

Doctrine of Foot Washing

1. Unfortunately, the issue of foot washing has become a controversial topic for many within the body of Christ.
2. Some Christians believe foot washing deserves the elevated status of being a mandatory practice while others do not believe the practice is to be exalted above the spiritual lesson it teaches by way of an example.
3. In considering the issue of foot washing it must be remembered that the region of Palestine and the wearing of sandals made some form of foot washing necessary as a general social practice.
3. When Jesus found His disciples arguing among themselves who should be greatest in His kingdom, the Lord wanted to teach them humility.
 - *Luke 22:23 And they began to inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. 24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*
4. One way to make the lesson of humility not only verbal but visual was for Jesus to wash the feet of His disciples.
5. The depth of humility found in this act is best understood by realizing that in the society of that day foot washing was the act of a lowly menial servant.
6. Only where love was great did people equal to one another in social rank wash the feet of another.
7. When Jesus moved to wash the feet of His disciples they were shocked.
 - *John 13:1 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. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; 3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; 4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. 6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. 8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet.*
8. Despite the initial resistance to His actions the Lord was determined to teach spiritual cleansing and Christian humility.

- Spiritual cleansing. *John 13:6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. 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. 9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*
 - Humility. *John 13: 12 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? 13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. 16 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. 17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*
9. The lesson of humility and service on behalf of others was manifested in its greatest form by the death of Christ at Calvary.
 10. The washing of feet is an example of these two great spiritual truths.
 11. Foot washing was not practiced as part of the Lord's Supper in the early church though in various groups throughout church history it was incorporated into their rituals.
 12. Tertullian (AD 145-220) mentions the practice of foot washing in his *De Corona*, but gives no details as to who practiced it or how it was practiced.
 13. There is no passage in the *New Testament* that makes the act of foot washing a religious ritual binding on all believers.
 14. With that noted, there is freedom of religious expression within the body of Christ. Foot washing seems to have been practiced by the church at Milan (ca. A.D. 380). It is mentioned by the *Council of Elvira* (AD 300), and is even referenced by Augustine (ca. AD 400). Observance of foot washing at the time of baptism was maintained in Africa, Gaul, Germany, Milan, northern Italy, and Ireland.
 15. The passage in 1 Timothy 5:10 which speaks of a Christian widow's practice of washing the feet of the saints does not demand or speak of a physical spiritual ritual observed; rather, the emphasis is upon an inner life of humility and service being recognized.
 - *1 Timothy 5: 9 Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.*
 16. To refuse to cultivate a life of humility and service to others is to exalt oneself above Christ and to live in pride.

- *John 12:26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*