



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### **Sacrifice of Service, Part 3**

In some churches, foot washing is practiced. A young Christian described the practice this way: What I saw seemed really dumb. There was an announcement that day in church that if you wanted your feet washed following the service, you could go to the fellowship hall and either get or give a foot washing. So, I went. In the hall there were four or five stations where men in suits and women in dresses were seated, and people were kneeling at their feet pouring water on them. My first thought was that if you are going to wash someone's feet

you need to do more than just pour water on them. You need soap and a scrub brush. So really, what I saw was no washing at all. Secondly, I, like most Americans, bathed daily and so I knew my feet were not dirty enough to warrant someone washing my feet. So why were they doing it?

However, across America there are foot washings going on<sup>1</sup>- most of which miss the point of this passage. In the words of T. R. Glover, “[These churches think Christ and the disciples] were being religious when they were merely being fastidious.” That having been said, what truly would be amazing is if Christians today, instead of physically washing each other’s feet, actually participated in the foot washing that Christ prescribed.

John 13:13-15, “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet [if I stooped to serve you], you also ought to wash one another’s feet [you too ought also to stoop in your relationship with one another]. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”

The foot washing Christ is here referring to is NOT the physical act of washing another’s feet, BUT a whole other matter altogether! It is the sacrifice of service.

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were given by God to encourage His people both to enjoy and to live in light of His grace (and so flee from sin in their lives). Yet in Christ’s day, those present were doing everything but striving against sin. Judas was in the death-spiral of sin and the eleven other disciples were engaging in an argument of folly, specifically “Who was the greatest amongst them?”

It was in this context Christ rose from the supper table and engaged in the work of God’s Kingdom. Now it is hard for us to imagine that Christ/God could participate in so great an act of humiliation, however three things were controlling His mind in this regard:

- God’s Sovereignty, v. 1b.
- The Riches of God’s Provision, v. 3a.
- The Certainty of One’s Security, v. 3b.

These things are the foundation for Christ’s motivation in serving.

John 13:1c, “...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”

This incredible statement serves as the basis of all ministry in the Kingdom of God is love! Now I doubt any here would NOT have been able to articulate that prior to this morning. Of course, our ministry and service in God’s Kingdom is to be done out of love.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Recall Christ's response to the lawyer... the lawyer said this:

Matthew 22:36-38, "'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment."

So again, what we read in this verse is not new to us. Yet there is a wrench here that we cannot miss: the motivation of the service we render to others is NOT simply love for God, BUT it also must be driven out of love for man!

John 13:1, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end [to the utmost; He couldn't have loved them more!]"

This brings us to a very difficult question: how do you genuinely love a fool? How do you love one who has injured you severely? How do we love the unlovely? When it comes to ministry our focus must ever and always be vertical — our minds must be "...set on the things above, not the things of the earth" (Colossians 3:2)! When this occurs, love is attainable! Consider the words of Christ to Simon, the host of the house in which Jesus dined:

Luke 7:44b-47, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Christians who do NOT see the greatness of God AND who view themselves as not so bad, will find it difficult to love anyone beyond themselves! BUT those Christians who see God for what He is: infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably holy, just, righteous, and good — so much so that our existence is sin — will see themselves for what they are a wicked and wretched individual unworthy to take up space in a fallen world on account of our sin! Christian, think of this past week accurately and you will know that you are "the chief of all sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15)! They will see grace for what it gave: complete and total pardon! Because of Christ, our existence no longer is an affront to God; we are now precious in His sight! People who see all three accurately will naturally give grace and love to any and every sinner in their path for "such were some of you, but you were washed" (1 Corinthians 6:11)! Consider the parable of the Unmerciful Steward:

Matthew 18:23-30, "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle *them*, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents [this is an enormous debt amounting in that day to the money that would be made in 2,777 lifetimes for the common man]. But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be

made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. [Talk about amazing grace!!! Yet our sin has produced an even greater debt (more than 2,777 lifetimes; our debt is eternal) which God on account of Christ forgave!] But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii [while this is a significant debt, the point is that it is nothing compared to 10,000 talents... and what did he/we do?]; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and *began* to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed."

