

JESUS TEACHING HUMILITY¹

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June 13, 2015

How shall I follow Him? Only you can answer that question. If you will remember Christ's grief, you will never repine because of yours. If you will think of how He left His home of pure delights, and how He died on the cross for you, you can answer that question in only one way: Lord I give you my life, my soul, my body, my time, my intellect, my affections, my money, my influence, my all—not because of fear or hope of selfish reward but because of your sacrifice for me!

If there is anyone here today, who feels he has nothing to live for, no hope for the future, no point in life, you feel depressed and discouraged, I present before you the sacrifice of your Lord, how He left heaven and died your second death. This truth will immediately deliver your mind from its captivity to selfish thoughts. It will immediately set you free from repining and discouragement; and will banish your depression as the east wind banishes the fog from Hayward. All your poisonous miasma of fear, disappointment, animosity, and the allurements of infatuation, will be swept from your soul. That is the power of the cross of Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). There is not one soul here today but what is wrestling with

the power of temptation. Young and old want to be a better person, better woman, a better boy or girl than you know you are. Salvation is a present reality—you know that power now. To set you free from the captivity that you hate so much now. New channels of thought are formed in your brain cells. Old habits are broken, old channels that your thoughts have run in for years are blocked off by the power of this gospel message, and a new pattern of thought and conviction comes in and takes over your mind and heart, and you are a new person. How? "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

That brings us to our topic today—the feet-washing. Why do we observe this ordinance? Is this something that we are taking too literally? We are the only church in the city of Hayward that practices foot-washing. We are the only church that opens its doors on the Lord's seventh-day Sabbath, too!

Here is the story of the foot-washing. Jesus was about to be crucified. It was at His last meeting with the disciples at a meal. He had words to say to them, but He could not say them. Why? Because the pride, selfishness, animosity, greed, and ambition, made the disciple's hearts as hard as concrete. So they could not receive His words. And yet these twelve men were all baptized members of the church. They were leaders, even ordained ministers and apostles. They had quarreled. "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest" (Luke 22:24).

¹ John 13:13-17. 152, 111.

There were hard feelings, like we have sometimes. There was hatred, animosity. This gives you a feeling like you're dirty. I don't want to touch you and you don't want to touch me.

Some people have imagined that this act of feet-washing was a thing rendered necessary by the fact that people wore low sandals, so that the feet became readily soiled and needed frequent washing, and that it was a common act of courtesy for a host to perform such a service for his guests. This is wholly imaginary. Suppose it were true, what kind of host would He be, who should neglect a thing that ought to be done when the guests first entered the house, if at all, until after they had sat down to supper? What would you think if you were invited to a feast, and in the midst of it were invited by your host to take a bath? No; the claim that the washing of feet was a common act of courtesy only sets Jesus forth as neglectful; and that fact alone disproves it.

It was indeed common for hosts to provide water for the feet of their guests, but not to wash their feet. Each one did that for himself. The host would no more think of washing the feet of his friends than we would think of washing the hands and faces of our friends when they arrive after a journey. We provide water for them, and leave them to make their own toilet. Even so it was in ancient times. Abraham was a pattern of hospitality, but he did not wash the feet of the three men whom he so courteously received. He ran to meet them, and bowing down to the ground, invited them to come in, saying, "Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched,

and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts" (Gen. 18:1, 5). Here we see very clearly that the guests were expected to wash their own feet. Hence it aroused the utmost astonishment on the part of the disciples, when they saw Jesus begin to wash their feet. They had never before seen or heard anything like that.

The foot-washing was the exactly right thing for Christ to do under those circumstances. He knelt down and washed His disciples feet. And that did it. It changed the disciples, all but Judas. Nothing could change him. During the most tender, sublime moment in all of human history up to that time, while the Son of God was washing the dirty feet of His Eleven fellows, Judas closed his heart once and for all to the Holy Spirit and opened it to receive Satan in all his fullness. Nobody could outwardly perceive that though. It seemed outwardly that Peter was doing that, but he did not.

Then Christ gave His commandment, repeating it four times. This is why we practice the foot-washing. "Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; (1) ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that (2) ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The (3) servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than He that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye (4) if ye do them" (John 13:13-17).

