

WHY DON'T YOU WASH FEET?

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Sometimes we are asked, "Why don't you wash feet?"

Who says we don't? Our members are not obligated to report to the congregation on the good deeds we have done since last we assembled. We don't know how many of our fellow disciples fed beggars, changed a tire for a stranded motorist, picked up hitchhikers, or otherwise loved their neighbors as themselves. If not even the left hand should know what the right hand is doing with regard to alms (Matthew 6:3-4), then, certainly, the church does not need members to boast about doing good.

"He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14). The kind of self-righteousness whereby folks would brag about their deeds is just not welcome here. It is contrary to the gospel.

Those who inquire about this practice don't usually have in mind private acts of charity, but rather ceremonies that take place in church. Again, aside from self-righteous aggrandizement, what possible motive could we have for spotlighting ourselves kneeling down and washing feet? Jesus rebuked those who would sound a trumpet when giving alms *"that they may have glory from men"* (Matthew 6:2), who would pray at the street corners *"that they may be seen by men"* (5), or who would *"appear to men to be fasting"* (16). Humility isn't humble if we have to show it off.

Humility is 100% the point Christ was teaching when He washed the feet of His disciples. He said, *"You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is*

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he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:13-17). Jesus very deliberately set an example He expects His disciples to follow. The example has less to do with foot washing, specifically, than it does lowly service of any sort performed by the humble regardless of their status.

Foot washing, as such, was relevant to that time and place. Walking was the primary mode of transportation. Few roads were paved. Most people were wearing open-toed footwear. Showering was not a likely option and full-body bathing was not an everyday occurrence. The combination of these factors resulted in people having dirty feet on a daily basis. In civilized houses, where hospitality was a matter of honor, servants would be employed to kneel down and bathe the feet of guests. Instead of leaving this necessary but unpleasant task to "the help," as would be expected and not at all inappropriate, Jesus of Nazareth *"laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself... poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded"* (John 13:4-5). Doing so, he proved in action a principle He had already set forth: *"Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve"* (Mark 10:43-45).

Foot washing itself is not particularly relevant in the twenty-first century, at least not in this country. Walking is merely a secondary means of travel. Pavement is abundant. Those who choose to walk far usually have shoes or boots, rather than sandals. And most folks can take a shower whenever they want. There's simply little to no need for foot washing. Because of that, most people would feel very self-conscious and uncomfortable if anyone washed their feet, whether that person was a humble household servant or the Lord and Master. It would not be an act of service, but a moment of intense awkwardness. Yes, Peter's reaction to Jesus washing His feet was initial discomfort (John 13:6), but not because he was unaccustomed to having his feet washed; it was because of who was doing it. And that is the very point; in the kingdom of Christ, the Master Himself does the dirty jobs, so none of His servants can claim to be above manual labor, hard work, stinky chores, or inconvenient errands.

If we need to scrub toilets, muck pigpens, change the dressing on a wound, burn weeds, change diapers, go out of our way to give a ride to someone, or otherwise be inconvenienced in order to help someone in need, then that is our foot washing. Forget the ceremony.

**"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"**

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard

Belén, New Mexico

Seekers Welcome.

Members Expected.

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS..."**

RESTORE SUCH A ONE"

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS

LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN

SETTINGS OF SILVER"

PROVERBS 25:11

"I have found that trying to become more like Jesus yields far better results than trying to become a better me."

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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"GREET NO ONE"

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Jesus appointed seventy disciples and sent them in pairs to the cities. He Himself would soon visit so that they could perform wonders and preach the kingdom (Luke 10:1-12). He gave them specific instructions for this ministry, even detailing their provisions, and included this: "Greet no one along the road" (4).

Greetings between brethren are commanded or exemplified about fifty times in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 16:3-23), so to prohibit greetings certainly contradicts the norm. There must, therefore, be an important reason the Lord had for telling His disciples to refrain from usual behavior in this regard.

Essentially, they would be much too occupied with the work of the gospel to be bothered with such pleasantries. They had an imperative: "Go your way" (Luke 10:3), "and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (9). They were not to pack anything at all for the journey (4), but get on the road with all due haste. Frivolous greetings were not warranted.

With instantaneous, worldwide, cost-free communication via the internet, one small church might receive dozens of messages per day, even hundreds per week, possibly more. If preachers and elders took the time to respond to a fraction of these missives, they would not be able to accomplish anything else. Prioritization requires setting aside what may seem polite to focus on the better work of preaching.

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