



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 13:1-17

“The New Commandment in Symbol”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are turning for our Scripture reading this morning to John chapter 13 and reading verse 1 through verse 17. This is, as you know, the beginning of the Upper Room Discourse. And in verse 1 of John chapter 13 the apostle writes,

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, (now there is a textual problem here in that some of the manuscripts have, ‘And supper being in process,’ or literally coming to be, and then there is some support for the reading supper having come to be or supper being ended. That latter reading, incidentally, could be something like supper having been served. At any rate, evidently, the supper is in process rather than being ended.) And supper being in process, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? (In this section there's a great deal of stress on these pronouns and one can only, in English, indicate it by

rising intonation of the voice.) Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do now, (or,) what I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet, (it's a very strong statement. So Peter blurts it out, "Thou shalt never wash my feet,") Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed, (now this word, unfortunately, is rendered in the identical way that the following word, 'Wash his feet,' and that's unfortunate in the New American Standard Bible. I'm sure it must be changed, but it is the word that means, 'To bathe all over.' And the word that follows is a word that means, 'To wash the parts of the body,' so we can render it 'bathed'.) Jesus saith to him, He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, (as they say in West Texas, warsh [Laughter], but wash,) He that bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, (just wanted to see if you were awake [Laughter,]) but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? 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. (Does this mean, perhaps, that our Lord intends for us to have a third ordinance, the ordinance of the washing of the feet or foot washing? It is practiced in some communions.) 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. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together a moment in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father, we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ and we give Thee thanks for the marvelous position into which Thou hast brought us. Through the Lord Jesus Christ Thou hast made us clean and every whit clean. And we give Thee thanks for the blood

by which we have been cleansed, the blood of the sacrifice at Calvary. We rejoice, Lord, in the fact that we have been made accepted in the beloved one. Not, of course, by our own merits but according to Thy good pleasure and through the merits of our representative substitute the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are grateful to Thee and today again Lord, on this the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, we give Thee thanks. We thank Thee for the privilege that is ours to know Thee, to know the forgiveness of our sins, and to know the present companionship of the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. We bring to Thee, Lord, the concerns of those who are gathered here and of our many friends who have asked us to remember them in our calendar of concern and we pray for them. And we would particularly remember some who are in the hospital. We ask Lord that Thou alt give, if it should please Thee, healing and restoration to health and minister to those who are their loved ones and supply all of the needs that exist. We pray for others who have difficulties and trials through which they must pass and we remember them.

And through this week Lord we ask that Thou alt be with us and enable each one of us to give a testimony to the grace by which Thou hast saved us. We are grateful to Thee. And then Lord, we ask too for Thy blessing upon this entire church, upon its elders and deacons, upon its ministries over the radio and also through the publications ministry and the Bible classes, and other forms of ministries that proceed out of Believers Chapel as a source. Oh God, may there be the sense of Thy blessing upon us as we seek to make him known. We pray for our country, for our President, for others associated with him. Guide and direct this nation and give us the continued opportunity to preach the gospel freely here. We commit our service to Thee and the service this evening to Thee. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] We're turning to John chapter 13, verse 1 through verse 17 for our passage that we are to look at in the morning ministry. And our subject is “The New Commandment in Symbol.”

John’s gospel is regarded by many as a paragon of the gospels, marked particularly by spirituality. The early church regarded it as the spiritual gospel. Clement of Alexandria in the 3rd Century said with reference to this gospel that it represents John as moved by the entreaty of his intimate friends and inspired by the Spirit to compose a spiritual gospel. Now one wonders why this is called a spiritual gospel in the light of the fact that the Synoptics are surely spiritual gospels. But perhaps it is a reference to this Upper Room Discourse which we are beginning in the study this morning because it is something that is not contained in the Synoptics and represents four chapters of truly spiritual communication from the Lord to the apostles, climaxed by the great high priestly prayer in chapter 17. So perhaps Clement’s words are suggestive of John 13 through 17 and the spiritual teaching that is found there.

