

# **FOOTWASHING**

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The Church of Christ does not practice the ordinance of footwashing. In fact if we were to practice it, we would be denying the completed work of Jesus Christ. This custom is practiced by many Christians in the world today and we need to be able to respond when asked "Why don't you practice it?" The reason is simple. Jesus was fulfilling the law of Moses that very evening by washing the apostles feet. He was making preparations to enter the Holy of Holies according to the prescribed methods in the Law of Moses thereby bringing flesh and blood back into the presence of God. This is not to say that there was not a double meaning in the fact that He was giving an example of servitude for the whole church to follow.

Footwashing is an ancient custom of hospitality still observed in the orient. This explains why there were water, towel, and basin available for Jesus to use on that night nearly two thousand years ago. Hospitality was considered a sacred responsibility that everyone understood. Inside the front door of nearly every home were found a pitcher of water, a towel, and a receptacle for dirty water. Water was poured over the feet of those who entered, the water fell into the basin, and then they were dried with a towel. In the homes of the more affluent this was done by a servant. However, Abraham may have performed it himself for the three heavenly messengers who visited him (Genesis 18:4). We find that the hostess fulfilled this responsibility also (1 Samuel 25:41). In new testament times it was still being practiced. Jesus chastised Simon for not supplying this service for Him when the woman was washing His feet with her tears and then drying them with her hair (Luke 7:44). The practice continued after Christ's resurrection (1 Timothy 5:10). This same pitcher of water may have been used for the washing of their hands before eating as this was also a strict custom in those days. I have read that these customs are still practiced today.

Looking at Mark 14:12-17 and Luke 22:8-14 we find that Jesus gave instructions to Peter and John to go into the city and prepare the Passover. They were to encounter a man with a pitcher of water and follow him home. Then they must asked the head of the house "Where is the guest-chamber?" The question fits perfectly with the sacred hospitality customs of the day. *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares* (Hebrews 13:2). Abraham entertained the three heavenly beings with this in mind. Great care was given to strangers. The rich would provide a room for travelers who would not be able to have the Passover meal otherwise. This room was often an addition to the home built as a second story or upper room. Jesus was calling upon this custom of hospitality, "Where is the guest-chamber?"

In addition to this provision of a place there would be provided all the food and utensils needed to complete the meal. So when the disciples entered the town to make preparations there was little that they needed to do in the way of substantial arrangements. Remember the man they were to follow was carrying a pitcher of water. He was probably making ready the guest-chamber. It is quite possible that this was the very pitcher of water that Christ used to wash the feet of His disciples. They were shown a "*large upper room furnished and prepared*" and there Peter and John made "*ready*" for the group of 13 men.

Jesus followed several customs that night. He made use of them as teaching tools. That night He gave the sop to Judas. This was not anything unusual. He was not merely pointing out the traitor. He was also offering His friendship and protection to Judas one last time. It was the custom for the head of the house to give the sop (a significant portion of the large common bowl

of food) to an honored guest. It meant that you were safe in the house of your host and that He would give you friendship, a place to sleep, and food to eat as long as you were under his roof. We need to realize that Jesus took the place of the host at this supper. It was His supper. He was the great Passover and was making the new testament or covenant in His own blood. By this act He shows us that the decision to betray was truly Judas's alone.

Jesus likewise fulfilled the Law of Moses that night. When He removed His outer garments and girded Himself with a towel and washed the apostles feet, He indeed completed the Law (John 13:1-11). There were two very important statements made to the disciples that night which explain what He was accomplishing. The first is John 13:7 *Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.* Jesus told them that later they would know what it was that He was doing. This does not mean that later that night they would know, but later after His crucifixion and resurrection. In the book of Hebrews we find the key scriptures to this point. Hebrews 6:18-20 states that Jesus is our hope and "*an anchor of the soul*". In addition it tells us that this "*anchor*" entered in within the veil and was made "*an high priest for ever*". In chapter 9 and verse 12 we also find that He entered in "*once*" and obtained for us "*eternal redemption.*" Continuing in chapter 10 verses 10-22 we come to the understanding that He sanctified us "*once for all*", that there is "*one sacrifice for sins for ever*", that Christ is sitting "*on the right hand of God*" or sitting in the Holy of Holies, that "*by one offering he hath perfected forever*" His children, and that there is "*no more offering for sin*". We see in verses 19 through 22 that we should have boldness to enter into the "*holiest*" by Christ's blood, that we have gone through "*the veil*" or Christ's flesh, and most importantly our hearts are "*sprinkled*" and our "*bodies washed*" with pure water. Each one of these things was done by the priests and especially by the High Priests before and during the sacrifices. Footwashing was also his responsibility.

