks ways to bruise our heel from behind (Gen 3:15). We must therefore be watchful and not be complacent, lest we fall from our steadfastness and be led away with the error of the wicked (1 Cor 10:12; 2 Pet 3:17). Judas, who betrayed the Lord, is an example, warning us the danger of becoming the devil's instrument. Even though his feet had also been washed by the Lord, he still lifted up his heel against Him (Jn 13:18). We are not incapable, however, to stand against the wiles of the devil, for by putting on the full armor of God, we may stand to the end (Eph 6:11-13). This includes equipping our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, which signifies proclaiming the gospel and living according to it (Eph 6:15). We also ought to keep our feet within the gates of Jerusalem by remaining in the fellowship of believers, exhorting one another daily lest we become deceived by sin (Ps 122:1,2; Heb 3:13). By God's grace and power, we can be victorious in the end, for God Himself will crush Satan under our feet shortly (Rom 16:20; cf. Lk 10:18).

The feet that have been washed by the Lord are valuable in God's sight. Whereas we once walked aimlessly in futility and darkness, we now live to fulfill the Lord's purpose. Paul thus exhorts us to live a disciplined life, running in a way that we may obtain the prize (1 Cor 9:24). As it is written "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:15; Isa 52:7). Although our feet will tread through many afflictions for the sake of Christ, the glorious hope of eating and drinking at Christ's table in His kingdom awaits us (cf. Lk 22:28-30). Paul finished this race and obtained a crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:7, 8). We likewise, after finishing this race, may also enter with abundance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:10, 11).

## **E. THE SPIRIT OF WASHING ONE ANOTHER'S FEET**

Having loved His disciples by washing their feet, the Lord Jesus commanded them to also do as He had done. The sacrament of footwashing is an act of love, for when the minister of the church wash the feet of our brethren in the name of the Lord, he is sent to bring the saving grace of Christ upon them. In addition to the sacrament of footwashing, mutual footwashing is a powerful reminder to all believers to love one another. It is not by coincidence, therefore, that immediately after the footwashing narrative the Lord gave them the new commandment: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34, 35; 15:17).

Love is made manifest in giving ourselves for another. This is the love Christ has demonstrated. "He loved us and had given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph 5:2). One way for believers to give themselves for one another is to serve one another, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45). To serve others entails putting ourselves in the position of a servant, and this is exactly what our Lord did during His footwashing. Even though He was the Lord and the Teacher, He set aside His position and stooped down to wash the feet of the disciples. This is the heart of humility that we have seen so vividly in Christ, who made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant (Phil 2:5-7). Thus, footwashing teaches us all to humble ourselves before one another so that we may serve one another. It teaches us to do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3).

When we are able to serve one another in humility, we would also be able to accept one another in love. Love does not seek its own (1 Cor 13:5). Paul exhorts us to bear with the weak rather than to please ourselves: "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself" (Rom 15:1-3). He continues,

“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also receive us, to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7). Discord and strife result when members of a community are not able to accept one another but only see the faults in others. Even when Judas had harbored an intention to betray Jesus, Jesus still washed his feet as He did for the other disciples. When everyone in the church is able to bend down to wash one another’s feet, it is unlikely that we are not able to accept one another and bear with one another.

Through continual footwashing, the church will grow in unity. Each time we wash one another’s feet, we again come to the realization that we are a community of love. We are also reminded that we are the body of Christ, and members individually (1 Cor 12:27), being placed where we are and granted a special gift by the Spirit so that we may serve one another. Mutual footwashing further teaches the importance of helping each other walk in the way of the Lord, exhorting, teaching, and admonishing one another. We may encourage the weak, confess our sins to one another, and pray for one another, thus bearing one another’s burdens and fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). This is how believers can help each other abide in Christ.

In Christ’s final prayer for the believers, He prayed that they may be made perfect in one, that the world may believe that the Father had sent Him (Jn 17:20-22). In His footwashing, the Lord had set in motion a love that binds us together. He expects us to carry on His example and love one another in His body. When the love of Christ permeates through us, and we in turn are able to love one another as exemplified in mutual footwashing, the unity that our Lord desires to see will become a reality. By our love for one another the world will also recognize that we are Christ’s disciples, and they will also put their faith in Him.

