

# Footwashing

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We are coming up on the Passover, and most if not all of us will likely participate in the memorial service Jesus created at His last supper. An integral part of that service is found in John 13, and I would like to elaborate on that today:

(John 13:3-5 NKJV) "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, (4) rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. (5) After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded."

Jesus' intention was to wash the feet of all the disciples, including Judas, and I'm sure He succeeded, but not without some difficulty.

(John 13:6-11 NKJV) "Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* 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 know after this." (8) Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

Why did Jesus say that? Was it only because it would mess up His footwashing example if Peter didn't cooperate? I think there was a far more important message He was conveying. Peter, as he had a tendency to do, overreacted.

(9) Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!" (10) Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." (11) For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."

Verse 11 shows he is talking about spiritual cleanness, not physical. This was more than just being a servant trying to get dirt off of their feet. Jesus considered it very important that Peter and the others be clean. What did He mean by this? What kind of cleansing was taking place?

The concept of being clean in a ritual, ceremonial way goes back to the Old Testament tabernacle service where God provided a laver for the priests to wash before participating in their service. Being clean was so important for the Passover that special instructions were given in Numbers 9 for those who had been defiled by a dead body, and they were permitted to keep the Passover in the second month.

(2 Chronicles 30:17-20 NKJV) "For *there were* many in the congregation who had not **sanctified** themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover *lambs* for everyone *who was* not **clean**, to sanctify *them* to the LORD. (18) For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not **cleansed** themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD provide atonement for everyone (19) *who* prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though *he is* not **cleansed** according to the purification of the sanctuary." (20) And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and **healed** the people." Why didn't they just keep the second Passover? This WAS the second Passover (v15).

Why do we need to be washed now, when this ceremonial system is not in place? Even in the Old Testament, this cleansing was symbolic. It that is still the case now.

(Acts 22:16 NKJV) "'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and **wash** away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'"

(1 Chronicles 6:9-11 NKJV) "Do you not know that the **unrighteous** will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, (10) nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you. But you were **washed**, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

(Eph 5:25-27 NKJV) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, (26) that He might sanctify and **cleanse** it with the **washing** of water by the **word**, (27) 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.

We are to avoid uncleanness. This is an ongoing process. It is not something that only took place at baptism:

(2 Chronicles 6:16-18 NKJV) "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and **walk** among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (17) Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is **unclean**, and I will receive you." (18) "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.'" (quotes from OT)

(2 Chronicles 7:1 NKJV) Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse** ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Jesus has washed us, and continues to do so to make us holy and without blemish. This is one of the lessons of the footwashing service.

But why feet?

(Leviticus 18:3-4 NKJV) 'According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you **walk** in their ordinances. (4) 'You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to **walk** in them: I *am* the LORD your God.

Walk: Used over 200 times in the Bible. 80-90% of the time, it is not used to refer to the physical act of moving from one place to another. 80-90% of the time it is used symbolically for the way someone lives his life.

(Psalm 119:1-16 NKJV) "Blessed *are* the **undefiled** in the way, Who **walk** in the law of the LORD! (2) Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart! (3) They also do no iniquity; They **walk** in His ways. (4) You have commanded *us* To keep Your precepts diligently. (5) Oh, that my ways were directed To keep Your statutes! (6) Then I would not be ashamed, When I look into all Your commandments. (7) I will praise You with uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments. (8) I will keep Your statutes; Oh, do not forsake me utterly! (9) How can a young man **cleanse** his way? By taking heed according to Your **word**. (10) With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not **wander** from Your commandments! (11) Your **word** I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. (12) Blessed *are* You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes. (13) With my lips I have declared All the judgments of Your mouth. (14) I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As *much as* in all riches. (15) I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. (16) I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your **word**."

(Psalm 119:101-105 NKJV) "I have restrained my **feet** from every evil way, That I may keep Your **word**. (102) I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. (103) How sweet are Your words to my taste, *sweeter* than honey to my mouth! (104) Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. (105) Your **word** *is* a lamp to my **feet** And a light to my **path**."

(1 John 1:6-10 NKJV) If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and **walk** in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (7) But if we **walk** in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses** us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

(Ephesians 4:17-24 NKJV) "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer **walk** as the rest of the Gentiles **walk**, in the futility of their mind, (18) having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; (19) who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all **uncleanness** with greediness. (20) But you have not so learned Christ, (21) if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: (22) that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, (23) and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, (24) and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness."

(Ephesians 4:25-28 NKJV) "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (26) "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, (27) nor give place to the devil. (28) Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him **labor**, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have **something to give him who has need.**"

(Ephesians 4:29-32 NKJV) "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (31) Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (32) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you."