This is how we tend to deal with the sins of others, we place the individual in debtor's prison until they do enough good to us to compensate for their insult! Until then, we excommunicate them in our minds and separate from them! What is the fatal flaw here? Notice the end of the parable:

Matthew 18:32-33, "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave [lit., 'should not mercy have been your lasting obligation'], even as I had mercy on you?'

The Christian who finds it hard to love another sinner has one main problem (and it is NOT the other person): It is pride! Because they sin little and so know little of God's grace, they don't have the capacity to forgive much! Jack Miller, referencing Matthew 18, wrote this:

Whom are you choking today?... Are there areas of weakness or sin you tolerate in yourself, but cannot tolerate in others?... Whenever we contemplate the sin of another against us, we must see that it is tiny in comparison to our own sin against God. The picture Jesus paints is this: Here is a fellow lifting one hand up pleading for mercy and for forgiveness of a tremendous debt, while at the same time reaching down with the other hand and choking a fellow servant who owes him a pittance. This is the spiritual condition for many of us. You must grasp the fact that if you're reaching out to God for forgiveness, you need both hands. (Miller 2014 , 178)

This means that *choking another with our hands is now impossible!* Truly, you will never love another — in fact you cannot love — unless you first understand and know the love of God for you! It is as John wrote in 1 John.

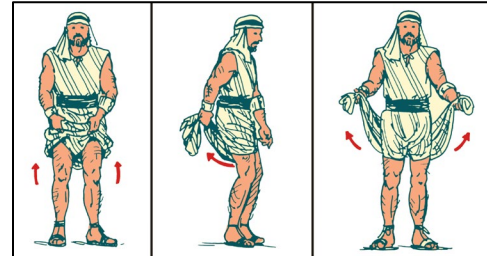
1 John 4:19, "We love because He first loved us."

If you have difficulty loving others it is because you have a low view of God's love as it evidently has not forgiven any real sin in you! And so we see the motivation behind any and all ministry

in the Kingdom of God: Love for God and love for the sinner! If in this regard you find loving another difficult, we know now it is the result of pride!

With love driving us, lastly let's consider the service that is part and parcel of ministry in God's Kingdom. If it is NOT literally washing the feet of someone, then what is it? It is humbly serving. Notice that in the midst of the evil of Judas/Satan and the folly of the disciples (who would NOT stoop to wash each other's feet), Jesus humbly served.

John 13:4, "Rose from supper, and laid aside His garments (the language here is one and the same as when Christ 'laid aside' His life;<sup>2</sup> it clearly is a foreshadowing); and taking a towel, He girded Himself about."



I don't think we read this verse very well. For the picture that I have always heard is that Jesus during the Passover meal, laid aside His outer garment, girded up His loins (see the picture), and then served. But that is NOT what this verse says. The text reads that Christ "rose from supper, and laid aside His garmentS..."

Notice the number of the latter expression, "laid aside His garmentS." It is plural! In keeping with John's use of this term (cf. John 19:23), it would have referred to Christ's outer garment AS WELL AS His inner garment.<sup>3</sup> So at this point, Christ would have stood naked (except for a small loin cloth) as he "took a towel" and "girded Himself" with it.

What is the significance of the "towel"? In that day the responsibility of the host of a Jewish feast (as in the case of Passover), was to provide for what would be necessary for the occasion. In this case, a basin and towel would have been placed at the door for the foot washing as people entered the room.<sup>4</sup> Now the key here is that "the towel" provided would have been the material used by a house slave!<sup>5</sup> That means that when Christ washed the disciples' feet, He NOT only did the work of a slave, BUT He took upon Himself the DRESS of a slave! Chuck Swindoll describes it this way:

Verse 4 tells us that... Jesus slipped away from the table and silently traded His robes for the attire of a slave. But not just any slave, the lowest rank of slave. A slave who washes road grime from the feet of houseguests. (Swindoll 2014, 224)

Gerald Borchert put it this way:

The evangelist [John] makes clear that Jesus intended that he should be viewed in the posture of such a slave by removing or 'laying down'... his 'outer clothing'... Then he tied a towel around himself in the fashion of a slave and actually used that towel to wipe the feet of the disciples once he had washed them. (Borchert 2002, 80)

This no doubt is why Paul said that Christ:

Philippians 2:7, "...[took] the form of a bond-servant..."