# Chapter 6

## TRACES OF FOOTWASHING IN HISTORY

In this section we shall look at some firsthand witnesses to the practice of footwashing in the early church. Only historical references that have some relevance to the sacrament of footwashing or mutual footwashing among believers are included, whereas references that mention footwashing as a form of hospitality are left out.

The intent of this survey is not to substantiate the doctrinal validity of footwashing, for historical witnesses have revealed both error as well as truth in the beliefs and practices of the Christian community through the centuries. However, the historical references presented here are valuable in demonstrating that footwashing had been in practice fairly early in the church. In some cases, we cannot ascertain whether the writer was referring to an actual practice of footwashing, since the reference may not be explicit. Therefore, in such instances, we can only surmise that footwashing may be in view.

### A. TERTULLIAN (CA. 160-220)

In one of his books to his wife, Tertullian discusses the hindrances an unbelieving husband would place on a Christian wife:

But let her see to (the question) how she discharges her duties to her husband. To the Lord, at all events, she is unable to give satisfaction according to the requirements of discipline; having at her side a servant of the devil, his lord's agent for hindering the pursuits and duties of believers: so that if a station is to be kept, the husband at daybreak makes an appointment with his wife to meet him at the baths; if there are fasts to be observed, the husband that same day holds a convivial banquet; if a charitable expedition has to be made, never is family business more urgent. For who would suffer his wife, for the sake of visiting the brethren, to go round from street to street to other men's, and

indeed to all the poorer, cottages? Who will willingly bear her being taken from his side by nocturnal convocations, if need so be? Who, finally, will without anxiety endure her absence all the night long at the paschal solemnities? Who will, without some suspicion of his own, dismiss her to attend that Lord's Supper which they defame? Who will suffer her to creep into prison to kiss a martyr's bonds? nay, truly, to meet any one of the brethren to exchange the kiss? to offer water for the saints' feet? to snatch (somewhat for them) from her food, from her cup? to yearn (after them)? to have (them) in her mind? If a pilgrim brother arrive, what hospitality for him in an alien home? If bounty is to be distributed to any, the granaries, the storehouses, are foreclosed.<sup>99</sup>

Tertullian asks rhetorically whether an unbelieving husband would allow his wife to offer water for the saints' feet. It is not clear whether this is a reference to mutual footwashing in the church or an act of special hospitality we have seen in 1 Timothy 5:10. However, the context indicates that hospitality for a pilgrim brother is out of the question because of the presence of the unbelieving husband at home. In view of this, offering water for the saints' feet is probably a reference to footwashing among believers.

Another reference to footwashing is found in Tertullian's *De Corona*, which he wrote in defense of a soldier, who was a Christian and refused to wear a chaplet on his head along with his fellow soldiers. In this chapter, from which our citation is taken, he argues that even though many articles used by the saints and Christ, such as the towel Jesus used during footwashing, had a pagan origin and are considered acceptable to Christians, there are some things that are nevertheless not fit to be used by Christians.

If at once, of every article of furniture and each household vessel, you name some god of the world as the originator, well, I must recognise Christ, both as He reclines on a couch, and when He presents a basin for the feet of His disciples, and when He pours water into it from a ewer, and when He is girt about with a linen towel—a garment specially sacred to Osiris. It is thus in general I reply upon the point, admitting indeed that we use along with others these articles, but challenging that this be judged in the light of the distinction between things agreeable and things

<sup>99</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. IV: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 46.

opposed to reason, because the promiscuous employment of them is deceptive, concealing the corruption of the creature, by which it has been made subject to vanity. For we affirm that those things only are proper to be used, whether by ourselves or by those who lived before us, and alone befit the service of God and Christ Himself, which to meet the necessities of human life supply what is simply; useful and affords real assistance and honourable comfort, so that they may be well believed to have come from God's own inspiration, who first of all no doubt provided for and taught and ministered to the enjoyment, I should suppose, of His own man. As for the things which are out of this class, they are not fit to be used among us, especially those which on that account indeed are not to be found either with the world, or in the ways of Christ.<sup>100</sup>

Tertullian's words, "we use along with others these articles," may be taken to mean that Christians at his time performed footwashing. However, it could also simply imply that Christians use articles as unbelievers do for common purposes.

