

## **THE TEACHING OF THE FOOT-WASHING** **NO. 1499**

**A SERMON  
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 12, 1879,  
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he rose from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.”  
John 13:3-5.*

IT seems to me that the true text of this enacted sermon of the foot-washing is to be found in the first verse of the chapter, “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” Our Lord washed the feet of His disciples to show that to the last moment of His communion with them He was full of the deepest and truest love to them, and was willing to perform the most menial action for their good. Nor was this all, for we may regard that one condescending act as the pledge and type of His daily kindness towards all His own which are in the world.

Those deeds of love, which the foot-washing sets forth, are continuous among us and are the sure tokens of His abiding love to us. Our Lord’s affection for His people is not a transient passion. He loved them or ever the earth was, He continues still to love them, and He always will love them when these heavens and this earth shall have passed away. In token of the continuance of His love, He has left on record this washing of His disciples’ feet, not because He did it once only, but because it is a type of what He is always doing. Even in His glory, He is caring for His saints with that same condescending love which led Him to wash their feet, and He is acting towards them spiritually in the selfsame way.

The love of Christ will assuredly endure all the strain that can ever be put upon it, for at the time when He acted as menial servant to His disciples, His love was enduring and enduring right gloriously, three great trials, any one of which might have broken it had it not been altogether omnipotent. For, first, He was about to go away from them. Much of human love needs the presence of its object for its maintenance. It is, alas, seldom true that “absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

Jesus was about to depart out of this world to the Father and with the exception of one brief interval, He was no more to walk in the midst of His chosen or sit at table with them. Out of sight, however, they would not be out of mind. Though He was just about to take the last terrible journey of death, yet He forgot them not, but graciously made them see that He would remember them still.

If you will remember the style of His going, His thoughtfulness of His friends becomes the more remarkable. He was about to leave them by a cruel and ignominious death, and according to the common conduct of men, it would not have been a wonder if He had sought pity and comfort from his friends—instead of which, He forgot Himself and all the pain, and grief, and death, which lay before Him, and spent all His time and strength upon the comfort and establishment of His followers.

When He knew that the hour was come when He must depart out of the world with pangs unutterable, He still loved His own with an all-absorbing love. There was much in the prospect of His grievous departure which might for a season have diverted His thoughts from them, but they lay so close to the center of His soul that even under such circumstances He washed their feet.

Next, it is to be remembered that our Lord was well aware that one of them had already entertained the idea of betraying Him. There sat one at the table who had held a secret interview with the Pharisees

and chief priests, and had taken money as a bribe for his Master's blood. You cannot so dissociate a leading disciple from the rest as not to feel that the whole band was thereby disgraced, and the Lord might very well have said, "I will discard My apostles, for they have betrayed Me," especially when you recollect that those who did not sell Him or betray Him, nevertheless, all forsook Him and fled—forsook Him when they ought to have rallied round Him and have spoken up for Him at the judgment seat.

None of them appeared in answer to the question, "Who shall declare His generation?" Like timid hares, they fled at the first bark of the dogs. It would not have been wonderful, had His been a human love, if He had said, "They are unworthy of Me—their confidence dies out when they see My sorrow—they betray Me—they forsake Me, therefore I will let them go and care for them no more." No, but knowing what they were, our Lord took a towel and girded Himself and washed their feet, ay, washed the traitor's feet and gently handled that heel which had been lifted up against Him—washing from it the dust gathered in its secret walk upon the traitor's errand.

***"The sight might kings themselves convert,  
God only could so far submit:  
Satan is in the traitor's heart,  
The Lord Most High is at his feet."***

This act of tender, considerate affection, performed under such circumstances, to men who acted towards Him in such ungenerous style, proves to us that His love will bear the strain of our ill-behavior, our want of fidelity, and our thousand grievous failures. Having loved His own, which are in the world, He loves them to the end.

There was a third strain and a powerful one, too. Our Savior knew that the Father had committed all things into His hands, He knew that there was but a brief interval before He should die, and then He would ascend to the Father's right hand, and sit there eternally as God over all, blessed forevermore, yet He did not disdain to do a slave's work for His beloved ones.

Oftentimes circumstances alter affections. A man grows rich and great and forgets his friends. This we would not suspect of Jesus if His had not been a greater change than we mortals can possibly experience. But His was a surpassing accession of glory—from being plunged in disgrace and shame, He was exalted to receive the homage of angels and the adoration of the whole universe. One would think that in the prospect of such honors, though He loved His own, He would not so love them as to become their servitor, and all in disarray stoop down before them, even to their feet, and do the service of a bondsman.