Why then is it neglected by so many of His professed followers today. The answer is easily given: It is Christ's ordinance of humility, but His professed church has become too proud to practice it. This is shown in His own words: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The servant has become greater than his lord, and so considers himself free from the example and obligation of his Lord; he that is sent has become greater than He that sent him, and counts himself at liberty to dispense with the ordinance instituted by his Lord. When the churches were despised and persecuted, they were humble enough to not despise Christ's lesson of humility. But now the church is courted by the world; now she is "rich and increased with goods and hath need of nothing." But she needs the humility of Christ. The message for today is entitled "Jesus Teaching Humility;" how many will learn the real lesson which He teaches? how many will practice the lesson which He taught, as He taught it? "I have washed your feet." "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you." "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet." "If ye know these things, happy [blessed] are ye if ye do them."

But my topic for this sermon is not Why do we practice feet-washing? The answer to that question would be simply, Because Christ commanded it. But my topic is, Why did Christ command it?

There is one clear and important reason. Jesus knew well enough that when the Twelve disciples were baptized, they were not completely cleansed from all sin.

Now some people think that when you first come to Christ and confess your sins, as best you know how, that you are then completely cleansed from all sin. This is known as the instantaneous sanctification theory and is widely taught in many churches. They base this on 1 John 1:9 which says that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

However, they fail to understand the meaning of the feet-washing. That's why many churches do not practice it! Jesus knew that the disciples were sincere men when they were first converted, baptized, and ordained. But there were still weaknesses and sins deep down that they were not acquainted with.

Take Peter, for example. "The Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Peter protested, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:33). "And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me" (Luke 22:34). There were cursings and swearings in his heart. How do you account for that?

When Peter denied his Lord three times before the rooster crowed that early morning, he was our surrogate. He was a man, and a young one at that; and the girl who tripped him up was evidently personality-plus with a tongue sharp as a razor and a wit devilishly keen. Men don't like to be ridiculed by such a female. This one probably fitted Isaiah's description, "stuck-up, prancing around, . . . making eyes, . . . swinging hips, tossing their hair" (Isa. 3:16, Peterson). The group she was with was having fun at the expense of this Man from Galilee, the pretended messiah who was at last getting what He deserved, they thought. His followers were stupid fools. Say, you, yes, you there—you talk like a Galilean! Surely you can't be one of this crazy Man's followers? (Pearly laughter). You are, aren't you?

Peter, for all his bravado at the Last Supper, collapses under this barrage. If only one of the disciples had been sharing the ridicule with him, he might have endured, but Peter was dreadfully alone in the cold courtyard, by the fire. Nonchalant. Probably trying to smile a bit and grin at their jokes, but he couldn't, it was too forced. Then the damsel's onslaught, and down he went.

The sin was there all the time, buried in Peter's heart, waiting only for an opportune temptation of crisis to bring it out. And when that girl taunted him with being a follower of Jesus that night, that's all it took to bring out the sin from Peter's heart into the open.

When Peter was baptized and converted the first time, he was cleansed from all known sin, but not

from all unknown sin. And it is the unknown sin that plagued the disciples. Hence, their strife for the supremacy. Hence, their weakness in running away from the scene of Christ's trials. Hence, their quarrelling amongst themselves.

The greatest sin ever committed was an unknown sin—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The last sin to be repented of before the coming of the Lord is an unknown sin, according to Rev. 3:17: "Thou knowest not." Said the True Witness of Laodicea: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and *knowest not* that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

When a guest went to a supper in Jesus' day, he took a bath before he left the house. But the streets were filthy and the feet became dirty. So He said, "He who has had a bath doesn't need another bath, but he does need his feet washed before he can be "clean every whit" (John 13:10).

So, we have been baptized (I, 54 years ago). And so have you have been baptized. But sin dwelleth in us. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing;" "the evil which I would not, that I do;" "evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:18ff).

Have you ever had the experience of doing or saying something wrong and then in horror wondering, "How could it be that I would ever do or say such a thing? I thought I was converted! How could I say those mean words? How could I have told that lie? How could I hate that person like I did? What's wrong with me? How could I have ever had such impure thoughts in my mind?" And on and on!

The apostle Paul gives the answer—“evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21). That explains a lot!

Someone may ask, “Then what good is conversion?” That’s just what the devil asks, “Why are Christian people so unlike Christ?” As the little boy prayed, “Lord, please make the bad people good and make the good people nice!” We often bring shame on Christ. This is why He has not yet been able to come the second time.

Satan often says, “I have people on my side who are nicer and better than some you have on your side!”

