



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 13:1-17

“Washing One Another’s Feet”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee with grateful thanksgiving for the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ to us as believers. We thank Thee for all of his high-priestly work, for the sacrifice which has made it all possible and for the continuous ministry at the right-hand of the throne of God. And again, Lord, we pray that Thou will be with us as we open the pages of the word of God. Enable us Lord to respond to the things that are found within them and may the Scriptures be a source of comfort to us and consolation as Thou dost promise in the word. We ask Thy blessing upon us in this hour and in the hour that follows. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are beginning in our exposition in a series of studies in the Upper Room Discourse of our Lord Jesus Christ contained in the 13th through the 17th chapters of the Gospel of John. Strictly speaking, the Upper Room Discourse begins with chapter 14 but ordinarily chapter 13 is included because there is some significant discourse material there that the Lord Jesus gave to the apostles.

John’s gospel is regarded by many as a paragon of the gospels marked particularly by spirituality. Clement of Alexandria of the earliest of the professing Christians represents John as, “Moved by the entreaty of his intimate friends and inspired by the

Spirit, preceding to compose of a spiritual gospel.” This was the expression that Clement used, a spiritual gospel. And in a sense it is a truly spiritual gospel. Of course, all the gospels are spiritual and we don’t mean to cast dispersions upon any of them in saying that John’s gospel is a gospel particularly noted by its spirituality.

Perhaps some of the symbolism of the Gospel of John has caused people to speak of it as the spiritual gospel. We know this, the thought is extremely elevated and in that sense it is truly a spiritual book. It is helpful to us in approaching the study of these very important chapters to remember the place of the Upper Room Discourse and the progress of thought in the Gospel of John.

Remember as you begin the 1st chapter of the gospel and really continuing through the 11th chapter, John gives us a revelation of the Son of God. He particularly gives this revelation in the form of signs, a series of signs designed to express symbolically the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the 11th chapter is completed the revelation of the Son is complete. And so in chapter 12 we have the reaction of the people and of the little flock. And in the case of the people there is clear rejection of the ministry of our Lord and response on the part of those who have believed in him.

The thing that they needed at this stage in their Christian life was some preparation for the future when the Lord Jesus would not be here. It’s clear, too, that they were not really prepared for what was to follow and so the Upper Room Discourse, chapters 13 through 17, is designed to prepare the apostles for the time when the Lord Jesus would no longer be here in the flesh as he has been.

It is true, I think, in all endeavors that it is necessary for us to have preparation. When the men first ascended Mount Everest it was necessary for them to prepare for that for months and months. When Roger Bannister first broke the barrier of the four minute mile he spoke about how his preparation had been undertaken through the years that had preceded it. He had gone through months and years of preparation in order to fit his

body for the supreme attempt to do what no one else had ever done, which also had become a kind of psychological barrier; to break the four minute mile. It was amazing to read some of the things that Dr. Bannister did in order to prepare himself for the breaking of the that particular barrier.

Now in the Upper Room Discourse the Lord Jesus is preparing the apostles for the age that is to come. He is going to give them a startling revolutionary promise and I think in some ways that’s the preeminent revelation of these chapters. It is simply this; that they shall have him again by the Holy Spirit, even though he physically will no longer be with them they will have him in the person of the Holy Spirit and through the Spirit. So that the disciples of the Lord Jesus who shall follow the apostles will be no worse off than the apostles. For just as the apostles had our Lord Jesus with them so the believers that are to come will also have him. And in fact it will be expedient. He will say later on for him to go away because disciples will have him all the time in contrast to the apostles in the earthly ministry.

There, I think, is probably the key revelation in this particular section; the Holy Spirit is going to come and take the place of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it’s important that we be prepared so our Lord would say for the time when he would not be there in the flesh. I think it’s also significant that we approach these chapters which are so important in our spiritual lives with an eager, open, heart to respond to the teaching of the word. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer many years ago, twenty-nine to be exact, almost, twenty-eight-and-a-half, in 1950, speaking in the chapel of the seminary made the comment that, “The purest Christian teaching that we have anywhere is in the Upper Room Discourse.”