(Ephesians 5:1-5 NKJV) "Therefore be followers of God as dear children. (2) And **walk** in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (3) But fornication and all **uncleanness** or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; (4) neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. (5) For this you know, that no fornicator, **unclean** person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

We should all be making strides toward perfection. If we examine ourselves, as we are instructed to do especially before the Passover, and find that we have not made progress, and are still doing the same things we were doing wrong last year, we are in a sad state indeed. Nevertheless, I suspect we have all fallen short to some extent. "If we think we have not sinned, we are kidding ourselves." John says "We are to walk in the light, not the darkness" (v.6,7).

We, of course, do not have the power to make our brother spiritually clean. Only Jesus can do that. But the entire New Testament Passover service is symbolic, and the footwashing and the idea of being clean is no exception. When you are sitting there having your feet washed, are you merely thinking about the humble servant at your feet, honoring you with his service. Or are you thinking about the fact that you still do mess up, and Jesus Himself has to do what this servant is symbolically doing for you. And if He didn't you would have no part with Him. We make mistakes, and Jesus needs to wash our feet because we have stepped in something we shouldn't have.

(John 13:12-17 NKJV) "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? (13) "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. (14) "If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. (16) "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. (17) "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them."

Did He really mean happy are you if you wash feet at the Passover service? No, He meant happy are you if you carry out in your lives what is being symbolized by this service. And that includes helping each other in our walk and overcoming. When we wash our brother's feet, we are symbolically acting in the role of Jesus. And isn't that in a sense what the role of the Church is?

(1 John 1:3 NKJV) "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have **fellowship** with **us**; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

When we gather together for fellowship, we often ask God to be among us, and we hope that He is. And we hope that His word will be preached, and He will be with us in that way. But I think there is something deeper here. We are supposed to have the Father and Son dwelling in us. To the extent that is the case, when we fellowship with each other, we are fellowshipping with the Father and Son. And it is often through each other that the Father teaches us and corrects us.

(Hebrews 10:22-25 NKJV) "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies **washed** with pure water. (23) Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. (24) And let us consider one another in order to **stir** up love and good works, (25) not forsaking the **assembling** of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but **exhorting one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

(Galatians 5:24-26 NKJV) And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (25) If we live in the Spirit, let us also **walk** in the Spirit. (26) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal 6:1-2 NKJV) "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you *who are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

(Leviticus 19:17-18 NKJV) "'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. (18) 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD."

(James 5:9 NKJV) "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!"

(James 5:16-20 NKJV) "**Confess** *your* trespasses to one another, and **pray** for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent **prayer** of a righteous man avails much.... (19) Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, (20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."

(Romans 15:1-2 NKJV) "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (2) Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification."

We read the end of Ephesians 4 earlier. Let's go back and read the beginning:

(Ephesians 4:1-3 NKJV) "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a **walk** worthy of the calling with which you were called, (2) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

(Ephesians 4:11-16 NKJV) "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (13) till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, (15) but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ; (16) from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

Then let's read again verse 31-32:

(31) Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (32) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you."

Because perhaps the most important way in which we serve others harkens back to our baptism, when we were "washed" as Jesus said--when Jesus sacrifice was used to cleanse and forgive us of our sins. We cannot atone for the sins of our brother. Jesus did that through His death, and at our baptism that atoning sacrifice was used to pardon our sins. We often say that our sins are forgiven by God, but we mean that in the sense of pardon, and it takes place not just at baptism but whenever necessary upon repentance following additional sins. But although we cannot pardon our brother's sins, we can and must forgive others for their sins against us.

(Matthew 6:12-15 NKJV) "And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.... (14) "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

(Matthew 5:23-24 NKJV) ""Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your **brother has something against you**, (24) "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

(Mark 11:25, 26, KJV) "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if **ye have ought against any**: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

(Colossians 3:12, 13, KJV) "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and **forgiving one another**, if any man have a quarrel against any: **even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.**"

(Luke 6:35-37, KJV) "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: **forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.**"

What happens if you don't like our brother? Well, that isn't an excuse. After all, Jesus washed Judas' feet, knowing perfectly well what he was about to do.

So as you are having your feet washed, remember that your sins cut you off from God. If we do not wash regularly (in His Word, repenting of your sins), we have no part with Christ, and having our feet washed is a symbol of the need to be washed in preparation for the remainder of this meaningful service. Our partner in the service is taking care of this vital need. He is acting in the role of Jesus Christ, to symbolically wash us of our sins. We need each other. As Jesus said, we need to be washing one another's feet—and we need to do it throughout the year.

The footwashing service is deeply symbolic. We need to recognize our need to serve one another, in humility and even at great sacrifice. We need to wash the feet of our brethren. But we also need to recognize that being cleansed, being forgiven by our Father and Jesus Christ, and forgiving and helping one another is equally if not more important. We need to have our feet washed, by Christ and our brother.