#### **B. ORIGEN (CA. 185-254)**

In his *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Origen cites the example of Abraham offering water to his guests to wash their feet:

Abraham, the Father and teacher of nations, is, indeed, teaching you by these things how you ought to receive guests and that you should wash the feet of guests. Nevertheless, even this is said mysteriously. For he knew that the mysteries of the Lord were not to be completed except in the washing of feet. But he was not unaware of the importance of that precept, indeed in which the Saviour says: "If any shall not receive you, shake off even the dust which clings to your feet for a testimony to them. Truly I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for that city". He wished, therefore, to anticipate that and to wash their feet lest perhaps any dust should remain, which shaken off, could be reserved "in the day of judgment" for a testimony of unbelief. For that reason, therefore, wise Abraham says: "Let water be received and your feet be washed".<sup>101</sup>

100 Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. III: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 98.

101 Origen, Ronald E. Heine, and Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 105-106.

Origen believes that Abraham's example teaches Christians to wash the feet of guests. However, he goes further than this, and states that Abraham offered water for footwashing in anticipation of Christ's words concerning judgment. Without explaining what "the mysteries of the Lord" is, Origen states that in the washing of feet the mysteries of the Lord are completed. At the least, we may infer from this that in Origen's view there is some spiritual effect related to Christ in footwashing, and it is possible that he has in mind the sacramental nature of footwashing.

#### **C. CYPRIAN (CA. 200-258)**

Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, writes to the presbyters and deacons and admonishes them to discharge their duties. He cites the example of Christ's footwashing:

Let them imitate the Lord, who at the very time of His passion was not more proud, but more humble. For then He washed His disciples' feet, saying, "If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."<sup>102</sup>

Cyprian's exhortation to "imitate the Lord" is with regards to Christ's humility. He does not speak explicitly about the practice of footwashing here, although the command of imitation could also involve actually washing the feet of believers.

#### **D. SYNOD OF ELVIRA (309)**

In the year 309 C.E., a number of bishops and presbyters convened in Granada in southern Spain. Together, they arrived at eighty-one canonic decisions which their churches were expected to comply. The witness of this synod is highly significant because of its early date. Laeuchli comments on the importance of the canons: "These canons, the first of their kind to have survived in the history of Christianity, are a fascinating witness to the evolution of

<sup>102</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. V: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 283.



the ancient church.”<sup>103</sup> The 48<sup>th</sup> canon pertains to baptism and footwashing:

Those being baptized are not to place money in the baptismal shell since it seems to indicate that the priest is selling what is a free gift. The feet of the newly baptized are not to be washed by the priests or clerics.<sup>104</sup>

The prohibition laid down by the canon can be understood in one of two ways: 1) footwashing of the newly baptized is forbidden; or 2) footwashing is not to be performed by priests or clerics. The canon by itself does not prove that footwashing is biblically sound. As we can see, the tendency to place money in the baptismal shell is surely not biblical. Neither can the prohibition be a basis that footwashing is wrong, since the decision itself could be erroneous. Regardless, we can be certain from this historical evidence that in as early as the third and fourth centuries, footwashing for the newly baptized was in practice at least to some extent in the church.

#### **E. AMBROSE (CA. 337-397)**

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan in the fourth century, discussed the sacraments extensively in *The Sacraments*, which consists of six short addresses delivered by a bishop to the newly baptized on six successive days. Being a strong defender of the sacrament of footwashing, Ambrose deserves close attention, and his presentation of footwashing is worth quoting in full:

You came up from the font. What followed? You heard the reading. The girded priest for, although the presbyters also do this, the highest priest, girded, I say, washed your feet. What mystery is this? Surely, you have heard that the Lord, after He had washed the feet of the other disciples, went to Peter, and Peter said to Him: ‘Do you wash my feet?’ That is: ‘Do you, Lord, wash the feet of a servant; do you without stain wash my feet; do you, the author of the heavens, wash my feet?’ You have this also elsewhere: He went to John and John said to Him: ‘I ought to be baptized by thee, and cometh thou to me?’ I am a sinner, and have you come to a sinner, that you who have not sinned may put

103 Samuel Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: The Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), 3.

104 The Council of Elvira, ca. 306, The Catholic University of America, <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/Canon%20Law/ElviraCanons.htm>

aside your sins? Behold all justice, behold humility, behold grace, behold sanctification. 'He said: If I wash not thy feet, thou shalt have no part with me.'