When we come to the Upper Room Discourse, we must remember carefully where we are in the gospel because it will help in the purpose that John had in writing these chapters or describing what happened to them. And especially it will describe our Lord’s purpose in giving the disciples at this time this discourse. Remember in John chapter 12 we reached something of a climax. The seven magnificent signs which John has described in the first chapters of the book are now finished and in chapter 12 he has given us something of a report of the response of those who heard our Lord to his ministry. And in verse 37 of chapter 12 he has just written, “But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him.”

So the vast mass of the people of Israel did not respond to the miraculous ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The revelation that he has given is complete. His signs have been performed, Israel had all of the opportunity in the world to recognize him as the promised Messiah. These signs were designed to point him out as the Messiah. But they have reacted largely in a negative way. Of course there are some who have responded by the grace of God. These are the ones that the Holy Spirit, through the Father, have brought to the Son. Remember in John chapter 6 we read, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me, draw him.” And so the Father through the Spirit has drawn the apostles to the Lord Jesus and some others as well.

So a little company of people, almost a little flock, that’s what they are called by the Lord Jesus in one spot. A little flock has responded but the vast number of people have not responded. “He came unto his own and his own received him not,” John said in the 1st chapter, “but as many has received him to them gave ye power to become the children of God.” Well now the Lord Jesus is going to suffer and then to leave them for a lengthy period of time, it has stretched out to over nineteen hundred years. And so desirous of preparing them for the time when he would not be physically present with them and incidentally preparing us too for the fact that he will not be with us in physical form, he gives them the Upper Room Discourse. They needed preparation for the future and this is a magnificent preparation. It’s not surprising that a great deal of time is spent on this. If a great task is to be accomplished it usually requires preparation.

Men who ascend Mount Everest spend not days and weeks in preparation but literally months and sometimes years in preparation for the ascent of that great peak. The Englishman Dr. Roger Bannister trained not for weeks and months before he ran the first four minute mile but literally for years, enlarging his lungs, strengthening his legs and other parts of his body physically so that he might run the first four minute mile, which he did.

So here the Lord Jesus is spending a great deal of time preparing the apostles for the time when he will not be there. And he gives them in the midst of this preparation a startlingly revolutionary promise. While he is going away he is going to send them the Spirit and through the Spirit he will be with them forever. Now that is magnificent. Sometimes we are inclined to think, “Oh if we had just seen the Lord Jesus Christ physically, if we just had the opportunity to be there with him, then it wouldn’t be so difficult to believe in him when he is not here.” And one senses as one reads through these chapters that the Lord Jesus is trying to answer that kind of objection. He’s trying to say really the apostles did not have any advantage over you. In fact, you have an advantage over them because he was only with them when he was physically present with them. “It’s expedient for you,” he said, “that I go away. For if I go away I’m going to send the Spirit to you and he will not be just with you as I have been with you, only temporarily while I am bodily in your presence,

but he will be with you for twenty-four hours out of every day. And furthermore, he will be with every one of you twenty-four hours out of every day.” So really, the coming of the Spirit means that we are, to use this old English expression here, no whit behind the apostles. What a magnificent thing it is to realize that you and I in 1983 in Dallas, Texas may live in a relationship with the Lord Jesus that is more intimate and permanent than the apostles who lived with him in the days when he was in the flesh. That is what is put before us potentially as ours through the coming of the Spirit.

I always, I must confess, look forward to the study of the Upper Room Discourse with a great deal of anticipation. Many years ago at Theological Seminary I organized a course originally in the Upper Room Discourse and taught it for a number of years, and then just a couple of years ago taught it again at Grace Theological Seminary, a study of these five chapters, 13 through 17, from the original text. And I have discovered through the years that every time I come to these chapters I learn something fresh. And so I look forward to the study of the Upper Room Discourse.

