

The Gospel Truth

BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT
FOR THE MISSION FIELD WORLDWIDE.

WHO IS THE GREATEST?

(The following account is an illustration of what could possibly have taken place amongst the disciples. It is drawn from the following scriptural passages: Luke 22:24-27; Mark 9:33-36; Matthew 18:1-4. KJV)

As Jesus and the disciples walked down the dusty road toward Capernaum, the disciples walked slower and slower. They soon fell behind Jesus as they began to quarrel amongst themselves as they disputed “who should be the greatest” (Mark 9:34b).

They envisioned being delivered from the occupation of the Roman Empire and ruling over Israel with the Messiah as kings and princes. The disciples did not yet understand that the kingdom of God was not political but was a spiritual kingdom (Luke 17:21; Romans 14:17).

The disciples grew more contentious as they debated which of them deserved to have the most authority and

prestige in the kingdom. “Surely I should be the greatest,” said one. “I am the eldest.”

“No,” another replied. “I deserve the chief position because I have more



experience dealing with people—just look at my gray hair.”

“You are all wrong,” another declared, his voice tinged with anger. “I am the most educated and am more capable and wiser than you both.”

“Just stop it,” another declared. “I have been with Jesus the longest. I was the first to follow Him.”

Their voices grew louder in frustration as they defended their positions to be the greatest. Surely, they did not want one of the other disciples to reign over them. Amidst the arguing, another disciple quietly said with purpose and resolve, “I will be the greatest. My family is the most respected in all of Israel.”

Later, Jesus asked His disciples, “What was it that you disputed amongst yourselves by the way?” (Mark 9:33). “About what were you striving?” (Luke 22:24).

Jesus, knowing the carnality and pride of their hearts, began to teach them about true greatness. He called a child into their midst and said, “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4). “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:35b).

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WHAT THE BIBLE Teaches About...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;

Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;

Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;

1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;

1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;

Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

(Continued from page 1)

“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them....but ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:25-26).

There is no place for pride or carnal ambition amongst God’s people. In the religious world, many ministers strive to climb the ladder of prestige, power and recognition. They desire to be the greatest by having people submit and obey them. They seek to rule as lords and chiefs in congregations and over other ministers. Many professing Christians and ministers try to demand respect and power because of their age, experience, education, family or position. Christ taught and exemplified something very different than that. He showed true greatness through humility and service.

Who is the greatest? It is the person who humbles himself as a little child and the man or woman who serves the people in love and humility without pride. True greatness is not found in ruling but in having the spirit of a servant. This spirit is one which exalts not itself but seeks for the edification of others. May every child of God and minister of the gospel find the reality of true greatness.

-mws

THE GOSPEL TRUTH

The Gospel Truth periodical is published in the name of the Lord for all people of all lands in the interest of establishing and encouraging them in the truth of God’s Word. This publication teaches and promotes the truths of the Bible that have been established since the time of Christ and the apostles.

The Word of God is the singular, acceptable rule of faith. It teaches salvation and deliverance from sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ; a subsequent infilling of the Holy Spirit to lead, direct and empower; practical holiness in every area of life; and the unity and oneness of God’s people. Acceptable service to God is through a personal relationship of love founded in truth.

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Editorial



Serving the Lord with all humility of mind.... —Acts 20:19a

I thank God for the opportunity to have known saints, pillars in the church, who set an example before me of true humility and service to the Lord. We live in a self-focused, proud generation where people's goals and dreams are fueled by carnal ambitions. This is also prevalent in the religious world, where many ministers are proud and self-serving. It is an ugly thing to see professed ministers of the gospel striving for position and exaltation of man, jealous of the spiritual success of others.

On the other hand, there is nothing more beautiful than to see people serving the Lord with ALL humility of mind. What a blessing it is that in the Church of God there are people who follow the example of our Lord in humility. Where there is strife and contention, you will usually find a carnal, proud spirit at work. Humility is essential and is evidence for which to look when seeking for true ministers of the gospel.