Now I always wanted to ask Dr. Chafer, “Where is the less pure teaching of the Bible,” because, of course, all of the Christian teaching of the word of God is pure. But what he was trying to say was that this section of the word of God seemed to have an unusual appeal to believers and I think in that sense he was right. He went on to say, “It is the seed plot of all the grace teaching of the word of God. In germ form we have

every essential of biblical doctrine; it is distinctively Christian in its teaching.” Now he was simply trying to say that what we have in the Upper Room Discourse is an anticipation of the kind of teaching that we have from the apostles following the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Let’s turn, now, to the historical situation as it is unfolded in the first three verses of chapter 13. Chapter 13, verse 1, we read,

“Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them completely (Now I am taking the sense of that expression *eis teleios* translated in the New American Standard Bible by “unto the end” in the sense of “completely”.) And supper being ended, the devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come forth from God, and was going back to God.”

Verse 1 is an introductory verse to the entire discourse since the love was not developed in the opening chapter completely. Now it is clear that what this verse is is a kind of heading for what is to follow, and the “Loving them completely,” is to be expounded in the verses that follow. Verse 2 is a kind of second beginning, “And during supper, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray him.” But looking back at this 1st verse he says, “Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour has come that he should depart out of this word to the Father, having loved his own,” now I think it’s important for us as we think through the Upper Room Discourse to remember that this teaching is primarily for men who are already related to the Lord Jesus Christ. “His own,” suggests believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The earlier part of the gospel is addressed to those who have not yet come and is

in appeal to them to hear the meaning of the signs and respond to the person and work of the Lord Jesus. But this one, this section of the gospel is addressed to those who are his own and he will unfold his relationship to them.

Many of the students of the Gospel of John believe that the background of this is Luke chapter 22, verse 24 through 27, that’s the section of the gospel in which the disciples fight with one another over who is to have the chief seat. And so there were ruffled tempers. They had trooped into the Upper Room like a set of set of sulky schoolboys, someone had said. And he will remedy by the words that he is going to say. It’s staggering when we remember the greatness of the Son of God that they should have such struggles as they did have. “Having loved his own, he loved them completely.”

Now I think that this expression, “He loved them to the end,” or, “He loved them completely,” which I prefer, is a reference to the cross of the Lord Jesus. “Having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them completely,” and the completion of the love of Christ is expressed by the ministry of our Lord upon the cross. “Having loved his own,” is a reference to the many expressions of love manifested by the Son of God in the days and months and years passed. But, “Having loved,” or, “He loved them completely,” is a reference to the event of the cross.

So, then, that’s the introduction. And we turn now to verse 4 through verse 11 in which we have this very interesting symbolical action. Listen to John as he writes, he says,

“The Lord Jesus rose from supper, and laid aside his garments; and taking a towel, girded himself about. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. And so he came to Simon Peter, (and I rather think that the reason he came to Simon Peter is because Simon Peter was last; that is, he began at the table nearest to himself and he went all around the circle. The table, remember, was in the shape of a horseshoe, and so he went around the

horseshoe to the opposite end of the horseshoe and there was Simon Peter because, after all, they had been fighting over who was going to be great and the Lord Jesus had said that the one who is least is going to be great and so Peter had rushed to the least place across the other side. And so I rather think, then, when we read hear, ‘And so he came to Simon Peter,’ as evidence of the fact that he has washed the feet of the others and now he has finally come to Peter, because we do not read of the washing of the feet of any others. And so he came to Simon Peter, he said to him,) Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered and said to him, What I do you do not realize now; but you shall understand hereafter. Peter said to him, never shall you wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with me. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus said to him, He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean: and you are clean, but not all. For he knew the one who was betraying him; for this reason he said, not all of you are clean.”