So often we read this expression and think that Paul is speaking figuratively here. He wasn't! Christ literally dressed Himself in the garment of a slave! In fact, Christ told His disciples at this juncture these words:

Luke 24:27b, "But I am among you as the one who serves."

In other words *as you think of me, think of the lowest slave!* That is the nature of Kingdom service! It is NOT glamorous or honored by our world or the church. RATHER it is thankless, humbling, and incredibly demeaning!<sup>6</sup> In order to serve in the Kingdom of God you have to stoop! That is how God designed it! With this, notice secondly that Kingdom Service requires actual sacrifice.

John 13:5, "Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."

Do you know what this verse means? It means that Christ actually did what He is calling us to here! Recall the words of James.

James 2:15-16, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?"

Christ's exhortation in John 13:12-15 would have been useless had not He Himself took up the posture of a slave and washed the disciples' feet! So that is what He did!

In this regard, don't miss how shocking/incredible this was! God Almighty condescended to this earth and washed the dirty feet of a devil and eleven foolish men! Amazing! It wasn't enough that:

- He stooped when He entered into our world as the babe placed in the feeding trough of an animal!
- Was raised by sinful parents who by necessity instructed Him! (Note: Think of that! Finite, ignorant beings instructing God almighty!)
- Allowed Peter to rebuke Him or the Sadducees and Pharisees to argue with Him!
- Came to His creation and yet claimed no right to be worshipped!
- Allowed Himself to be "tempted in all ways as we are yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15)!

In His coming Christ humbled Himself by washing the feet of ones were arguing as to how great they were! Brothers and sisters, that is Sacrifice!

Yet this is what Kingdom Ministry is all about! It involves self-sacrifice... unrequited love... being in need and hurting and yet giving to ones less needy or hurting and ungrateful to boot!

1 John 3:16-18, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. [How ought this to translate to life?] But whoever has the world's goods [this doesn't mean you are rich... it simply means you have worldly goods. In fact, you could be in greater need than your brother at this point, but- and this is the nature of Kingdom Service- if you...], and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but IN DEED AND TRUTH."

That is the point here! Kingdom Service involves NOT just talking or wishing, BUT ACTING- giving ourselves up for other people who again are unworthy, ungrateful, and even mean!<sup>7</sup> Washing another's feet is NOT something you do between worship services, wash your hands, and then walk away. RATHER it involves the expenditure of time, resources, and talents that another might be built up in Christ- which brings us to the final point. The sacrifice of service is focused upon the growth and edification of others.

John 13:6-11, "And so He came to Simon Peter. He [Peter] said to Him, 'Lord, do You wash my feet?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.' Peter said to Him, 'Never shall You wash my feet!' [In other words, you are NOT my servant; I am your servant!] Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.' [I love the response of Peter at this point. He genuinely loves the Lord and so if he is going to be bathed by Christ, let it be his entire body! If Christ was offering anything, Peter wanted all of it!!! And so, we read...] Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head' [In other words, everything!] Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.'"

Stuart referenced this last week as he led worship. There is a play on words here between two different kinds of washings that occurred in Christ's day. First there was the body wash that occurred not daily, but when it was deemed necessary. Daily life in the ancient Near East for most didn't involve too much dirt and grime except that which clung to the feet on account of the unpaved roads of the day. Accordingly, the second washing was the feet washing that occurred every day before meals. Again, as the posture of eating in that day was that of reclining at a table, the feet of another would be rather close to one's head. Accordingly, feet were always cleansed before a meal (most often by the person themselves).

Parallel to this, in the Kingdom of God, likewise there are two kinds of washings. First there is what is referred to as "the washing of regeneration" when a person is saved by Christ. As Jesus said, this only occurs once.