I can remember in September of 1950 sitting in the chapel hours at Dallas Seminary as Dr. Chafer taught the entering class. And hearing him say as he turned to John chapter 16 and expounded the ministry of the Holy Spirit there that in the Upper Room Discourse we have the purest Christian teaching that we have anywhere in the New Testament. Oh well, some scholars might want to debate that particular comment but it's obvious that what we do have here is something that is of a different flavor from the Synoptics. After all, remember John is writing now sixty years or so after the time of the coming of our Lord and he's reflecting on things that he's reflected on for decades after our Lord has gone. And he's looking at it from the standpoint of, say, 90 to 100 AD, many years afterwards. So it's not surprising that he should pick out the things that have special reference to the age in which he is now living.

Dr. Chafer also said, “This is the seed plot of all the grace teaching of the New Testament and in germ form, every essential of the doctrine of the New Testament is found here.” Well maybe not every one but a great part of New Testament doctrine is suggested by these words of the Upper Room Discourse. Now John tells us in the 1st verse the historical situation in which our Lord has

given us this discourse. And this 1st verse of John chapter 13 is a kind of introduction. It really is a title verse to the whole discourse, “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” Now just a couple of things to notice there before we pass on, but notice the occurrence of the word love, now we’ve had love a few times in the opening twelve chapters but the prominent words up to this point have been life and light. But now in the Upper Room Discourse, turning to consider particularly the ministry that he has with reference to the believers, love becomes one of the key words. In fact, in chapter 13 or 14 one of these chapters, it’s escaped my mind for the moment, the word love occurs about thirty-seven times and so I think it occurs just a half a dozen or so times previously but now the key word becomes love because he’s speaking about the eternal love that he has for his own.

It is true that that the Lord Jesus loves the world. The Father has a benevolent attitude toward the world. He can be said to love the world. He has provided for the world in remarkable ways but so far as redemptive love is concerned that expression of his eternal infinite nature, the kind of love that wants, it sets itself upon an individual, never ceases. That’s the love that is referred to here so prominently. Now that kind of love is the kind of love that he has for all believers. “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. Jacob have I loved, Jacob have I loved eternally,” for remember, our God is an infinite God and an eternal God. And so whenever he loves it’s an eternal love. That’s why if he sets his love upon someone, that love can never be lost. That is why we believe that the saints will preserve because they are loved by an infinite God with an infinite love.

“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” Now this expression if it is a kind of title description for the Upper Room Discourse is a reference to the fact that his love stretched on and includes the cross when he shed his blood and when he rose again from the dead to the right hand of the Father to carry out all of his distinctive promises. “His own,” notice that expression, “His own.” We are his own, we are his own because we have been bought with a price and isn’t it striking that he should give himself to his own? Now, “He loved them unto

the end.” I don’t know exactly how to render that expression, “Unto the end,” because it can be rendered in two ways. It can be rendered “completely” or it can be temporal “unto the end”. He loved them completely. Or as someone has suggested, he gave them the perfect love token, he loved them completely. And that is, of course, ultimately a reference to the cross.

Now it’s interesting that it is possible that previous to this particular event described here if we can believe the context that Luke seems to set this Upper Room Discourse, the disciples had been engaged in a little bit of discussion with one another over who should be first in the kingdom and who would sit on his right-hand and who would sit on his left-hand and they had been debating this. In other words, they’d gotten into quite an argument over who was going to be first. And so when the time came for the supper they had come in with ruffled tempers as someone has said, they had trooped into the Upper Room like a set of sulky schoolboys. So that’s the tone, that’s the disposition of the apostles as they sit down to observe the Passover feast. It’s staggering to remember if that is the background that the Lord Jesus at this point rises and lays aside his garments, takes a towel, girds himself, pours water into a basin, began to wash his disciples’ feet like a lowly slave. Evidently they had rushed into the meeting and had forgotten that they were to wash their feet before they came in and so the Lord Jesus assumes the place of the servant who usually carried that out.