What follows here after the introductory verses is a kind of acted parable of the past and future ministry of the Lord Jesus, almost as if he is acting as a prophet because, remember, in the Old Testament the prophets often gave their messages not simply by word but by action. They often engaged in a symbolical action in order to teach and this was by the direction of the Lord, they are listeners. And they taught them by the things that they did, not simply the things that they said. We find this in the Book of Zechariah, for example. We find it also in the other prophets. And they were told by God to perform these symbolical actions in order to express certain truths. So it seems that this is a kind of acted parable as if our Lord is ministering as a prophet. That seems to be evident from the opening words in verse 3, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands,” and that he had come forth from God and was going back to God. That suggests prophetic ministry.

Also, at the conclusion of the symbolism or the symbolic actions of the prophets they often asked the people for a response. What is meant by this? And that’s what our Lord does here in verse 12, “So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments and reclined at the table again, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?” So it was characteristic of the prophetic style for that to take place too. So it would seem, then, that what this is is an acted parable of the past and future ministry of the Lord Jesus in which he speaks as a prophet desiring to teach them certain spiritual truth. Therefore, in analyzing what took place we notice our Lord laid aside his garments and then he took the basin and he began to wash the disciples’ feet.

There are two things that are mentioned. He laid aside his garments and he washed the disciples’ feet. Now the laying aside of the garments is rather interesting because the word that is used to describe the laying aside of the garments is the same word that is used in other places of this gospel for the death of the Lord Jesus. For example, if you’ll turn back to chapter 10, and verse 15, here we read, “Even as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” And so there the word, “Lay down,” is the word used for the death of Christ and here we read of him, “Laying aside his garments.”

Again, in chapter 13, this very chapter at which we are looking in verse 37 and verse 38, while not used of the Lord Jesus this word is used of death, “Peter said unto him, Lord, why can I not follow you right now? I will lay down my life for you.” And there is the word again. “Jesus answered, Will you lay down your life for me?” Again, the word.

So the idea of laying aside or laying down the garments and becoming naked is suggestive of the death of our Lord upon the cross. And then the washing of the feet represents, then, his present ministry to the believers that which follows his death upon the cross. And so I would like to take this, then, as a symbolic incident in which the

laying aside of his clothes represents his death and the washing represents the present ministry of the Lord Jesus as high-priest to his people.

Now that means that we are to look at this incident primarily as a work of the present ministry of the Lord Jesus because it’s clear that the washing of the feet is the important thing and not the laying aside of the garments here. Now I’m sure that if you were thinking about this and meditating upon it you probably would think of some other passages of holy Scripture that are very similar to this. The one that I think of is Philippians chapter 2, verse 5 through verse 11, where the Lord Jesus, in the form of God, thinks it not robbery to be equal with God, but takes upon him the form of a servant and then, ultimately, offers himself up for the death on the cross.

So the idea of our Lord in the dignity of equality with the Father, laying aside his glory, his majesty and glory, and becoming a servant is typified in this incident because to take the towel and to minister to the apostles and wash their feet is to become a slave or a servant. So the action represents the prophecy and it points to the work of salvation and purification, and primarily the work of purification.

Strachan, one of the British commentators speaking about the fact that this passage is almost written in lyrical form says, “That the lyrical teaching of the Lord Jesus is not merely composed of dogmas, but they begin as doxologies.” And I think that’s true. We have here very - a great occasion for doxology in the self-humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well the conversation with Peter follows after verses 4 and 5. He began to wash the disciples’ feet, and wipe them, and you can see him going around the table with each one of the apostles washing their feet and wiping them with a towel with which he was girded. And finally he came to Peter. Now by the Lord’s dealing with Peter, by the blunders that this man commits, we learn a great deal of truth. Now I must confess that Peter has been the object of a lot of talk by Bible expositors. We’ve made a lot of fun of Peter but I think we will see in just a moment that there was something fundamentally

right about the Apostle Peter. But nevertheless he made blunders because he was not yet permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he had not yet been taught by the Lord Jesus for forty days after the resurrection. He has not become Peter the apostle in the sense that he will become him yet and these things are put forth in the word of God that we might learn from them and while we laugh at Peter we do it with a sense of gratitude to this great man who was *primus inter pares* among the apostles, the first among equals.