No wonder that Peter raised an objection suggested by reverential awe. Who could without protest receive such humble service from such hands? Yet our Lord did this with heaven's supernal glory descending on Him! He disrobed Himself, though angels longed to cast the imperial purple about His shoulders. With all things in His hand, He yet took a towel and wiped the disciples' feet.

Beloved, if our Lord's love bore these three strains, we may, like the apostle, be persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I invite you now, therefore, to see your Savior's enduring and continuing love as set forth to us in this symbolic washing of His disciples' feet and in similar acts of which it is an emblem. I shall ask you to view it, first, as *the type of His continuous love*. And secondly, as *the example of that love as it should be reflected by His people*. May the Holy Spirit be our interpreter and open to us this choice cabinet of love tokens.

**I.** First, we will look upon this washing of the disciples' feet as THE TYPE OF OUR LORD'S CONTINUOUS LOVE TO US.

We will view it in four lights. First, *Christ Jesus still acts as the host of His people*. Has it never struck you how much the life of Christ with His people lay in intense familiarity with them? How in common things He displayed His brotherhood with them? He began His ministry at a feast at Cana of Galilee, working His first miracle at a wedding. Again and again we find Him eating with His disciples. The last thing He did was to sit at supper with them and He still says to His church, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man open to me I will enter in and sup with him and he with me.”

His own figure for the opening of the new dispensation is a supper, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread at the marriage supper of the Lamb.” We do not always view our communion with Christ in this homely light and I fear we forget that the acquaintance of Christ with His people was one of great intimacy and familiar communion, for they did eat and drink with Him and He with them.

At this time also Jesus is the host of His church, providing the Gospel supper and entertaining us right royally. Instead of meat, He gives us His flesh to eat, rarest of dainties, and He cries, “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. He satisfies our mouth with good things, so that our youth is renewed like the eagles. And mark you, the Lord is a host who goes through with His divine hospitalities and leaves nothing incomplete.

In the East, the master of the house would wash his guests’ feet if they were persons whom he sought to honor. You remember how Abraham bade the angels turn into his tent and also said to them, “Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched and wash your feet.” Even so our Master entertains us at His table, not as paupers, but as guests, ay, and not as guests of an ordinary kind, but as friends of the highest class, dear to His soul, whose feet He will wash. He can truly say of us, “Since you were precious in my sight you have been honorable and I have loved you.” He treats us as distinguished persons who shall not sit among mean men, but shall have their portion among princes.

This foot-washing once done was a fair representation of that honorable entertainment which the King extends to all believing souls when He bids them come to His banqueting table and drink of the wine which He has mingled. I like to think of the Lord as my host and of myself as no mere waif and stray, but as a welcome guest to whom He is daily fulfilling all a host’s part, granting me all I want, yea, all that I wish for. He Himself gives us honors and comforts more than could be expected even from our most familiar friend. See He even washes our feet! What better token need we of His abiding love? Since He continues to entertain His whole church and treats us all as distinguished visitors, it is clear that He loves us still.

My second rendering of the passage is that *He cares for our minor matters with a personal interest*. Jesus washed their feet—this showed a very tender and familiar consideration of their little wants. That He should ease their weary hearts, I can understand, that He should enlighten their clouded brains, I can understand. But that He should wash their feet is wonderful. A little soil on their ankles—will He attend to that? Ay, that He will, and personally too. He will Himself take the basin and the towel and wash their feet. Had they been diseased with leprosy it would seem natural that He should touch them and say, “Be clean.”

Or had they been blind or crippled, it would have been probable that He would touch their eyes or heal their limbs, but a mere defilement of their feet is so a small a matter, would He attend to that? He might have left them to wash one another’s feet, might He not? Surely He had but to suggest it and they would have cheerfully waited on each other. Peter, at any rate, would have been first to obey and to his Lord’s command he would have replied, “Wash them? That I will, with delight.” But no. The Lord laid aside His own garments and took a towel, and Himself performed the kindly deed for them.

Brothers and Sisters, take your little things to Christ. Those trials of which your heart says, “They are too small. Though they prick me like thorns in the flesh and give me pain, yet they are really too trifling for me to mention in prayer.” Not so. The Lord loves us to trust Him thoroughly. This is a token of His love, of His continued affection, that even to the little things He will look—even to your small

affairs He will condescend and you may ask Him—oh, it is bold asking, but you may do it—you may ask Him to wash your feet, for He will do even that.