This quarter, we have studied the ordinance of feet washing and the lessons that it teaches. It is a blessed experience to be in the midst of godly people who believe and practice this ordinance and who humble themselves, washing one another's feet. The physical act of feet washing is not appealing in the flesh, but the spiritual rewards are wonderful.

In life, there will be misunderstandings and problems that arise because of differences of personality and perspective. Humility will resolve many of the problems people have with others. It takes humility to say "I was wrong," or "I'm sorry." Even when we are right on an issue, it is paramount to be humble in spirit. When a congregation or brethren have problems, it might be a good time to have feet washing and seek God for greater humility.

Just because someone is firm in belief does not mean there is a lack of humility. Many times people in positions of leadership are accused of pride just because of the nature of the job they fill. Let us be careful that we do not attribute pride to God's people just because they may be visible in the work they are doing.

I remember years ago teaching a group of ministers about Christ's example of humility and service. They were not happy with the teaching because it contradicted their desire to have their ministries elevate them above the people. This should never be the case among true men of God. Our goal and call is to have the heart and mind of a servant and to walk in humility.

Let us seek the Lord that we would obtain and manifest in every situation the spirit of humility Jesus desired when he instituted the ordinance of feet washing.

Michael W. Smith

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more
online

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All Ye Are BRETHREN

(Matthew 23:1-12)

The Pharisees loved to be exalted and honored by man. They basked in the glory of their titles. Jesus instructed the disciples that they should not be called Rabbi, Father, or Master. Christ is the one master and God is the spiritual father in heaven.

Ministers, while filling different positions in the body of Christ, are not to be titled (Father, Master, Bishop, Reverend, etc.).

The New Testament church does not have a hierarchal ministry. Rather, there is an equality among the ministers as servants. In the words of Christ, "All ye are brethren."

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

SUBJECT: THE ORDINANCE OF FEET WASHING

Scripture Reading: *If I then your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.* —John 13:14

Summary: Jesus Christ instituted the ordinance of feet washing. All believers are commanded to follow this example. Saints of God are called to be servants. Feet washing is a physical reminder of the equality and humility that should exist in the body of Christ. (Read John 13:1-17).

I. Instituted by Christ

John 13:1-5 Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

II. Commanded by Christ

- A. Matthew 28:20 Observe all things.
- B. John 13:14 Ye ought...
 1. Ought: owe, bound, under obligation.
 2. See Luke 18:1; Acts 5:29; I John 4:11.

III. Exemplified By Christ

John 13:15 Example of Christ.

IV. Practiced in the Apostolic Church

- A. John 13:8 Fellowship with Christ.
- B. I Timothy 5:9-10 Widows.

V. Lesson of Humility

- A. John 13:16 The servant is not greater.
- B. Philippians 2:3-7 Mind of Christ.
- C. Matthew 18:1-4 Become as little children.
- D. I Peter 5: 3-5 Clothed with humility.

VI. Called to be Servants

- A. Luke 22:24-27 The chief as a servant.
- B. Galatians 5:13 Serve one another.

VII. Lesson of Equality

- A. Matthew 23:8-12 All are brethren.
- B. Galatians 3:28 One in Christ.

VIII. Blessings to the Obedient

- A. John 13:17 Happy are ye.
- B. Isaiah 1:19 Eat the good of the land.

Conclusion: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant...*

—Philippians 2:5-7



THE ORDINANCE OF FEET WASHING

Companion article for Bible Study

THE BIBLE ACCOUNT

(John 13:1-17) Rising from the table, Jesus looked around at the gathered disciples. They had just finished supper, commemorating the Passover. Jesus knew that He had just a few hours before He would offer Himself as a sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of mankind. This last supper together was a precious time in which Christ established an ordinance to reinforce one of the most important precepts of godly living.

JESUS WASHES THE FEET OF HIS DISCIPLES

With a heart of love, Jesus laid aside His mantle and girded Himself with a towel. He poured water into a basin and knelt down before His disciples. As a servant, He began to wash their feet and to wipe them with the towel. After washing one of the disciples' feet, Jesus moved to Judas. He looked on him, knowing that Judas would soon betray Him. With love and humility, Jesus knelt in front of His betrayer and began to wash his feet.