And so he came to Simon Peter, he said to him -- that is, Peter said to the Lord -- he anticipated the Lord coming to him, he saw what was going to happen, and he said, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” He cannot have our Lord wash his feet. Now the picture that you get here immediately if you are thinking doctrinally is that Peter is taking the position of a perfectionist. He’s suggesting that because he’s been bathed all over he does not need any washing of his feet. Listen to what he says again, “Lord, do you wash my feet? Now the Lord replied to him, “What I do you, you do not realize now but you shall understand hereafter.” “Never shall you wash my feet!” And then Jesus said, “If I do not wash you, Peter, you have no part with me.” Now what does he suggest by this? Does he suggest, “Peter, if I do not wash your feet you do not really belong to the apostolic company”? Does he say, “If I do not wash your feet you are not really a true Christian”? Does he say, “If I do not wash your feet you will lose your salvation”? Well, it’s easy to see how one might think that that was what the Lord Jesus meant. I want you to notice the little word “part”. “If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.” And I think it’s important, too, to notice the preposition before the pronoun me. He does not say, “If I do not wash your feet you do not have part in me,” but, “Part with me.” But what does he mean by part?

Well, let’s turn back first to Luke chapter 10, and verse 42. This is the account of our Lord’s preaching in the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. And he came to Bethany and Martha welcomed him into the house and immediately went into the kitchen, remember, to prepare something for him. But Mary, her sister, sat at Jesus feet

and went on hearing his word. Martha was exasperated by this because, after all, she needed help in the kitchen. Someone has said, “Martha’s trouble was just too many dishes.” And so she came out and said,

“Lord, do you not care that my sister has let me to do all the serving alone? (Then,) Tell her to help me. The Lord answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things but only a few things are necessary, really only one, (now this is characteristic of our Lord’s language, he moves from the material to the spiritual significance. Really only one; now he’s moved from the material to the spiritual,) Only a few things, you didn’t have to prepare such an elaborate meal as you have prepared, only a few things is necessary. In fact, only one thing is necessary. But Mary had chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from her, (notice the word part,) Mary has chosen the good part.”

Now it is clear that the idea is the idea of fellowship or communion. Really Martha’s exercise of herself in service has been the means of loss of communion with the Lord. You can be so busy doing things around a church, you can be so busy in spiritual activity that you actually lose communion with the Lord. It’s very possible for people to do that. That was Martha’s problem. Now that’s the special stumbling block of preachers and teachers of the word, of course. It’s possible for someone actively in the Lord’s service to be so active about things in the Lord’s work but actually fellowship and communion with him goes out the window. But “part” is fellowship.

Now that’s the same word, “Peter, if I don’t wash your feet you have no part with me.” Now let’s turn to 2nd Corinthians chapter 6, and verse 15, because the apostle Paul uses that word in the same sense, I think. 2nd Corinthians chapter 6, and verse 15, listen to these words. The apostles says in verse 14,

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said.”

Now I should have read that before I came to this particular meeting because I’m reading this from the New American Standard Bible and I’m not exactly sure which word it has used to render the Greek word *meris* which is the same that we have in John chapter 13. Verse 14, of chapter 6 reads, in the Greek text, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? Or what communion, light with darkness? Or what agreement is there between Christ and Belial? Or what part,” that’s it at the last part of verse 15, translated here, “Or what has a believer in common, what part to a believer, or has a believer with an unbeliever?” So you can see it is translated here in this version by having something in common and it is made parallel in the preceding part with partnership, fellowship. So part is a word that expresses fellowship.

Now, then, in John chapter 13, in verse 8, when the Lord Jesus says, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with me,” he means, “Peter, if I do not go on washing your feet you do not have fellowship with me.” Not, “You lose your salvation,” but, “You do not have fellowship with me.” So he is talking to a person who is already a believer and he’s speaking about the necessity of this ministry of his in order to remain in that relationship of communion with him.