Titus 3:5-7: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior [what, practically speaking, is this washing?], that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.”

The forgiveness of sins is not in part, but in whole. Every sin — past, present, and future — is forgiven when a person enters into a saving relationship with Christ! And only those who have received this cleansing by Christ have “a part with Christ.” That is the body washing that occurs when a person is redeemed; this is something that God only does. Yet in Scripture there is another washing — the foot washing (something you and I can participate in)! We read about it in 1 John.

1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

This is NOT talking about the salvific cleansing of sin, BUT the cleansing that occurs as we daily come before God in prayer and confess the sin(s) committed since the last time we bowed before the Lord in prayer. While this is something God does (i.e., the forgiveness of sin), it nevertheless is something God has ordained for you and me to participate in.

Hebrews 3:12-13, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

Romans 15:1-2, “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.”

Colossians 3:12-13, “And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

Do you know what all these verses have in common? They all are part and parcel of the foot washing that daily is to occur in our lives! It is this that Christ was referencing when He discussed with Peter the kind of washing that he needed. And so, the service exhorted here is the service of encouragement, of bearing each other’s burdens, of fellowship and so refreshment. Dr. James Montgomery Boice describes it this way:

According to Christ’s words to Peter, the cleansing of the feet symbolized the spiritual cleansing of Christians who have, nevertheless, fallen into specific sin. So if we are to follow Christ’s example at this point, we must do as Paul admonished in writing to the Galatians: ‘Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted’ (6:1).



How do we seek to restore a brother who has fallen into some sin? How do we seek to wash the feet of such a person? We are to take the Word of God, with which we are all to cleanse our ways, and then gently, ever so gently, apply it to our brother that he might respond to it by the grace of God.

Notice the word ‘gently.’ In his commentary on these verses Harry Ironside points out that if we are going to wash another’s feet, we ought to be careful of the temperature of the water. You would not go to anyone and say, ‘Here, put your feet into this bucket of scalding water.’ Nor would you ask him to place his feet in a bucket of ice water. It is just as bad to be too hot in approaching another person as it is to be too cold and formal. Stedman points out that in trying to cleanse others, some Christians do without water at all. They try to dry-clean feet. They scrape them free of dirt and unfortunately sometimes take the skin with it. Instead of this, we who are spiritual are to approach the other person meekly and in love. (Boice 2005, 1012)

This is what the sacrifice of service is all about! May God make Bethel an army of such servants!

## References

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> There are some denominations that view foot washing as a sacrament.

<sup>2</sup> cf. John 10:11, 15, 17–18; 15:13.

<sup>3</sup> It later would be gambled for by the soldiers as it was a seamless, John 19:23-24; Ps. 22:18.

<sup>4</sup> Chuck Swindoll wrote, “When a host family invited someone to dine in their home in those days, they customarily stationed a servant by the door with basin, pitcher, and towel. As each guest arrived, the servant removed his or her sandals (1:27), rinsed each foot, and then wiped away the dirt and water with a clean towel. ¶ If anyone in the room deserved to be treated like a king, it was Jesus. If anyone was worthy of this kind of devotion, it was the Lord.” (*Insights on John*, pp. 224-225)

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris wrote, “λέντιον (only in this passage in the New Testament and not attested in earlier writings) is a loanword from the Latin *lintheum*. It denotes a long towel, so that Jesus could gird himself with it and still use the free end to dry the disciples’ feet. Cf. 1 Pet. 5:5.” (*The Gospel according to John*, NICNT, p. 547)

<sup>6</sup> Christ said it Mk. 10:43b-45, “...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even [the language here is intended to

be shocking] the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

<sup>7</sup> Again, how do we do this? Paul gave us the answer in Philippians 2:5-8, “Have this [mind]/attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” This passage involves two things: (1) The Mind of Christ- and so His worldview (as we discussed last time under the title, “The Conviction”), and (2) The Way of Christ- the way of disregarding self for the benefit of others. Paul calls us here actively to labor that this would become more and more a part of our worldview!