PETER FEELS UNWORTHY

As Jesus came to Peter, Peter asked, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not understand what I am doing right now, but you will know after this."

Peter, feeling unworthy for the Son of God to wash his feet, responded, "You shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered saying, "If I do not wash thee, you have no part with me."

"Then Lord," Peter said with feeling, "Wash not only my feet, but my hands and my head."

THE SYMBOLISM OF FEET WASHING

When He had finished, Jesus sat down with the disciples and began to explain the meaning and importance of what He had just done. "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. 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" (John 13:13-16).

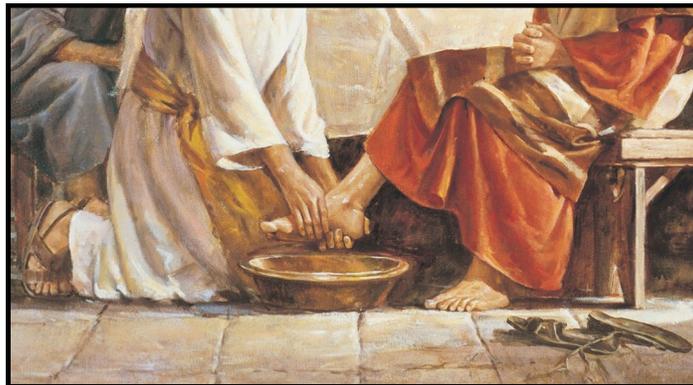
MORE THAN A CUSTOM

In Bible times, feet washing was a common practice because of the dusty conditions. It was typically the job of menial servants to wash the feet of guests. Jesus did not wash the feet of the disciples for the purpose of cleaning off the dirt. It is evident that Christ

had never done this before, as demonstrated by the incredulity of Peter. It was more than just a cultural practice Jesus was performing. He told Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). Jesus established the literal act of feet washing as an ordinance for the Church to follow—an act which has spiritual and symbolic meaning.

COMMANDED BY CHRIST

Jesus commissioned the disciples to go teach all nations, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus laid down clear instruction for His people to follow this ordinance of feet



"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

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washing. It was commanded by Christ and was not left as a discretionary practice. Jesus said, “Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.” The word “ought” in the Greek means: to owe, to be bound, or to be under obligation. “Men ought always to pray” (Luke 18:1b). “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29b). “We ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11). Clearly, God’s people are under an obligation to wash another’s feet. Furthermore, Jesus stated without ambiguity, “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

PRACTICED BY THE CHURCH

While many churches observe the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, the ordinance of feet washing is rarely practiced. Many people are unwilling to wash another’s feet and they try to excuse and justify its absence. The ordinance of feet washing was not only taught by Christ but was observed by the apostolic church. When the church was financially helping a widow, she was only qualified for assistance “if she have washed the saints’ feet” (1 Timothy 5:10). When people deny this ordinance, they are refusing to humble themselves and are in disobedience to the instruction of Christ.

AN EXAMPLE OF HUMBLE SERVICE

Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, demonstrated the humility and service required of true children of God. The Savior humbled Himself not only to the disciples who loved and followed him, but also to the disciple who betrayed him and was a hypocrite. This spirit of Christ is far different than the striving for position and recognition that is found in the religious world today. God’s people, the ministers, the apostles and leaders in the church are not greater than Christ. Hence, His example is to be followed—not as masters, lords or chiefs, but as servants (Luke 22:25-27).

THE “SPIRIT” OF FEET WASHING

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than them-



...selves....Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:3-7). It is an act of humility to wash the feet of another person. It exemplifies the spirit that saints are to have at all times. Christians are to “be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5). While the literal ordinance is not followed every day, the spirit of feet washing should ever be present in the life of a Christian.