Do not, I pray you, cause your own love to be put under suspicion through a deficiency in your childlike confidence in your condescending Lord. I confess I have often required more faith to pray about some tiny matter of my own than about a thousand things which concern my Master's kingdom, and yet when faith is broad and large, love knows that all matters which grieve the minds of His servants touch the heart of the Master, and that all which works our good works also His delight. We must believe in Him so much that we can trust each day's cares with Him, believing that He still washes His disciples' feet by attending to their minor needs and griefs

*“He overrules all mortal things,  
And manages our mean affairs.  
On humble souls the King of kings  
Bestows His counsels and His cares.”*

We will now take a third reading of it. This washing of the disciples' feet means that *He provides refreshment for His people*. I do not suppose that many here present know what an intense pleasure it is in extremely hot countries to have the feet washed upon coming in after a weary walk. The servant from a pitcher pours forth fresh cool water upon the feet when they are aching with a long journey and hot with burning heat and dust. The result is delightfully refreshing.

Our Lord washed His disciples' feet, not only because cleansing was desirable, but also for their pleasure and solace. He takes great pleasure in giving joy to His followers. He desires that His joy should be in us that our joy may be full. He does not want us to be like paupers who have to be content with bare necessities, but to be gentlemen-commoners upon His bounty who shall be served right royally, like princes of the blood whom even the king himself does not disdain to wait upon.

When does the Lord give us these refreshments? He often does this after a journey—I mean after a severe trial. When, as pilgrims to heaven, we have been wearied by the greatness of the way, the Master comes and manifests Himself to us and refreshes us. Sometimes, also, this good cheer comes before the trial, for these disciples were now about to enter upon a very rough road—they were doomed to travel through the rest of their lives without the personal presence of their Master, and He seems to say, “Before you set out I will wash your feet. A little refreshment of this kind will strengthen you at the starting, and when you are further on your way, the very remembrance of it will come to you like a cool stream of water fresh from the pitcher.”

So the Master was pleased to refresh them after a journey and before a journey, and the refreshment was intended, as I have already said, for their souls' delight. It was a feast at which they sat and He wished them to enjoy everything that could make them happy at His table. Brethren, I have told you that this foot-washing is a type of our Lord's continuous love to us, a type which is followed by action like itself and so it is in this respect, for He is often refreshing us.

Have you not tasted of His cordials? We speak far less of our spiritual delights than we might do, but if we would open our mouths, we could tell of rapturous times, when, though weary and cast down, we have been graciously revived. Sweet promises have been applied to us by our Lord's own hands—like cold water poured upon hot and weary feet—and by this means we have been bathed in rest. A sense of His love has come over us like a dream and yet we were never more awake in our lives. We have been entranced and yet most sober and calm.

Our Lord's love is a dear delight and when we realize it, the bells of heaven seem to be ringing close against our ears and choirs of angels to have come down from glory to make music in our chambers. At such times we often wonder why we were so gladdened, but when the next day an extraordinary trouble sets in, we discover the reason and perceive that we have been well nourished that we may go a forty days' journey in the strength of this meat.

Yes, we have had those refreshments in this house when the Word has been preached or when some joyful hymn has borne us on its wings to heaven. Or best of all, at the communion table. Nor here alone, for in our own quiet chambers and in the night watches, the Lord has refreshed our hearts, for He gives songs in the night. These sweet renewals and upliftings are the tokens that having loved His own, He loves them to the end. This is the foot-washing all over again, for Christ is still busy at His works of love.

Though He lays not aside His garment today, nor comes among us like a servant, yet even from the highest throne in glory, He has ways of executing the same purposes of kindness. Still He gives us inward delight and this joy becomes our strength, making us swift as a young roe to run upon His gracious errands. The weariness which makes the feet heavier is removed by joyful fellowship, and so we are washed and refreshed. We who are His ministers need much of this, that we may be as hinds let loose, giving goodly words.

Our fourth view of the text is more full and accurate, namely, that *Christ continues to guard the purity of His church*, for though it was not all His meaning, yet by washing their feet He certainly intended their cleansing, for after He had done it He said, “You are clean: he that is washed is clean every whit.” Our Lord watches over the purification of all those who are His own, and this is a great joy to us who love His church and are concerned for her honor. To see professors defile themselves is heart-breaking work to loving pastors and our only comfort is that Jesus is quite as jealous of the holiness of His people as ever we can be.