Now Peter, not understanding this immediately, however, sensing that this is important because he certainly wants to have part with the Lord, he senses that that’s good and he does not want to abandon that position, but now he speaks as an Armenian. Now, of course, this is beyond his ken and Armenia had not risen yet, although the doctrine had, we read, “Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my

hands and my head.” In other words, “if a little washing of my feet is important then do a complete job. Wash my head also; give me a thorough, completed bath.”

Now you must admire the loyalty of the Apostle Peter. He speaks of our Lord as Lord. He says in verse 6, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Verse 9, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” Furthermore, it’s obvious he does love Jesus Christ. He wants, above all thing, to stay in relationship to him. But loyalty and love speak rather than faith and knowledge. It is possible for people to have a genuine love for Jesus Christ, but one that’s not according to knowledge. He will not let the Lord do as he, the Lord, pleases which is the important thing.

Now it, I think, is rather interesting that our Lord has said, “I must keep on washing your feet.” There are people that do believe that it’s necessary to be saved over and over again. Many years ago I was preaching in Cleveland out at the Bible conference at Erieside, an old, old Bible conference which was on its last legs about thirty years ago. I’m sure it’s probably a modern, suburban area of the city of Cleveland now. But I remember at some of the meetings that we had in the morning, brief meetings after the breakfasts in which men got up and gave a little testimony by way of a devotional message, Mr. Charles Olman, who was the father of a graduate of the seminary later on, standing up at that conference and telling of the testimony of a Salvation Army man. He once said in a meeting, they were rather Armenian in their theology, “Thank God I’ve been saved. I’ve been saved seven times.”

Now, of course, it would be nice to have the experience of salvation seven times to enjoy that joy, but you don’t really have to do that. To be saved is to be saved once and then the joy continues. Dr. Ironside has a story in one of his volumes of a man who came down to a front after a meeting as was the custom in the church and he went through the procedure again to get saved down at the front. Dr. Chafer used to really resent this because he used to preach that kind of message, he went around the country as an evangelist and he used to bring people down to the front and have them go

through the ceremony of praying through or raising their hand in the meeting or signing a decision card and all of that that the professional evangelists used to do. And finally one night he was preaching in a meeting and someone jumped up in the midst of the meeting and said, “I’ve been saved, I’ve been saved!” and he said, he used to tell us at the seminary, “My first thought was to say, ‘Sit down, sit down, it’s not time to get saved yet!’” [Laughter] Then he said, “I’ll grind you out at the end.” Well this man, Dr. Ironside, was preaching in the meeting and this man came down to the front and he thought, Dr. Ironside said, “He thought that we had had a person who had responded to the message and had been saved that night. I thought he was a new convert until I was standing by and someone came over to him and said, ‘Well I’m glad to see you’re out here at the front again, how many times have you been converted now?’” And these are the words of Dr. Ironside, he said, “Oh, this makes ninety-nine times that he had been saved.” There are people who have been brought up in that kind of environment and they’re not to be blamed, I suppose, for all of it but it’s clear from the teaching of the word of God that once we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we don’t need any other bathing than that one bath of regeneration we receive when we believe in the Lord Jesus.

But Peter wants another bath. So now the Lord Jesus must make Peter orthodox, and so we read in verse 10,

“Jesus said to him, He who has bathed, (this really reads something like, ‘He who has been bathed all over,’) needs only to get his feet washed, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.”

Now in the Greek there are three words for washing. There is the word *pluno* which is used of the washing of things. If I were to wash a thing; a vase, a plate, I would use the term *pluno*. If I were to wash my hands or my feet, a part of the body, I would use the verb *nipto*. But if you want to wash the whole body the verb in Greek is the verb

louo. So there is a verb for washing a thing, there is a verb for washing parts of the body, and there is a word for bathing all over. In the Old Testament there is a verse in Leviticus in the Greek translation of the Old Testament which has all three of the verbs in that one verse because in that one verse reference is made to the washing of things, parts of the body, and the whole of the body.