THERE ARE BLESSINGS IN OBEDIENCE

Jesus established the ordinance of physical feet washing that His people might be reminded of the true spirit of humility, selflessness, servitude, and equality. Jesus commended a blessing on those who are obedient to follow His example in practice and in spirit. “If you know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

-mws



How often should the ordinance of feet washing be observed?

Jesus taught the disciples in John 13 that they should follow His example and do as He had done to them. Jesus gave no guidelines as to how often the ordinance should be observed. An ordinance, by its very nature, is symbolic of something spiritual. If it were observed daily, weekly, or possibly even monthly, it might begin to lose its significance and become a ritualistic practice.

Many of the saints have a special ordinance service during an annual meeting. Some congregations have a practice of washing the saints' feet around the time of year that Jesus celebrated the Passover.

Jesus washed the disciples' feet at Passover and then instituted the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, or communion. This is a time to remember His death and crucifixion. Hence, the ordinance of feet washing is often observed in the same service as partaking of the Lord's Supper. What is more important than how often it is observed is that it IS observed.

Is it appropriate for men and women to wash each other's feet?

The scripture records an instance in Luke 7:37-39 where a woman washed the feet of Jesus with her tears. While criticized by the self-righteous, this was a special act of worship and honor to the Lord Jesus. This was not a precedent-setting event for a general ordinance service.

There is a respect and barrier that belongs between men and women which is not wise to break down under the pretense of a spiritual act of worship in a formal, organized observation of the feet-washing ordinance. There are some cultures where it is customary for the wom-

cently and in order." In keeping with the spirit of modesty and propriety, this scripture has relevance. It is right and appropriate for men and women to separate for this ordinance and for the men to wash the men's feet and for the women to wash the women's feet.

In a feet-washing ordinance service, should each person wash the feet of everyone present?

In setting an example, Jesus washed the feet of all his disciples. He then told them to "wash one another's feet" (John 13:14b). It would be nigh impossible for one person to wash everyone's feet in a large group. The importance was placed on the physical and spiritual act of humility in



an of the house to wash the feet of an honored guest in the presence of the household. This is a custom that is more similar to the incident that Christ experienced. This cultural custom is likewise not the same as the general observance of the saint's feet washing.

While not specifically addressing this issue, 1 Corinthians 14:40 states, "Let all things be done de-

kneeling down and washing someone's feet.

If one person washes the feet of someone else, and that person washes a different person's feet, when all have done this, everyone will have washed and been washed. Hence, they have "washed one another's feet."

-mws



DID YOU KNOW?

Evidence suggests there have been Christians who practiced the ordinance of feet washing throughout history. Augustine (A.D. 400) endorsed the literal ritual. The custom gained popularity in southern Europe between the fourth and seventh centuries. The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were committed to this doctrine.

Feet washing was even practiced among many Baptist churches in the United States up to the close of the nineteenth century. As a boy, Abraham Lincoln prepared the water and basins for this ordinance in a Baptist church in southern Indiana.

[Brown, Charles E. (1947). *The Apostolic Church*.]



**A Word
In Season**

Servant of Christ

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HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. —Romans 1:1

True ministers are called and ordained of God. They are chosen to spread the gospel and to speak as the spirit gives utterance. Paul identified himself "as a servant of Jesus Christ." He was acknowledging Christ as his Master and Lord. He assumed no authority of his own but labored and spoke as a servant doing the will of the master.

When a servant humbly follows instruction, the results of labor are credited to the master. When God blesses and anoints the efforts of a minister in His kingdom, the glory and honor all goes to the Lord. A godly minister should never be exalted in his own ability or works, for all are but servants.

Sometimes ministers feel discouraged when their labor seemingly does not bring forth much fruit. There are times in which prayers go unanswered. Ministers can carry this burden and can be pressed down because of their own inability to cause people and situations to change. Be of good courage and remember that you are just the servant. It is God's power and God's will that brings results in His time and in His way. Stay submitted, obedient, and faithful as a servant and leave the results to the Lord. Lift up thy head and humbly fulfill God's purpose as a servant of Jesus Christ.



—mws