We are not unaware of the fact that the Church in Rome does not have this custom, whose character and form we follow in all things. Yet it does not have the custom of washing the feet. So note: perhaps on account of the multitude this practice declined. Yet there are some who say and try to allege in excuse that this is not to be done in the mystery, nor in baptism, nor in regeneration, but the feet are to be washed as for a guest. But one belongs to humility, the other to sanctification. Finally, be aware that the mystery is also sanctification: 'If I wash not thy feet, thou shalt have no part with me.' So I say this, not that I may rebuke others, but that I may commend my own ceremonies. In all things I desire to follow the Church in Rome, yet we, too, have human feeling; what is preserved more rightly elsewhere we, too, preserve more rightly.

We follow the Apostle Peter himself; we cling to his devotion. What does the Church in Rome reply to this? Surely for us the very author of this assertion is the Apostle Peter, who was the priest of the Church in Rome, Peter himself, when he said: 'Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.' Behold faith: That he first pleaded an excuse belonged to humility; that he afterwards offered himself belonged to devotion and faith.

The Lord answered him, because he had said 'hands and head': 'He that is washed, needeth not to wash again, but to wash his feet alone.' Why this? Because in baptism all fault is washed away. So fault withdraws. But since Adam was overthrown by the Devil, and venom was poured out upon his feet, accordingly you wash the feet, that in this part, in which the serpent lay in wait, greater aid of sanctification may be added, so that afterwards he cannot overthrow you. Therefore, you wash the feet, that you may wash away the poisons of the serpent. It is also of benefit for humility, that we may not be ashamed in the mystery of what we disdain in obedience.<sup>105</sup>

Ambrose teaches that footwashing after baptism is unlike the custom of washing the feet of guests. It is a mystery based on the Lord's words, "If I wash not thy feet, thou shalt have no part with me," and it belongs to sanctification. What is particularly revealing

<sup>105</sup> Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and Roy J. Deferrari. *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works* (Washington: Catholic University of American Press, 1963), 291-292.

are his comments about the discontinuance of the practice. He indicates that while the church in Rome no longer practices footwashing, the church in Milan has preserved this custom. He surmises that the decline of this ceremony is “on account of the multitude,” a phrase he leaves unexplained. Clearly, footwashing after baptism performed by priests or presbyters was an original practice that had continued up to the time of Ambrose, and through Ambrose’s words we understand that while the church in Milan still preserved this tradition, it had declined in Rome. In addition, if Ambrose’s view is representative of an earlier tradition, the church had from the beginning regarded footwashing as a sacrament before the practice declined in Rome.

In his treatise on the Holy Spirit, Ambrose allegorizes the story of Gideon. One part of the treatise links Jesus’ footwashing with the dew that moistened Gideon’s fleece:

Let us come now to the Gospel of God. I find the Lord stripping Himself of His garments, and girding Himself with a towel, pouring water into a basin, and washing the disciples’ feet. That heavenly dew was this water, this was foretold, namely, that the Lord Jesus Christ would wash the feet of His disciples in that heavenly dew. And now let the feet of our minds be stretched out. The Lord Jesus wills also to wash our feet, for He says, not to Peter alone, but to each of the faithful: “If I wash not thy feet thou wilt have no part with Me.”

Come, then, Lord Jesus, put off Thy garments, which Thou didst put on for my sake; be Thou stripped that Thou mayest clothe us with Thy mercy. Gird Thyself for our sakes with a towel, that Thou mayest gird us with Thy gift of immortality. Pour water into the basin, wash not only our feet but also the head, and not only of the body, but also the footsteps of the soul. I wish to put off all the filth of our frailty, so that I also may say: “By night I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?”

How great is that excellence! As a servant, Thou dost wash the feet of Thy disciples; as God, Thou sendest dew from heaven. Nor dost Thou wash the feet only, but also invitest us to sit down with Thee, and by the example of Thy dignity dost exhort us, saying: “Ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye do well, for so I am. If, then, I the Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another’s feet.”