The teaching, that we entered in to the Holy of Holies with Christ appeared after the Day of Pentecost after they received the Holy Ghost, which comforter was to bring to their remembrance every thing that Jesus had previously taught. It was then they understood that Jesus was performing the duties of the Law of Moses found in Exodus 30:17-21 and 40:6-7; 29-32. The priests were given a commandment to wash their hands and feet in the lavar that was placed between the alter and the tabernacle door. They were also commanded to wash again after they entered into the tabernacle. Hebrews 9:10 says that there were "*diverse washings*" and "*carnal ordinances.*" Jesus said "*I am not come to destroy the law ...but to fulfill*" and "*one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*" (Matthew 5:17-18). Jesus fulfilled "*all*", even the washings that were to be performed by the High Priest before he entered within the veil. He was sanctifying the new "*priesthood...changed*" (Hebrews 7:12) to enter with Him into the Holy of Holies. Jesus himself had no need to be cleansed of any sin, therefore His feet were not washed.

This brings us to the second important verse to understand. John 13:8 *Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.* Jesus was very clear in this statement that this was something that He must do for Peter. "*If I wash thee not*" is a clear statement indicating that Jesus was the one to do the washing and Peter the one to receive the washing or Peter would have "*no part with*" Jesus. This was more than an example of humility and service it was the last time that a High Priest would wash feet. He was entering the holiest of places to sit at God's right hand and we, the church, represented by the twelve apostles, were being cleansed and sanctified so that we could enter in

with Him. An interesting point to consider for believers in the Book of Mormon is that this custom is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon even though it may indeed have been the custom. This fact is very important in understanding this custom. Jesus did not repeat this when He came to America, although He did repeat by either commandment or example all of the ordinances. Why was footwashing left out? It is because it is fulfilled once for all and forever.

Next we find Peter saying "*not my feet only*" but wash my hands and head (verse 9). Jesus responded by saying that some one who has been washed only needs "*to wash his feet.*" The preparations made by the high priest included washings before putting on special clothing and beginning the sacrifice. After the high priest made a sacrifice on the alter in front of the tabernacle he entered the tabernacle. However he was not able to walk the short distance from the alter to tabernacle without washing his hands and feet. Jesus told Peter that someone who is washed only needs to wash his feet. There were in oriental societies public bath houses and when a man returned home from one of them the only thing he needed washed was his feet. He had walked on the dirty streets of the world. This symbolizes to us that even when we have been baptized and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost we still walk in the world and are in need of daily cleansing through confession and repentance. Only Christ can cleanse us because we can not cleanse ourselves (see Ephesians 5:25-27). The ordinance of footwashing is therefore a vain exercise because we have read "*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*" You and I retain a remission of our sins by remembering Christ through daily prayer and by doing good to others (see Mosiah 2:20-23; 42-43; Alma 2:20-21; 1 John 1:9). It is the Holy Ghost that sanctifies us continually and the promise given if we partake of Christ's body and blood is to always have his spirit with us (Moroni 4:4; 5:3; 6:4).

The next part of this scripture is given to us as a guide for daily life (John 13:12-17). It is quite likely that the footwashing occurred after the disciples strove among themselves "*which of them should be accounted the greatest*" (Luke 22:24). Christ's example of doing the servant's work is our guide. The western world has no such custom today. Not many of us walk as a form of transporting ourselves. Our lives are filled with "self service" every where we turn. Service to others is a dying responsibility. In many homes there isn't even time to cook, clean, or do the laundry for another person. Service is disappearing, although the demand for service has not disappeared. Proud Americans enter restaurants both at home and abroad creating scenes by loudly demanding to be served like kings and queens. Few people look upon service as a sacred honor any longer. It is too demeaning, women's work, or any other excuse we can imagine. The problem is that when footwashing becomes a sacred holy ordinance the example of humility is lost. It is no longer the humble daily service required from all of us but something high and holy. The footwashing episode is recorded once in the gospels, however the example and teaching of Jesus to be a servant and not a master is recorded in all four gospels (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:12-17). This clearly indicates which is the most important aspect of the lesson. Servitude toward others is the teaching for daily life.

We can find countless ways and means for service if we look. They occur daily in families, at work, school and with visitors. No job is to menial. Remember however that Jesus example was based on an actual reality. There were twenty-four dirty feet. Jesus said in John 13:10 "*He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet.*" The principle word to remember for daily life is "*needeth*" or what is truly needed. This presents another dilemma when we think of footwashing as an ordinance. Is it truly needed or are we creating a need and an avenue to become righteous by ourselves with the vain works of the law and of men? One of the best ways

to be a servant is to take care of the needy. You will find yourself constantly ministering to physical and spiritual "needs" by imparting of your substance to the poor, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and administering relief spiritually and temporally (Mosiah 2:42-43). This can only be done by becoming involved with people that try your patience with their demanding needs. Dozens of humbling experiences will occur. This puts you in positions where service and humility are essential because "*are we not all beggars?*" (Mosiah 2:32) You will find that you may be cleaning up things (washing feet) that you would rather not clean. You may be associating with humble people that the world looks down upon. However if this becomes your pride and you begin to admonish others to do as you have done, humble servitude may be canceled out by self-righteousness.

It is plain to me that footwashing is permissible when feet are dirty. It is also plain to me that the spiritual benefits of the ordinance were completed nearly two thousand years ago in small home on the second floor by our last High Priest before He entered in to the Holy of Holies. Today are feet have been washed by Christ's eternal work. [Ephesians 5:26-27] *That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.* May God keep you always in the Sanctification of His son Jesus Christ.

Your brother in Christ  
Jay Moser