Well if that’s the background there is some question about it. It certainly lends a great deal of interest to the account. John writes, “And supper being in progress, or having been served, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him,” I’m going to reserve comment on that for the latter part of this chapter because there Judas become a rather prominent character and we’ll talk about the significance of that verse at that point. “Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he was come from God and went to God,” think of that. Knowing all of this, knowing that everything is given into his hands, knowing that he has come from God in the incarnation of the second person of the divine Trinity, and knowing that he would die and that he would be resurrected and that he would ascend to the right-

hand of the Father, knowing this tremendously great place that he as the representative has, even though he is who he is, this magnificently divine savior, he takes the servant's place. He rises from the supper and he lays aside his garments. He takes a towel like a slave, girds himself. Pours water into the basin, gets down upon his knees, and begins to wash the disciples' feet. And then to wipe them with a towel where with he was girded. Magnificent lowliness of the divine greatness.

Of course, it's an active parable; it's an acted parable of the past and future ministry, as if he were a prophet performing a visible illustration of what he wants to say to them. Our teachers who teach children like to use visual aids and then our adults who teach adults use visual aids, transparencies, overhead projectors. Prophets often carried out their ministry by performing some particular task and they would perform some physical task and then they would say to those to whom they were ministering, “Do you understand what I have done?” It's just a way of making the truth that they were proclaiming clear. And so the Lord Jesus here is acting like a prophet and his opening words in verse 3 suggest that he's the sovereign, supreme savior who is on his way to God but nevertheless he does this. And in verse 12 he will say, “Do you know what I have done to you?” That indicates that he's acting as a prophet and has given them an illustration. So he desires for them to understand the spiritual significance of what he's doing. And I would like to just suggest to you without any sense of absolute certainty that my interpretation is correct, I'd like to suggest to you that when he laid aside his garments that that was a figure of his death that would transpire shortly. In fact, that very word that is used there to describe that act is the word that he had used previously in John chapter 10 and verse 15 to describe his death. “As the Father knoweth me, even so I know the Father, and I laid down my life for the sheep.” And so here he riseth from the supper and he lays down his garments.

And then he takes the towel and he washes the disciples' feet and so I would suggest to you that he is visibly representing his death and that the washing that follows represents his present ministry of ministering to those for whom he has already died. At the right-hand of the father at the present time as the great high priest he ministers to those for whom he has died. He has offered the

sacrifice for them and now in order to be sure that that sacrifice is effectual for all those for whom he died, he lives in heaven as great high priest to minister the benefits of that death that he died on Calvary's cross.

In John chapter 17 he will say, “I don't pray for the world, I pray for those who believe on me.” So it's a high priestly ministry for those who are his own, beautifully represented in this marvelous little visual illustration. Now the action is described very briefly by John. It's interesting, it's almost as if it were done as a piece of poetry, seven features are mentioned. He rises from the supper, he lays aside his garments, he takes a towel, he girds himself, he pours water in a basin, he begins to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with a towel wherewith he is girded.

Many have noticed the similarity between this passage and Paul's statement of our Lord's self-humbling in Philippians chapter 2 where the apostle writes, “Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” And then in the description that follows again, seven particulars are brought out. He made himself of no reputation or he emptied himself. He took upon him the form of a servant, such as our Lord did in the Upper Room Discourse. He was made in the likeness of men. He was found in fashion as a man. He humbled himself as our Lord did there to wash the disciples' feet. He was obedient unto death, even the death of a cross.

So I'd just like to suggest that this action here represents the prophecy of verse 4 pointing to the work of salvation and the work of purification which the Lord is going to accomplish in the immediate future. Now we learn a great deal by the blunders of the apostles and particularly Peter. And I'd like to be sure to comment afterwards that we learn a great deal from Peter but we must remember that Peter was an apostle who was characterized by an intense devotion to the Lord. There was no question about his fundamental love of the Lord.