I, then, wish also myself to wash the feet of my brethren, I wish to fulfil the commandment of my Lord, I will not be ashamed in myself, nor disdain what He Himself did first. Good is the mystery of humility, because while washing the pollutions of others I wash away my own. But all were not able to exhaust this mystery. Abraham was, indeed, willing to wash feet, but because of a feeling of hospitality. Gideon, too, was willing to wash the feet of the Angel of the Lord who appeared to him, but his willingness was confined to one; he was willing as one who would do a service, not as one who would confer fellowship with himself. This is a great mystery which no one knew. Lastly, the Lord said to Peter: "What I do thou knowest not now, but shalt know hereafter." This, I say, is a divine mystery which even they who wash will enquire into. It is not, then, the simple water of the heavenly mystery whereby we attain to be found worthy of having part with Christ.<sup>106</sup>

Ambrose finds in the "heavenly dew" of Gideon's story an allegory for the water Jesus used for footwashing. He also sees a parallel between the actions in footwashing and Christ's redemption. Lastly, he mentions the self-cleansing power of humility through washing the feet of others and confesses that there is great mystery in footwashing. The value of the above citation is not so much in Ambrose's allegorizing or his views on footwashing, but mainly to demonstrate that footwashing was in practice during the time of Ambrose and was considered to contain a mystery based on the footwashing narrative in John 13.

We also find a discussion on footwashing in Ambrose's treatise *On the Sacraments*, which was written for those who were about to be baptized.

You went up from the font; remember the Gospel lesson. For our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel washed the feet of His disciples. When He came to Simon Peter, Peter said: "Thou shalt never wash my feet." He did not perceive the mystery, and therefore he refused the service, for he thought that the humility of the servant would be injured, if he patiently allowed the Lord to minister to him. And the Lord answered him: "If I wash not thy feet, thou wilt have no part with Me." Peter, hearing this, replies: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." The

<sup>106</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. X, Ambrose: Select Works and Letters* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 95.

Lord answered: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet but is clean every whit."

Peter was clean, but he must wash his feet, for he had sin by succession from the first man, when the serpent overthrew him and persuaded him to sin. His feet were therefore washed, that hereditary sins might be done away, for our own sins are remitted through baptism.

Observe at the same time that the mystery consists in the very office of humility, for Christ says: "If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; how much more ought you to wash one another's feet." For, since the Author of Salvation Himself redeemed us through His obedience, how much more ought we His servants to offer the service of our humility and obedience.<sup>107</sup>

Ambrose once again calls footwashing a mystery. Not only so, he assigns footwashing the effect of washing away hereditary sins. As stated before, writings such as these by themselves do not prove doctrinal validity. For example, in the same chapter just prior to the above quote, Ambrose also presents the anointing of the head as a ceremony performed on the newly baptized. Such a practice lacks a sound biblical basis. What we may glean from the discussion on footwashing, however, is that it was a sacrament administered to the baptized at the time of Ambrose.

#### **F. AUGUSTINE (354-430)**

The following excerpt is taken from Augustine's letter to Januarius concerning the observance of sacred days:

As to the feet-washing, since the Lord recommended this because of its being an example of that humility which He came to teach, as He Himself afterwards explained, the question has arisen at what time it is best, by literal performance of this work, to give public instruction in the important duty which it illustrates, and this time [of Lent] was suggested in order that the lesson taught by it might make a deeper and more serious impression. Many, however, have not accepted this as a custom, lest it should be thought to belong to the ordinance of baptism; and some have not hesitated to deny it any place among our ceremonies. Some, however, in order to connect its observance with the more sacred

107 Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. X, Ambrose: Select Works and Letters* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 321.

associations of this solemn season, and at the same time to prevent its being confounded with baptism in any way, have selected for this ceremony either the eighth day itself, or that on which the third eighth day occurs, because of the great significance of the number three in many holy mysteries.<sup>108</sup>

Augustine seems to be neutral on the observance of footwashing. The fact that he mentions footwashing in the context of sacred days appears to be a passive acknowledgment of its validity. But he also gives no judgment on those who have done away with the rite. One point to note, however, is the reason Augustine cites why certain people denied footwashing its place among the ceremonies. He explains that they abolished footwashing out of fear that it would be thought of as part of the ordinance of baptism. Calvin quotes Augustine's words and comments on the resemblance between footwashing and baptism, "For when Augustine says (Ep. 118) that certain churches in his day rejected the formal imitation of Christ in the washing of feet, lest that rite should seem to pertain to baptism, he intimates that there was then no kind of washing which had any resemblance to baptism."<sup>109</sup> For those who shared the same concerns but still believed that footwashing should be observed, they decided to postpone it. This historical information is significant, because it indicates that footwashing was formerly a rite of the church, but it underwent gradual change and was even removed among some churches as a measure to prevent its confusion with baptism.