Beloved, I live while I see your pure and holy conversation. But when I see impurity, worldliness, and evil among you, it cuts me to the heart, and were it not that I know my Lord is watching over the purity of His people, I would fain lay me down and die.

From the occasion which our Lord selected for the foot-washing, it is clear that He would have us seek the special purifying power of His presence during religious ordinances. I really cannot tell at what point of the evening’s proceedings our Lord washed His disciples’ feet and if you read the chapter, you will be somewhat puzzled. It is “before the passover,” yet it is said, “supper being ended,” which I suppose would be better rendered, “supper being in progress,” for after the washing our Lord took a sop, dipped it, and gave it to Judas, and therefore the supper was not over. Or if one supper may have come to an end, another was just commencing.

Was this feast the Passover? Was it the Lord’s Supper? Was it the first of the *agape* or love feasts, in which the early church delighted? Which was it? I do not know and I am not much concerned to know. The Lord Jesus Christ made the Passover melt into the Lord’s Supper so that you cannot tell where one ends and the other begins. No violent jerk occurred in leaving the lines of the Jewish dispensation for the Christian—for our Lord’s disciples went up to the temple to pray after the veil was rent in twain and the legal ceremonies had lost their meaning.

There was a gradual sliding of the one economy into the other and on the memorable night of the washing of the feet, I suspect that our Master ate and drank with His disciples at a common meal just as the early Christians did when they met together at their love feasts—then probably followed the actual Passover celebration, a night before its time—and this gradually dissolved into the Lord’s Supper of which the cup was “the cup after supper.” Anyhow, it does not matter much, but it is clear that we need our feet washed before we come to His table, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread.”

We also need our feet washed while we are at His table, for there is sin in our holiest things and even when we come most near to our Lord, we need that He wash us according to that text, “If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Even when we walk in the light and have clearest fellowship with God, the Lord Jesus continues to cleanse us from all sin. And I am sure we need washing after supper. When we come away from worship, we have need to get alone and cry, “Cleanse me from secret faults. Let my

want of devotion or my coldness in it be forgiven. Let my lack of zeal, my scantiness of faith, and the wandering of my heart be all washed away by You, my Lord and Master, for I much need it.”

Our Lord is so anxious for the purification of His people that He is frequently giving them a sweet sense that their transgressions in holy things are put away and thus He seems to say to them, “I have accepted your sacrifice. I have received your prayers and tears, and presented them unto My Father. I have washed you and you are clean. Go in peace.” This is one of the acts of His continuous love, this daily washing of our feet.

This frequent washing by our Lord we must all have—it is *absolutely necessary*. There is a “must” in the case—as we must be born again, so we must be made holy. It would be to our Lord’s dishonor to be followed by disciples who do not walk in integrity and uprightness. As He is Himself perfectly holy, He desires to have around Him a holy people purged from all defilement. He is so anxious that He should have such a people, that sooner than they shall not be washed, He will act the part of a servant and wash their feet Himself.

“Be you clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.” You that follow in His footsteps, walk with clean feet. Come not up with the miry clay still sticking to you, but wash, wash daily, and follow your pure Master with pure and cleansed hearts, with careful and obedient feet, so that all may see that you are the disciples of the Undefined. His ministers especially need this or the people will never cry, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings.” Brethren, pray for us that we may experience this to the highest degree.

These constant washings which are the testimonial of Christ’s continued love we must all receive. Did He not say to Peter, “If I wash you not, you have no part with me”? If Jesus does not make you holy, you are not His. Brother, if you live in sin and love it, you cannot love God. Unless He truly purges your life and makes you to walk in a clean path, you are not His, for He purges His own—such as riot in iniquity prove that they are of their father, the devil, for his works they do. Whom Jesus loves He purifies. He loved His church and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it. If, then, you are unholy, ungracious, dishonest, unrighteous—how can you say that you belong to His church? He washes the feet of all who are His disciples and if your feet are filthy, you belong not to the faithful band.

This washing must be *spiritual*—no external form will suffice. Christ washed the feet of Judas with water, but inasmuch as Judas had never been bathed in the laver of regeneration and had never been purged in the fountain of forgiving love, that washing which Christ gave to his feet did him no spiritual good. And you, my friend, may use what external ablutions you will and perform whatever religious ceremonies you please, but unless your spirit has been renewed by the Holy Ghost and your heart purged in the sight of God, you still have no part nor lot with Christ’s disciples.