And that's something good for us to remember in a local church. There are some people who commit the same kind of blunders that Peter did, only they commit them in the local church. But frequently the blunders that are committed in the local church do arise from a basic commitment to the Lord. It's good for us to remember that. But now Peter, he doesn't understand everything

that’s transpiring. Remember, Jesus will say in a few moments after this, “I have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now.” When he, the spirit of truth, has come he will guide you into all truth. But at the moment Peter doesn’t understand, he doesn’t have the benefit of the presence of the Holy Spirit in illumination, but fundamentally there is a conviction that he wants to serve Jesus Christ and do his will. Of course he’d like to sit on the right-hand, but nevertheless, he wants to please the Lord.

Now he is thoroughly convicted evidently and is startled by what Jesus has done. There’s a silence so far as we can tell as Jesus carries out this ministry to them. And so when he finally comes to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Lord, are you washing my feet?” He senses that there’s something exceedingly perverse about this that the holy Son of God should wash him, Peter, unholy Peter, wash his feet. And Jesus said to him, “What I’m doing, you don’t know now but you shall know hereafter.” Peter still doesn’t understand so he blurts out in a very, very strong fashion, in fact the strongest way to say something by way of prohibition, “Lord, Thou shalt never wash my feet.” Can you not see Peter? “You’ll never wash my feet.” Jesus said to him, “Shut up Peter,” [Laughter] now that’s, I think, what I would have said. “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Ah, well, if having a part with Jesus means washing, “Then Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head.” Oh, you can learn a great deal from Peter. One moment he’s a perfectionist, the next moment he’s an Arminian [Laughter] and which is worse, well, you make the decision.

Now I want you to notice that he’s first of all a perfectionist. The Lord Jesus said, “Peter, what I’m doing now you don’t know, but you shall know here after,” and Peter says, “You shall never wash my feet.” It’s almost as if he were saying — of course he doesn’t understand this — but it’s as if he were saying, “I’ve been bathed all over and I don’t need any foot washing.” Well now, we know that when we’ve received the washing of regeneration that we do continue to commit sin. We do need daily cleansing from our sins. We are defiled and we positively sin. And so we do need something to cleanse us from our daily sin. So to affirm, “Thou shalt never wash my feet,” is to affirm, “I don’t need any further washing.” Now there are perfectionists who do believe that once

receiving Jesus Christ as savior then we do not need any further cleansing because we have been made perfect.

Now let me spend just a moment to point out that this is not the position of Wesleyan evangelicals. Wesleyan evangelicals talk about the doctrine of Christian perfection but they do not mean that a Christian cannot sin. Christians do sin. The doctrine of Christian perfection does not mean perfectionism in the sense that we never sin thereafter. But we do not commit certain kinds of sins. And so when we say Peter is a perfectionist we're talking about a true perfectionist but now, of course, the New Testament makes it plain that even though we are Christians we do sin. So Jesus said to Peter, “Peter, if I don't wash you,” and of course he's talking about his feet, “If I wash thee not,” because he uses a verb that is used of washing parts of the body, “Then you have no part with me.” Now notice, he does not say, “Part in me,” but, “Part with me.” Once one believes in the Lord Jesus Christ he is united to our Lord and possesses life. What is meant by part? Well it's helpful to turn over to Luke chapter 10 and verse 42 where the Lord Jesus, visiting in Bethany, has this little incident when he enters into the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and Martha immediately rushes to the kitchen to do something about food and Mary sits at his feet and goes on listening to his word. And finally our Lord passes an opinion on the actions of the two ladies. He says, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.” Now the good part is to sit at our Lord's feet and communion with him and to hear his word. So the term “part” there has reference to communion, not to the reception of life, but communion in life.

Then in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 when the apostle is exhorting the Corinthians, not to be associated with unbelievers, in the 14th verse of 2 Corinthians 6, he says, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord, (notice these terms, they all refer to communion: fellowship, communion, concord,) hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” So it's clear that the term “part” is a term that refers to communion, to

fellowship, to concord. So when he turns to Peter and he says, “Peter look, if I don’t wash your feet, you don’t have part with me,” he doesn’t mean, “Peter, it’s necessary for me to wash your feet in order for you to be saved, but Peter it’s necessary for me to wash your feet in order for you to have communion with me.”

