

I recently received a question from one of our members asking if the example of foot-washing as found in John 13 was something that Jesus commanded the church to do today. I would like to answer that question, but first let me take a couple of lines to make one thing very clear. What I will present in this article will be backed by scripture. What I present in this article is not my opinion or my interpretation of what the scriptures tell us. It is simply my job as a Christian and minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ to present the truth of God's Word in the same loving way Paul did as he spread the gospel abroad. I in no way am comparing myself to Paul, however, his God directed method of spreading the truth of the gospel can never be questioned.

On to the question at hand—"Is foot washing, as Jesus gave the example in John 13:3-11, something we are commanded to do today in the church and if not by doing are we in error?" I make this one last plea before beginning this article: PLEASE READ THE SCRIPTURES MENTIONED AND DO NOT JUST TAKE ANOTHER MAN'S WORD FOR WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY. That being said, let's travel together to John 13:8. In this verse, Peter had told Jesus for a second time he would not allow Him to wash his feet. Notice here it is both feet being washed—not just one. The Greek sentence here reads as this, "*meenipseis mou podas eis ton aioona*", which is to say, "You shall by no means wash my feet so long as the world stands." The statement is a double negative of denial and the extent of it is "unto the ages" (The Gospel According to John written by Guy N. Woods). If Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet he would have no part with the Lord in His work or His kingdom. Again, John makes clear that the Lord's purpose here was to teach the disciples humility and submission of will. To assume, as some religious bodies do today, that Jesus made the act of feet washing a rite or a ceremony to be done and performed in the church throughout the ages is to miss the lesson Jesus intended. It was intended to symbolize for all future generations humility of spirit and the necessity that when one is truly a servant of God even the most menial acts of Christian service must not be neglected. It was never used as a church ordinance in the New Testament. It should be noticed here that the washing involved far more than the removal of dirt and grime from Peter's feet. It included Jesus cleaning his soul of the pride that had controlled his early life. The significance is seen in Peter's next statement in verse 9, "...not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

Dear reader we cannot just read parts of the scriptures and make them church ordinance and leaves others out. In John 13: 12-20, Jesus explains His actions. Once again I plead with you to read these scriptures as space does not allow me to print them here. Jesus explains that if someone occupied the high position that was the Lord's but humbled themselves to perform the lowly task of washing the disciples feet, then the disciples should be willing to wash one another's feet—the symbol of any humble act of service. Instead of seeking for places of preeminence they should follow the example of their Lord in serving others. Yes, we understand that, but what does verse 15 mean? It reads, "For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you."

An example of what? To wash feet indiscriminately and to make this a church ordinance? We must remember that it was the act itself the Lord authorized but the principle embodied in the act. It would no different then saying since Jesus preached from a boat that we too must preach from a boat in order present the gospel message. It is no different than when Jesus preached that there was no such thing as a "church building" and that if we do not preach outside then the fullness of the gospel cannot be taught. Jesus taught the disciples to possess and let it be evident in their lives that love for others which leads to service in any area of activity no matter how humble was needed to be an example of Christ. Those who have created a church ordinance out of this engage in something not intended by the Lord. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples—both feet—and He washed them because they were dirty. His actions were humble and necessary. To wash but one foot, as most groups have adopted as a religious rite, and to wash this foot after it has been meticulously cleaned at home (No one wants to wash a stinky one do they?) should be considered a counterfeit of the Lord's actions. We must be careful we do not empty the examples left for us by our Savior of their real and intended meaning and substitute rituals and ceremonies in their place.

I pray this article has shed some light on the question at hand. Even though one may not be a member of the churches of Christ and attend some denominational institution, we do share a belief in God and Jesus. One needs only to understand the love in Aquilla and Priscilla took Apollos aside a taught him more correctly the Word of God. May you walk with God and allow His Word to guide you daily.