

# The Upper Room (John 13)

## **John 13.1-3: The Prologue to the Discourse (Setting the Scene)**

In setting the scene, John reminds us that there are *three* things the Lord Jesus knew. **First**, He knew that the hour of His departing to the Father had come (v.1). **Second**, He knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, in other words, Divine purpose was entrusted to the Son and He would be obedient to His Father's will. **Third**, He knew that He had come from God and was returning to God. There was a commission which must be fulfilled, and afterwards He would be in the presence of God (suggestive of holiness). If the disciples are to enjoy communion with Christ (in God's presence), cleansing will be required. So, with the prospect of Calvary looming large on the immediate horizon He gives ultimate expression to His love for the disciples. This was love 'unto the end' (*eis telos*), a term which can be taken in a temporal sense and would therefore mean He loved them to the end of His life with a love which could not fail. But the phrase is better taken in the sense of degree: He loved them to the uttermost; He loved them infinitely. *The height of perfect and complete love. He will take into His hands the feet of one He knew would deny Him (Peter) and one He knew would betray Him (Judas). Are we so gracious?*



## **John 13.4-17: The Parable of Feet Washing (Sanctification)**

**Expression of love (vv.4-5).** The Lord Jesus rises from supper to wash the disciples' feet. A Bible Encyclopaedia says: *The Orientals wore only sandals, and this washing was refreshing as well as cleanly. In the case of ordinary people, the host furnished the water, and the guests washed their own feet, but in the richer houses, the washing was done by a slave.* But not just any slave. It was a task reserved for the lowest of Gentile slaves. What a rebuke this was for the disciples! They had been discussing who amongst them was the greatest (Luke 22.24-27); they certainly would not be offering to wash one another's feet – this would have been regarded as an admission of inferiority. Instead, the Almighty God laid aside His garments! Notice the **seven** distinct actions of the Lord Jesus. He: *rises; lays aside His garments; takes a towel; girds Himself; pours water into a basin, washes and wipes.* He is taking the dress of a menial slave. This reminds us of the seven-fold stoop the Lord Jesus made in coming into the world (Philippians 2). He rose from the throne in heaven and made Himself of no reputation (He *poured Himself out*) by taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2.7). The form of God was not exchanged for the form of a servant; rather the One who subsists in the form of God was revealed in the form of a Servant. **Luke 22.27:** *I am among you as he that serveth.* These seven actions also remind us of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He rose from the grave, laid aside His garments in the tomb by passing right through them and still He girds Himself in service. **Luke 12.37:** *(The Lord) will come forth and serve them (His watching servants).* Note. There is no record of the Lord removing the towel with which he was girded for service (v.12). He ever remains in this character.

**Explanation of the parable (vv.6-11).** Peter is incredulous. 'Dost \*thou\* wash \*my\* feet?' (v.6). Peter did not yet comprehend the spiritual significance of the act, but he would come to learn it by experience (*ginosko*) 'hereafter', i.e. following Calvary and in the day of the Spirit, whom would teach them all things (14.26). We should be grateful for God's 'hereafters'. *The Lord would teach His own that there is always a deeper meaning behind the present circumstance, not always discernible at the time. What a comfort to know that nothing happens by chance to the child of God. By these words the Lord conveys that there is a spiritual lesson behind the physical experience.*

Peter wrongly thought this was merely a lesson in humility. 'Thou (being the Son of God) shalt never (for eternity) wash my (being a fisherman from Galilee) feet' (v.8). The Lord was teaching the disciples that if He did not wash (*nipto*) them, they had *no part with* (not 'in') Him. This is cleansing for communion. Without our feet being daily washed, we cannot enjoy fellowship with Him where He now is in the presence of God. 'No part' (*meros*) is often used in association with receiving an inheritance. We therefore cannot enter into the *full enjoyment* of the spiritual inheritance that is ours without daily feet washing. Of course, the Lord's feet did not need washing, rather, they were *anointed* (John 12.3).