Now Peter, of course, he says, “If you’ve got to wash me, then give me the whole thing” because he really does love our Lord so he says, “Lord, not my feet only but my also my hands and my head, give me the whole bath.” Now that’s loyalty, that’s love, but it’s not faith, it’s not knowledge. Actually what Peter has become is an Arminian. He’s been bathed all over Jesus will say in a moment, he doesn’t need another bath. But Arminianism has taught, historically, that it’s possible for a person to lose their salvation and if he commits certain kinds of sins then those sins are destructive of spiritual life and he needs to be saved again. So that’s the position into which Peter has put himself by saying, “Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head, give me another bath.” But we don’t need another bath. Once having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ we have the bath of regeneration, we need cleansing from daily sin. We need cleansing from acts of sin but we do not need another bath.

Many years ago I was speaking at a Bible conference just outside of Cleveland by Lake Erie and in one of the breakfast sessions in which we had a brief devotion from the man who was the director of the conference in the midst of his brief devotion he told of a testimony of a Salvation Army man, he was speaking along these lines and he said that this Salvation Army man in the midst of a meeting when the time came for Christian testimony, stood up and said, “Thank God I’ve been saved. I’ve been saved seven times.” And then, of course, “Mr. Ulman went on to point out that once saved is sufficient, we don’t need to be saved seven times. Well some time after that I was reading H. A. Ironside’s commentary on the Gospel of John and I must say Dr. Ironside has that story beat by quite a bit of numbers. He said in his commentary that he remembered an incident that happened in his ministry which was almost amusing if it had not been so sad. He was preaching and in the midst of his preaching near the end of it he gave an invitation and one of the men who came

forward was a young man and afterwards they sat down with this young man and thought that they led him to a first time salvation.

Now they were rejoicing over it after the meeting was over that he had been saved and they were standing around outside and as they were standing around outside and the man was standing nearby someone came up to this man and said to him, “Well, I see that you’re down at the front again tonight, how many times does that make?” And Dr. Ironside said the man said, “Oh that makes ninety-nine times that I have come in answer to an invitation to receive Jesus Christ as savior.” Well that’s rather sad that a person should think that having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ it would be necessary for him over and over and over again to receive the bath of regeneration. Well, our Lord then says to Peter in verse 10 and to the rest of the apostles, “He that is bathed,” now if you have an Authorized Version that verb is different from the verb that has been found in the preceding verses and translated washed, this one is, “He that is bathed,” it’s the word that refers to the bath, the total bath, of the body. “He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his felt but is clean every whit. And ye are clean but not all,” he refers of course to Judas there.

So what our Lord is teaching is simply this, that when one believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, one receives an eternal salvation, that’s the bath of regeneration. You don’t need to take the bath of regeneration over and over again. All that is necessary is for the washing of the feet. And you’ll notice that it is our Lord who does both of these works in heaven now. He’s the one who has bathed us with the bath of regeneration and he’s the one who washes the feet of his disciples.

One would, of course, sense this if he had been an Oriental much more than we because we don’t have the custom of washing one another’s feet or making provision for it when we invite friends over to our homes because we don’t walk on dusty streets barefooted as they did in the East. It was the custom of the Orientals to have a slave at the door when they invited people over and as the people arrived they would, since they were wearing generally sandals, they would stop there. They would take off their sandals, they would have the slave wash their feet. And then they would go in and have whatever relationship with the hosts they were expected to have.

The Romans also did that as a custom and of course the Charlestonians do it as well as you might expect. [Laughter] All of us people who are ancient do that which I would imagine the British do it as well. But anyway, in Charleston which is a sea coast town, as you know, it's customary for a lot of people to have homes down on the beach and ordinarily you have to walk over the sand a bit of time before you come to the house and usually what happens is that they will have a shower underneath their homes which are set up to protect them from any kinds of waves that might be excessive at certain times of the year. And so you will come in your bathing suit, you'll take a shower, but then you walk outside and there's a lot of sand everywhere and so your feet will get a little sandy again even though your body is clean. And so as you come up the house and go into the house they usually have a little room in which you can go and wash your feet so that you are perfectly clean as you come into the house.