## G. GENERAL REFERENCE WORKS

The following excerpts on the practice of footwashing in the early church are taken directly from reference works on church history. Like the writings we have cited so far, the main purpose of presenting these materials is to show that footwashing had been in practice in the church since the early days of Christianity.

108 Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. I, The confessions and letters of St. Augustin with a sketch of his life and work* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 314.

109 Jean Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translation of: Institutio Christianae religionis.; Reprint, with new introd. Originally published: Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), IV, x, 20.

## 1. History of the Christian Church

The context of the following citation is a description of the Easter cycle in the church during the Nicene and post-Nicene period:

Next follows Maundy Thursday, in commemoration of the institution of the Holy Supper, which on this day was observed in the evening, and was usually connected with a love feast, and also with feet-washing.<sup>110</sup>

In another section, Schaff discusses the sacraments in general, and one of them is the washing of feet:

In the North African, the Milanese, and the Gallican churches the washing of feet also long maintained the place of a distinct sacrament. Ambrose asserted its sacramental character against the church of Rome, and even declared it to be as necessary as baptism, because it was instituted by Christ, and delivered men from original sin, as baptism from the actual sin of transgression;—a view which rightly found but little acceptance.<sup>111</sup>

## 2. The Catholic Encyclopedia

This reference work seeks to provide an overview of the practice of footwashing through the centuries:

This tradition, we may believe, has never been interrupted, though the evidence in the early centuries is scattered and fitful. For example the Council of Elvira (A.D. 300) in canon xlviii directs that the feet of those about to be baptized are not to be washed by priests but presumably by clerics or at least lay persons. This practice of washing the feet at baptism was long maintained in Gaul, Milan, and Ireland, but it was not apparently known in Rome or in the East. In Africa the nexus between this ceremony and baptism became so close that there seemed danger of its being mistaken for an integral part of the rite of baptism itself (Augustine, Ep. LV, "Ad Jan.", n. 33). Hence the washing of the feet was in many places assigned to another day than that on which the baptism took place. In the religious orders the ceremony found favour as a practice of charity and humility. The Rule of St. Benedict directs that

110 Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), vol. III 4.78.

111 Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). vol. III 4.91

it should be performed every Saturday for all the community by him who exercised the office of cook for the week; while it was also enjoined that the abbot and the brethren were to wash the feet of those who were received as guests. The act was a religious one and was to be accompanied by prayers and psalmody, “for in our guests Christ Himself is honoured and receive”. The liturgical washing of feet (if we can trust the negative evidence of our early records) seems only to have established itself in East and West at a comparatively late date. In 694 the Seventeenth Synod of Toledo commanded all bishops and priests in a position of superiority under pain of excommunication to wash the feet of those subject to them. The matter is also discussed by Amalarius and other liturgists of the ninth century. Whether the custom of holding this “maundy” (from “Mandatum novum do vobis”, the first words of the initial Antiphon) on Maundy Thursday, developed out of the baptismal practice originally attached to that day does not seem quite clear, but it soon became an universal custom in cathedral and collegiate churches. In the latter half of the twelfth century the pope washed the feet of twelve sub-deacons after his Mass and of thirteen poor men after his dinner. The “Caeremoniale episcoporum” directs that the bishop is to wash the feet either of thirteen poor men or of thirteen of his canons. The prelate and his assistants are vested and the Gospel “Ante diem festum paschae” is ceremonially sung with incense and lights at the beginning of the function. Most of the sovereigns of Europe used also formerly to perform the maundy. The custom is still retained at the Austrian and Spanish courts.<sup>112</sup>

### 3. A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities

The following dictionary entry associates footwashing with the Gallican churches and confirms that footwashing was closely tied to baptism:

*Pedilavium. The washing of feet.* A peculiar custom prevailed in the early Gallican ritual, of a symbolical washing of the feet of the newly baptized, having reference to the action of our Lord recorded in the Gospel of St. John (xiii. 1-16). The so-called Gothic missal, and another early Gallican missal (Martene, *De A. E. R.* tom. i. pp. 63, 64), both contain references to this as a