It hurt Christ awfully that night when Peter denied Him with cursing and swearing; it hurts Him terribly today when you and I deny Him by impurity, meanness, harshness, lovelessness, and on and on we could go, and you know what I mean, all of you.

Now I would like to ask the older members to take a particular interest in the new members and the visitors. For many of them this is their first feet-washing service. Help them!

A missionary in the bush could wash the feet of his parishioners. Their feet were indeed dirty. They were barefooted. They come through the muddy paths with their feet caked with mud sometimes an inch thick. It made one feel like saying, “You go wash your own feet yourself then come have fellowship with me!”

Sometimes we feel like saying that to one another. We get sick of what we think is their hypocrisy, the sinfulness, the foolishness, of one another. We tend to feel inside, “I wish so and so would clean himself up—then I could have fellowship with him!”

But that is not the spirit of Christ. He did not tell the disciples that night, “You Twelve men—look how dirty your feet are—go wash them yourselves.” No. He knelt down and did it Himself.

And so you and I are invited to work with Jesus. Cleanse your brother or your sister of his disaffection, his worry, his sin, if you please. Wash his feet yourself. Take his burden upon yourself. Put yourself in his place. Instead of condemning him for what he has done, think what you would have done if your circumstances had been exactly like his! And then clean him up by your love and your own repentance. That’s what it means to wash one another’s feet! It is a sort of systemic repentance, a thorough cleansing, all in the name of Jesus. He does it, but we cooperate with Him.

The feet-washing is a further cleansing, after baptism. And we need it just as much as Peter did.

Every time we have a service like this, the work of the Holy Spirit goes deeper and deeper. You become aware of sins you never knew were in your heart, unknown before. And you confess them to God, and you ask for forgiveness, and He keeps His promise and forgives and cleanses. You gain victories. You make progress. You come closer to Him.

But the next time we have a foot-washing service, the Holy Spirit goes deeper still. And you discover more things buried that you did not know were there, and again you ask for cleansing. And thus the healing medicine of the Holy Spirit works ever deeper and deeper.

This is what the Bible calls sanctification and it is a daily work, extending over your lifetime. There is no need ever to get discouraged because of this process which the Holy Spirit works.

In my lawn there are weeds and thistles. I hoe them all out so that it looks clean. I call to my wife, "Come, dear, look how clean it looks now. I've uprooted every one of those terrible sharp thorny thistle weeds out of the lawn. Doesn't it look nice?" And she smiles and says, "Yes, dear, you're quite a farmer. But I want to see what it looks like next month."

Sure enough, there they are again! Why? Because there were little seeds buried in the soil that I could not see, and that my hoe and rake could not get hold of. When I pulled out the old plants those little seeds were still there unseen; and as soon as rain or water comes, they spring up and make a new crop.

What can I do? Someone will ask, "Isn't it hopeless? Won't there be weeds in my soul forever?" The Bible clearly says, No. Those who are ready when Jesus comes in the clouds of heaven will not have spot or wrinkle or any such thing. "That He might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). "And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:5). If anyone is perfect, he belongs in heaven, not here on earth.

How will this wonderful work be accomplished? By the grace of Christ, working through His ministry in

the most holy of the heavenly sanctuary. This is what the feet-washing symbolizes.

I say to every one of you—you are students in the school of Christ. When you joined the remnant church, you entered His active school. Day by day you are learning. Some say, "I don't like Brother so and so, he annoys me. I will leave the church."

Or, "So and so offended me. I won't come to church anymore. I won't do anything anymore." If you leave the school of Christ, if you drop out of the course, then you miss the fruitage of the feet-washing. It's what Jesus meant when He said to Peter, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me." In other words, if you will not submit to the purifying, disciplining ministry of my Holy Spirit, through church fellowship, through letting your brethren or sisters wash your feet and through washing their feet, thus letting Me wash your feet, Thou hast no part with Me.

But I will guarantee you something; and I say it humbly in the fear of God: If you will stay in the church and fully submit to all the discipline of the Lord Jesus, you will be prepared for His coming no matter who you are or where you have come from.

I speak advisedly because I take into mind the events of the final crisis when the mark of the beast will be enforced when many, sad to say, will be shaken out of the church because they choose the service and worship of self rather than the service and worship of the crucified Christ. But if you stay in school, you will get an A in the course. You will overcome.