Now when the Lord Jesus says here in verse 10, “He who has been bathed,” he uses the Greek word louo which means to be bathed all over. So he’s talking there about a bath of regeneration. He’s talking about a bath in which the whole body is cleansed. “The one who had been bathed does not have need except to get his feet washed.” Now, then, I want you to notice first that the word bathed is the word louo which means to wash all over, the word for wash is the word nipto which means to wash a part of the body, in this case the feet. So the point of it is, “Peter, if you have been bathed all over you don’t need to get washed all over again. All you need is to have your feet washed. So the one who has been bathed all over doesn’t need what you are talking about when you say, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.’ All that is needed is one bath of regeneration.” But then there remains the washing of the feet which will go on and on as long as we are here in the flesh.

Now notice it is the Lord Jesus who does both of these, “He who has been bathed needs only to get his feet washed but is completely clean, and you are clean but not all of you.” Now the Lord Jesus does both of these works in heaven. That is, when a person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and believes in him it is then that the Lord Jesus gives him a bath all over, spiritually. And he becomes clean; from that time on he is clean. And it is the Lord Jesus who is our great high priest carries on the ministry of cleansing and refining those who have been bathed all over, washing their feet. There are some illustrations of this in the life of individuals. It was the custom of Orientals, and surely our Lord had this in mind, that when they were invited out to visit someone they took a bath before they left. And when they arrived at the door of the home where they

had the engagement there would be servants there. They would slip off their sandals and then the servants would wash the feet of those who had bathed all over. The reason for that is that on the way they contracted defilement -- dusty roads, dirt -- and so there they washed their feet. The servants didn’t give them a complete bath, they simply washed their feet.

The Romans did something like that and even the Charlestonians do that, and others too. Incidentally, the Charlestonians don’t do it in their homes, they do it down on the beach and I’m sure you do it too when you go to the beach. If you have a beach house and if your beach house is located a little ways from the water you go into the water and swim, frolic, cavort, whatever you do in water [Laughter], and then you come back and in Charleston at least they have showers usually under their houses and you take a shower but frequently you have to step out of the shower and there will be some sand there and so you’ll step on the sand and then if you come in the house, well, there will be another place where you can wash your feet. So you have a bath all over to get the saltwater off and then you wash your feet.

So one bath is sufficient but washing feet is something that goes on and on. Oh, take a muddy little child that climbs into mother’s lap. That little child learns that there must be cleansing before communion [Laughter] and mother immediately takes the child out and washes the feet, gets all of the dirt off before there can be any communion with mother. The Lord Jesus is speaking some in a very similar way. He is saying, “That I have performed a symbolic action, I have laid aside my clothes, that’s my self-humbling death for you, by which you are bathed all over. But then I carry on my ministry of cleansing the saints, washing their feet throughout my present ministry at the right-hand of the father.”

Well now the practical application follows because this is a prophetic ministry of our Lord. Peter’s lecture is a kind of a side-light. The principle lessons - our principle lesson is the expression of love as illustrated by our Lord. And in a moment he will set it

all fourth in the new commandment. You see, what he is doing, really, is just picturing what the new commandment will state in just a moment, that we are to love one another as our Lord Jesus Christ has loved us.

Verse 12 contains the request, “And when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments and reclined at the table again, he said to them, Do you know what I have done to you?” In true prophetic style he asks for an understanding of his action. Now the reasoning that follows in verses 13 through 16 is, I think, interesting and raises some questions, too. Verse 13 says, “You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” Now what is meant by this? “You also ought to wash one another’s feet.” That really is the key to this section; that is, this part of the discourse.