<sup>112</sup> Herbert Thurston, “Washing of Feet and Hands,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol 15, New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15557b.htm>



recognized part of the baptismal ritual. In the first . . . , immediately after the application of the chrism, we read, “Dum pedes ejus lavas, dicis, ‘Ego tibi lavo pedes. Sicut Dominus noster Jesus Christus fecit discipulis suis, tu facias hospitibus et peregrinis ut habeas vitam aeternam:’” (“While washing their feet, He should declare, ‘I wash your feet. In the same way our Lord Jesus Christ did to His disciples, you should also do to guests and strangers, that you may have eternal life’”) (then follows the *impositio vestimenti*). In the second of the two documents, a collect is given “ad pedes lavandos,” which follows, as before, immediately upon the “*Infusio Chrismae*.” “Dominus et Salvator noster Jesus Christus apostelis suis pedes lavit: Ego tibi pedes lavo, ut et tu facias hospitibus et peregrinis, qui ad te venerint. Hoc si feceris habebis vitam aeternam in saecula saeculorum. Amen.” (“Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ washed his disciples’ feet: ‘I wash your feet, that you may also do to guests and strangers who come to you. If you do this, then you will have eternal life forever. Amen.’”)<sup>113</sup>

Without purporting to be a comprehensive survey of the history of the development of footwashing in church history, the selected references cited above provide ample evidence that footwashing was an ancient practice in the church and was often viewed as a sacrament. Even through its evolution and even dissolution in some parts of Christendom, the ceremony of footwashing was prominent enough to have left its traces in history.

113 Sir William Smith, and Samuel Cheethan. *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities. Being A Continuation of the 'Dictionary of the Bible'* Vol. I (London: J. Murray, 1875-1880), 164.

# Conclusion

We have seen from a close examination of John 13:1-20 that Jesus' footwashing is far more than a moral lesson on humility and love. From the introductory notes of the narrator and Jesus' own comment on His footwashing to His command and commission to the disciples, it is clear that Jesus' footwashing is a divine initiative and mandate—the reception or rejection of which has an eternal consequence for the believer. Being an ordinance instituted by Christ that consists of external signs and a spiritual saving effect, footwashing is considered a sacrament the same way that baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments.

To be more specific, the spiritual effect endowed on the believer through footwashing is to have a part with Christ. While the act of washing is often associated with cleansing, the Bible does not teach that footwashing is for the purpose of spiritual cleansing. According to the narrative on which we base our study, we may be certain that footwashing does not provide additional cleansing after baptism, for the believer is wholly clean after he has been washed in baptism.

Finally, we have seen that Jesus commanded the disciples to wash one another's feet and commissioned the church to administer the sacrament of footwashing. The church needs to perform footwashing for believers who have been washed in baptism so they may have a part with Christ. Behind both types of footwashing are practical teachings concerning our relationship with Christ and with fellow believers.

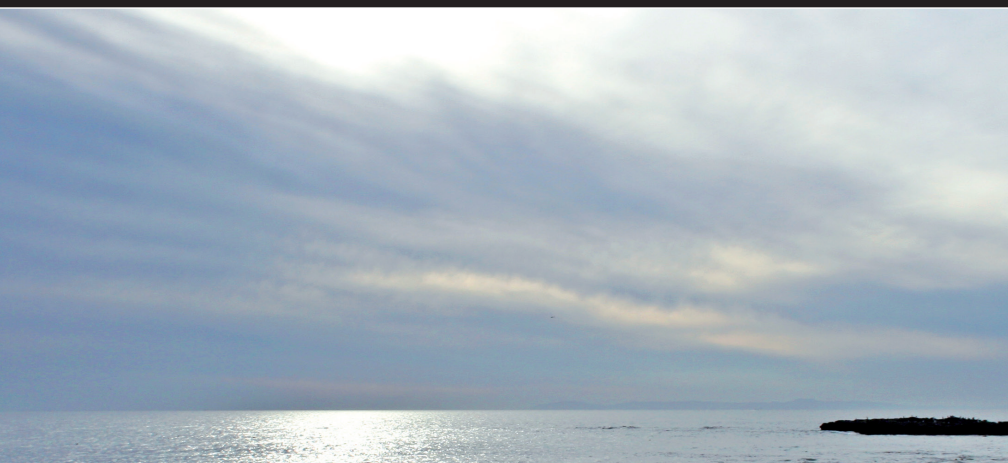
As a supplement, we cited and evaluated selected historical writings and reference works related to footwashing in the early church. It is evident from history, despite the scanty materials available to us, that footwashing was in fact practiced in the early church prior to its decline. Ultimately, however, questions regarding the necessity, effect, and administration of footwashing need to be answered according to the inspired words of the Scriptures, and that has been the guiding principle of this study.

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