I feel so sad when someone says, “I’m going to leave the church or I’m not going to hold any office if they ask me” for I know what they are doing—they are harboring the kind of resentments and bitterness that only the feet-washing can wash away in truth. Oh brethren and sisters, let’s let Jesus wash it away today!

A LESSON OF LOVING SERVICE

“There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest” (Luke 22:24). This strife would very naturally show itself in an attempt to secure the place of honor at table, especially at this time, when they supposed that Christ was about to take the kingdom. We know that this is a matter of no small importance to worldly people. Jesus therefore told them that the place of honor in His kingdom is the place of greatest and lowliest service; and He gave them a practical illustration of this, by rising from the table and washing their feet. Then He said, “Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” John 13:13-15. No commandment of the Lord Jesus is more emphatic than this, preceded by His own example. Why is it not obeyed by all who profess to be His followers?

If anything in the world could have won the heart of Judas, and held him back from the dark crime which he was about to commit, it would have been the sign of Jesus kneeling at his feet to wash them. Yet Christ was the same then that He is now and

always; and then, as always, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.” Just such service the Lord is doing for us and for all mankind continually. Christ is greatest, because He does the greatest service; and the recognition of His constant, loving service for us will lead us continually to repentance, and will bind us to Him.

Look again at that upper room where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Judas was among them, although the devil had already put it into his heart to betray his Lord, and, the bargain had already been made with the chief priests. Jesus well knew what was in the heart of Judas, but the fellow-disciples of Judas did not. Jesus had all the time known the covetousness that was in the heart of Judas, and He knew that this covetousness would make him His betrayer. He knew the anger that filled the heart of Judas at his failure to secure the value of the ointment that had been poured out upon the Master. He saw Judas as he went to the chief priests and made the bargain which really meant murder. Nevertheless the Lord proceeded to wash the feet of Judas just the same as He did the others. No shade of difference was noticed in His treatment of them. Not by word, look, or gesture did Jesus give any intimation that He knew that Judas was not as loyal as the rest of the twelve. His intercourse with Judas, the traitor, was marked by the same tenderness as with John, the beloved disciple. Let those who are wont to consider feet-washing as an act of courtesy look at this phase of it for an example in courtesy such as the world has never seen.

But this was not an act of mere courtesy. It was the courtesy that naturally springs from perfect love. There was nothing “put on” with Jesus. He was just what He seemed to be. He did not force Himself to any line of action. In the world, the height of “good breeding” is manifested in the man who can maintain a calm exterior while boiling with indignation and rage within; but Jesus had that perfection of good breeding that the world never can know. It was the breeding that marks the oldest of “old families”—the family of God. He acted calmly, because He was calm within. He made no difference in His treatment of the disciples, because He felt none. His was the character of God, who “maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:15). “He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35). Jesus treated Judas kindly, because He felt kindly toward him. In His heart there was not a trace of bitterness, no rising of anger, revenge, or what men delight in calling “righteous indignation.” Yet Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are” (Heb. 4:15). He had our nature, so that injustice would tend to arouse Him as much as us. The perfect love which He manifested to all is a proof of the power of the Divine nature to swallow up the human. God gave Him “power over all flesh,” so that the same unselfish love may be manifested in us.

The love that Jesus manifested in washing the feet of Judas was the same as that which prompted the prayer for those who crucified Him, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” He who washed

the feet of Judas would just as readily have washed the feet of Pilate or the chief priests. And not only would He have washed the feet of these men, if occasion had called for it, but He would have performed any other service for them; for the feet-washing stood as the representative of all kinds of service for others. No man ever did a baser deed than Judas did; and the fact that Jesus did for him the most humble service, knowing that he was at the time under the direct influence of the devil, and planning the most heartless betrayal against his chief Benefactor, is evidence to us that Christ would gladly and lovingly serve His worst enemies. This is a strong ground of consolation to us, making it possible to come to Him with confidence, in spite of our sins against Him: but it is more than that; it is a lesson to us as to how we should treat those who might be considered our enemies.

It is most fitting that the ordinance of foot washing should accompany the Lord’s Supper, since both show communion with Christ. His word is Spirit, and we are made clean by the word which He speaks to us (John 15:9). Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by a water bath in the Word (Eph. 5:28). And “he that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet” (John 13:10, R.V.). That is to say, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Col. 2:6). “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). The water in which the feet are washed, represents the water of life, the Spirit of God, in which we are continually to walk. Thus only have we fellowship with Christ; for

He says: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me” (John 13:5).