There are those that teach that we are to have foot washing as an ordinance. They are some good brethren, some of the Grace Brethren in Winona Lake, Indiana, very sound in the word. They believe that foot washing is an ordinance to be practiced by the church. And so, I think, about once a year they all gather and they wash their feet at home before they come [Laughter]. That’s right, they do. They wash their feet at home before they come but they all gather in the meeting and they wash one another’s feet, which have already been washed. But by that they believe they are carrying out the third sacrament: not only baptism, not only the Lord’s Supper, but foot washing as an ordinance.

Now I don’t want to make fun of them because they have some good reasons for the things that they teach, but I do think that they fail to see the symbolic nature of this particular act of our Lord. Notice verse 15, “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” Furthermore, the washing of the feet is put in the context of the bath all over and the bath all over was a spiritual bath. Is it not likely, then, that the washing of the feet is also a spiritual washing of the feet in the light of the fact that the bath is a spiritual washing?

Furthermore, he said to them that, “You don’t understand what is happening to you now but you will.” I think they did understand what was happening to them so far as the washing of their feet with water was concerned. I don’t think that is the meaning, although I respect those who hold that particular view. They have never been able to carry a significant amount of the Christian church in their view. There are those who teach that washing one another’s feet is a reference to the washing of one another with the word for defilement, in that I’m to wash you and cleanse you and you are to wash me and cleanse me.

But of course, only our Lord’s actions have atoning force and so I rather - I do not go along with this view which is the view of some of the brethren whom I respect very much. I do not think that we wash one another’s feet with the word of God and cleanse them by our washing of their feet. What I think this is is an illustration of the new commandment. The atoning activity of our Lord Jesus is the motivation and justification of non-atoning activity on our part. So that what is meant by the washing of one another’s feet is the relationship of love toward one another, which he will spell out in the new commandment. Because we have received the atoning ministry of regeneration we wash one another’s feet in the loving of our brethren as our Lord Jesus Christ has loved us. He will explain that later on.

Now that, I think, is a Johannine thought and I would like to have a little more time to talk about it, but perhaps if I read a text you will see what I am saying. 1st John 3:16 says, “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” So he laid down his live for us in atoning work, we lay down our life for the brethren as expression of love for them, not in atoning work at all, only he does atoning ministry. So I rather think, then, when he says that, “We wash one another’s feet,” it is not a reference to the fact that we cleanse our brethren by what we do, but rather because we have been cleansed and because we are constantly cleansed by

him in heaven, we love our brethren and give ourselves to them in humble service to them as he was doing to those around that table.

He says in verse 17 as he concludes the section, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” Happiness comes with knowledge and action. If you know these things -- and you do, he implies -- happy are you if you do them. How wonderful it is to know that true Christian happiness comes in loving service one to another in the body of Christ.

Well the account began with a dispute over greatness and we have in our Lord’s actions true greatness in lowliness. It’s not enough for greatness in the Kingdom of God for one to be a believer; one is expected to be a devoted believer, a dedicated believer. Consecration to the Lord without consecration to our Christian neighbors is an illusion.

Well, did Peter learn his lesson? Yes, Peter learned his lesson. Later on he wrote, “Likewise ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder; yea all of you be subject one to another and be clothed with humility.” The term that Peter uses, “To be clothed with humility,” is a term that was used with two meanings. The root kombos meant a knot and thus it referred to a garment that was fastened with a knot or a bow. It was used of an apron which the slave tied on over his undergarment; it’s then suggestive of the slave’s position. Where did Peter get that idea? Well he probably got it from this Upper Room Discourse.

But the Greek word also came to be associated with royalty because royal garments came to be attached in a similar manner. And so consequently it’s almost as if Peter, looking at our Lord and seeing him take the slaves position and the towel and washing the disciples’ feet in lowly service of them and expression love, saw shining through the slaves clothes the clothes of royalty. And he then later addressed the Christians who were scattered throughout Asia Minor, “Be clothed with humility. It is this that is characteristic of the Christian who has been bathed all over.” Let’s bow in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the lesson of this section. Enable us, Lord, to have the clothing of humility and enable us to remember that true Christian experiences...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]