Well that's what our Lord is speaking about here when he said, “Peter, he that is bathed all over doesn't need except to get his feet washed. Incidentally that's the way the Greek text reads there. “He that is bathed all over needeth not save to get his feet washed, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.” Now I think that a mother would understand that. If a little child who is in perfectly good relationship with mother should go out and play in a mud puddle and rush into the house and leap into mother's arms full of mud, then that little child will learn the great lesson that cleansing must come before communion. [Laughter] Well that is all our Lord is talking about, that cleansing comes before communion. So you need to get your feet washed. Not to be saved all over again but to get your feet washed. In the Old Testament that's illustrated so beautifully in the tabernacle because out in the tabernacle was the brazen altar where the animals were slain and then the altar, the laver, where the priests as they went back and forth into the temple stopped to wash their hands and feet. So as they carried on their work the animal was sacrificed at the brazen altar, but at the brazen laver as they went back and forth they always kept themselves clean, their hands and their feet. The sacrifice was the place where atonement was made but the washing took place as

they carried out their ministry because of the defilement that was communicated as they carried out their work.

Now the Lord sits down, puts his garments on and says to them as the teacher, “Do you know what I’ve done to you? Or do you recognize what I have done,” as the Greek text suggests. “You call me Master and Lord,” he says, “And ye say well; because I am. If I then, your Master and Lord, 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.”

Now Peter’s lecture that he receives is a kind of side light. The principle lesson is expressed now and it’s the expression of love that is illustrated by our Lord and in a moment he will set it all forth in plain teaching, it’s the new commandment. It’s possible to understand verse 14 and verse 15 in a different way. In fact, one of the recent commentators, the Roman Catholic commentator Raymond Brown, has pointed out that at least nine different interpretations have been given of verse 14 and verse 15. “I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.” Now some of you look a little troubled and perturbed, I’m not going to go through the nine interpretations. Some have, however, said that this refers to a new ordinance. Not only the ordinance of baptism, not only the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, but the ordinance of foot washing should be practiced by the local church. I have some good friends in a theological seminary in the Midwest that believe in this particular church that this ordinance should be celebrated today. Baptism suggests our salvation, accomplished once and for all, the Lord’s Supper represents our continual communion with our Lord, but we do fail do we not? And so the ordinance of foot washing suggests the fact that we need constant defilement. And there are some things that could be said for that. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church practices this once a year. The Pope will select twelve poor people and he will publicly wash their feet. Of course, Peter is not told here now, “Peter, you will be the first pope and you are to wash the feet of twelve people once a year.”

Bengel, the German commentator, an evangelical, said, “If the Pope would not wash twelve poor people’s feet but would wash one king’s feet once a year that would mean more to me.” In this

church, incidentally, it's a fine church, they practice it once a year. Everybody comes to the foot washing service once a year and boy they really wash their feet before they come to that foot washing service. [Laughter] And you would too. And then they each wash one other person's foot — feet. [Laughter] Or two, I've forgotten whether it's one or two. I haven't been in this service, I've been very interested in it, however, I must admit. So I always ask them, “Describe it to me.” But almost always it's really a rather symbolic thing with them to express the fact, after all Jesus said, “I've given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”

Others have said the washing of one another is the washing of one another with the word because of our defilement. But actually this incident describes only our Lord's actions as having any force. So what would be the point of washing one another with the word? It seems much better to take this as simply an illustration of the new commandment. In other words, our Lord's atoning activity represented by the taking of the laying aside of his garments that that represents his death. Getting down upon his feet and washing the disciples' feet, his atoning activity is motivation for our non-atoning activity of washing one another's feet.