**Verse 10** is critical to the understanding of the Lord's teaching: *Jesus saith to him, He that is washed (louo) needeth not save to wash (nipto) his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all (Judas Iscariot).* Note the different Greek words employed for 'wash'. *Louo* means to be bathed all over; *nipto* is to rinse a body part. The picture is of a person returning home from the public baths. On the way home their feet would become dusty and require washing

again, but they did not need another complete bath! Likewise, true believers in the Lord Jesus have been and remain 'washed' (*louo*). They are bathed all over and so 'clean every whit', entirely pure. This took place at conversion and is **once and for all**. It is cleansing in connection with water. The **blood** of Christ has cleansed our consciences from the *guilt* of sins = justification. **Water** cleanses us from the *defilement* of our sins = sanctification. This water pictures the cleansing and regenerating power of the word of God and Spirit of God. **John 3.5:** *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* **Ephesians 5.26:** *That he might sanctify and cleanse it (the church) with the washing (*louo*) of water by the word.* **Hebrews 10.22:** *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (blood), and our bodies washed with pure water.* **Titus 3.5** *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. This once and for all, complete washing has sanctified us, thus we are set apart unto God for His special service. We are introduced to a new order of life.*

But! We still need our feet to be washed (*nipto*) by the Lord on a regular and daily basis. The world in which we live is filthy. As believers we see things we would rather not see; we hear things we would rather not hear and this has a defiling effect upon our lives. This is not positive, deliberate sin (the truth of the Lord Jesus as our Advocate, 1 John 2.1), but the general defilement we contract on a daily basis by contact with the mass media of a world controlled by the 'god of this age' (2 Corinthians 4.4). How are our feet washed? This is a continuing aspect of the High Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus. It is as we spend time in communion with Him, reading His word and praying, that He washes away the defilement of a filthy world. **CA Coates:** *I believe our feet are washed by a fresh presentation of Christ to our affections. He brings Himself and His love before our hearts, and thus He displaces the dust of the world.*

All of the above is brought out clearly in the typical teaching of Exodus 29. At the consecration of the priests they were washed (bathed) *all over*, once and for all by Moses (a picture of the Lord Jesus). Yet, they continually needed to wash their hands and feet at the laver before serving in the presence of God (personal responsibility).

**Example of the Lord (vv.12-17).** There is yet a further lesson which the disciples need to learn (v.12). Not only does the Lord wash our feet, but we are to be engaged in washing one another's feet (v.14). Note. They called Him Master (teacher) and Lord (v.13). **Master** suggests instruction whereas **Lord** (*kurios*) suggests authority, sovereignty and supremacy. This was true; He was indeed their Master and Lord, but they had it in the wrong order. He was in fact their Lord and Master (v.14). We like to be taught (Master) and then decide whether or not to be obedient (Lord). The Divine order is the opposite! *If I am to be benefitted and blessed by His teaching, I must first of all be subject to His Lordship.* Cf. *John 7.17: If any man do His will (Lordship) then he shall know of the doctrine (Master).* *Matthew 11.29: Take my yoke (Lordship) and learn of me (Master).*

Now, we are not greater than our Lord (v.16). So, if He, as our Lord and Master has washed our feet, we have an obligation and debt to follow His example and do the same to other believers (vv.14-15). How do we wash one another's feet? Not literally of course! Not by finding fault with one another. Not by correcting and criticising! But, by ministering Christ one to another. **Leckie:** *As we meet each other and converse on the Scriptures, then we can often cleanse each other from defilement in this world.* This was the approach of the apostle Paul at Colossae. In order to meet the error that the believers were facing, he ministered the greatness of Christ. If I am to serve the saints in this way, they will need to appreciate that I love and care for them. We will need to get down to one another's feet, but what great spiritual blessing this brings (v.17).

Did Peter come to appreciate the lesson? Not only is his first epistle full of Christ, but he concludes it by writing: *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (1 Peter 5.5).*