

FOOTWASHING: EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY

John 13:12–15

JESUS RETURNS TO THE TABLE (JOHN 13:12)

- Jesus washed all of his disciples' feet—including Judas
- since the footwashing (13:1–17) introduces and probably interprets the Passion Narrative (13:1–20:29), "laid aside His garments" (13:4) and "taken His garments" (13:12) may be a picture of laying down his life and taking it up again (10:17–18)

JESUS IS LORD (JOHN 13:13)

- Jesus reminds them of their relationship to him: he is Teacher and Lord, they are disciples and servants
- a respectful way of addressing a religious leader was "Teacher" or "Rabbi" (John 1:38; 20:16; cf. Matt 7:28–29; Mark 6:2)
 - a rabbi was also called "Lord" or, in Aramaic, "Mar" (John 9:36)
- for the disciples "Lord" recognized his anointing as King—his Messiahship (Matt 16:16; John 11:27; "I am a King" 18:37; 20:28)
- Jesus was Lord because he had authority over all of God's creation (Matt 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 13:3)—including men (17:2)
 - Jesus approved of the two titles "Teacher" and "Lord"

AN EXAMPLE OF LOVE AND HUMILITY (JOHN 13:14–15)

- Jesus gives a second meaning of the footwashing: it's an example of humility, service, and love (13:12–14)
- Joseph protested when Asenath, his bride-to-be, lovingly offered to wash his feet, saying a slave girl could do it, but Asenath told Joseph, "Your feet are my feet...another shall not wash your feet" (*Joseph and Asenath* 20:1–5; ca. 100 B.C.–100 A.D.)
 - verse 14 is an *a fortiori* argument (from the greater to the lesser): if the Lord of all loves us enough to humble himself and wash our feet, we servants should love one another enough to be willing to humble ourselves and wash one another's feet
 - rendering menial service is a mutual obligation (the present tense of *opheilo* implies a continual debt or obligation):
 - to claim exemption is to say you are greater than the Lord
 - there is an implied reprimand in this exhortation for refusing to wash one another's feet at the Last Supper
 - general principle: disciples of Jesus should be willing to perform any kind of menial service for one another
- Peter may have had the long linen towel (*linteum*) in mind when he wrote "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (*egkoubomai* means "*put or tie something on oneself*" and an *egkomboma* is "any garment which is tied on" 1 Peter 5:5)
 - Jesus' attitude in washing their feet is an example of the attitude of his entire career (Phil 2:3–8)

EXHORTATION OR ORDINANCE?

- some believe footwashing is an ordinance like Baptism and the Lord's Supper—they call it the *Pedilavium*
- it was an ordinance in many early churches: Tertullian (*De Corona* 8), Athanasius (*Canon* 66), Augustine (*Letter to Januarius*)
 - it was observed once a year on Maundy Thursday after the Synod of Toledo (A.D. 694)
 - Jesus does not tell his disciples to do *what (ho)* he has done, but *as (kathos)* he has done:
 - the footwashing is just one example of love, humility, and service they are obligated to do for one another
 - Jesus was stressing an inner attitude, not giving a new rite or ordinance to the Church
 - there is no record of such an ordinance in Acts, the Epistles, or Revelation
- it was practiced by the Pope, emperors (Austria, Russia), kings (Spain, Portugal, Bavaria), and the Church of England
 - Luther called it "an abominable papal corruption"
- some church groups still practice footwashing today (Brethren, Mennonites, some Adventists and Baptists)
- much of the sickness in the Church today is caused by pride—an attitude that is unwilling to wash one another's feet