Now is this to be taken literally though? Well, let's look at verse 10, it says, “He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet.” Now the bath of regeneration that is referred to in verse 10 is a spiritual bath. It's not a literal bath, it's a spiritual bath. The spiritual bath of regeneration accomplished by the blood shed on Calvary's cross. Is it not reasonable then in the light of the fact that this spiritual bath is spiritual to take the washing of the feet to be ultimately a spiritual washing of one another's feet and not a literal washing of water since the bath is not a literal washing in water. That makes sense to me. And so I tend to think then that when the Lord says, “I've washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet, I've given you an example that you should do as I have done unto you,” that he's suggesting to them that I have given myself in ministry for you by dying upon the cross for you and I have devoted myself now to ministry to you as your great high priest. And in response to my atoning activity I ask that you wash one another's feet in non-atoning love for one another.

It seems to me that the Apostle John, writing in the first epistle, understands that principle to be involved in the Christian’s relationship to one another very plainly. In 1 John 3:16, this same apostle who experienced this from the Lord said, “Hereby perceive we the love of God because he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” He laid down his life for us in atoning activity; we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren in non-atoning activity. We cannot atone for sin, 1 John 4:11 in the very next chapter he says again, “Beloved, if God so loved us, (in an atoning way,) we ought also to love one another, (in a non-atoning way).”

So the atoning activity is the motivation and justification of the non-atoning activity of love on our part. He is the great illustration of love and we are to love one another in the light of his example. Now in a moment he will state it plainly, giving us the new commandment. He concludes by saying, “The servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if you do them.” Would you like to know what it is to live a happy, joyous, Christian life? Take a queue from our Lord. Wash one another’s feet. Love one another because he has loved us in an atoning way. Loved us to the end with eternal love, why should not we love those whom he loves?

Well, the account began with a dispute over greatness; greatness in lowliness. It’s not enough for greatness in the kingdom to be believers. A consecration to the Lord without consecration to our neighbors is really an illusion, so Jesus said. I wonder if Peter learned his lesson. Well, there’s an interesting statement that he makes in his epistle. In his first epistle in the 5th chapter in the 5th verse, he makes an interesting statement and I just wonder if he did not have this in mind. He writes, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed in humility.” Notice that expression, “Be clothed in humility.” The word that is used here is a verb that was used with two meanings. It’s built on a noun that means a knot and this knot was used to usually applied to garment that was fastened to an undergarment and it was fastened by a knot or a bow. An apron which a slave put on was fastened by a kombos, which is the word that is the root of this to the undergarment, it meant a knot. And

ein komboma [ph56:48] was an apron which a slave tied on over his undergarment so it was suggestive of a slave’s position. So when Peter says, “Be clothed with humility,” well it’s possible he was thinking about our Lord in the Upper Room Discourse when our Lord laid aside his garments and took that apron like a slave.

Now it’s very striking too that this word came to be associated with the garments of royalty. In fact, it is given as a synonym of a word that means to be girded in the sense of girded like a king. And the reason for it is that the same kind of knot was used for a king’s garment as was used for a slave’s garment. And in fact someone has suggested that maybe this should be rendered not girded with humility but, robed with humility, suggesting the garments of a king.

Well it may be that one of the commentators is right when he says, “It seems to me that possibly Peter saw the knotted garment of slavery on Jesus and before he was through he saw that it was the knotted garment of royalty.” For after all, it is the person who becomes the slave who’s the true king. So I suggest to you as a Christian brother and sister that when we think of the fact that the Lord Jesus became a slave in order that we might be redeemed, is it saying too much to ask you to take the place of a slave and love one another? Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord for these magnificent words from the Apostle John who has given us such a beautiful picture which our Lord originated. A beautiful picture of response to his atoning love. And O God, may each of us know what it is truly to love one another, to wash one another’s feet spiritually. If there are some here Lord who have never believed in Christ and are not in the company of his own, give them grace to flee to the cross where the blood was shed that sins might be...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]