The mercy is that this purification, which is so necessary and which must be of a spiritual kind, is *very readily given*. I admire the beauty of the figure in its simple ease. The Scripture does not say that our Master was nailed to the cross and poured forth a stream from His heart, in order to wash His disciples’ feet. No, although the act by which He cleansed them was very condescending, yet it was not painful or laborious. He laid aside His garments, girded on the towel, and took the pitcher and straightway proceeds therewith to wash the disciples’ feet. It was easily done and whatever there was upon the feet was soon removed—it needed no suffering, no dire grief on Jesus’ part.

For our first washing from the guilt and condemnation of sin it needed that Jesus should lay down His life and fill the cleansing fountain with atoning blood. But for the after removal of sin, the Lord uses an easy process of love. He does by His Spirit speedily cleanse us from iniquity, even as our feet are soon washed. How readily, therefore, we ought to go to Christ about the purging of our consciences from dead works. I have heard it said that the sinner finds great difficulty in going to Christ at first—that is sadly true—but I have also noticed that sometimes there is a difficulty in continuing to go to Him every day of our lives. To go as a sinner and get washed from sin needs faith, but it also requires a steady confidence to resort to Jesus under a thousand conscious failures and backsliding year after year.

I sit down in my chamber and I feel I am a forgiven man—about that I am quite sure and therefore I shall never be cast into hell. But this day I spoke unadvisedly with my lips, or I grew angry in temper, or I am conscious that I was proud, or I have been frivolous and worldly, or I have been selfish—and at the remembrance of those sins I lose my peace and feel I cannot pray. Communion with God seems gone while these faults stare me in the face. The arch-enemy whispers, “You cannot get back into your former happy state.”

At such times let us say to him, “O you enemy, I can and will return into fellowship, for my dear Lord and Master has only to take the basin and wash my feet, and this He can do right speedily.” O my brother, when a sense of sin revives upon the conscience, do not be persuaded by unbelief that there is an impossibility of escaping it, but go straight away to your Master and say, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,” and He will cleanse you and once again you shall joy and rejoice in Him. Remember the words of our hymn concerning the fountain of divine grace—

*“This fountain from guilt not only makes pure,  
And gives, soon as felt, an infallible cure,  
But if guilt removed return and remain,  
Its power may be proved again and again.”*

Mark, however, that this *washing must be given us by our Lord Himself*. He must first wash our feet before we can wash one another’s feet. I think I see the Well-Beloved now as He pours the pure water on their ankles! Mark how He takes their feet into His kind and tender hands and washes them clean, and then He wipes them with the towel! He continues to do this to us even now in a spiritual sense. It is His own dear love that takes away sin from the conscience so that it does not linger there to foul and mar it.

Often I think He seems to kiss those feet and say, “Dear child, you are clean now. Watch your footsteps and keep your garments that they be not defiled again. Yet even if they are, I will wash them again, for I live still to cleanse you and put away your transgressions. I mean ere long to make you as perfect as Myself, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.”

Nor may I leave this point till I bid you mark the condescension of this personal washing, for Abraham did not, himself, wash the angels’ feet, but said, “Let a little water be fetched and wash your feet.” And Joseph did not personally wash his brethren’s feet, but the steward of his house brought them in and gave them water, and they washed their feet. But Jesus does it all Himself. O my soul, bow down before Him and adore His unparalleled love.

Thus I have shown you that this foot-washing is a symbol of our Redeemer’s continuous acts of love. Jesus is always our host and therefore He washes our feet. He always cares for our little matters and in this sense washes even our feet. He is always providing refreshments for His people in their pilgrimage to heaven and thus He washes their feet. He is always guarding the purity of His church and people and so in the fullest sense He washes their feet.

**II.** Secondly, we come to practical matters as to ourselves. AS THE MODEL OF HIS OWN LOVE IN HIS PEOPLE our Lord washed their feet.

The love of the saints is their Lord’s love in them, which has filled their vessels to the brim and is now running over. Christ’s love is the sun and our love is the moonlight which we are able to give forth because the sun has looked upon us. Love is first freely imparted and then plenteously diffused. Jesus says, “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water.” And then again, “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” What we receive we impart, and the grace which works *in* us at the first ere long works *by* us.

Let us look at this foot-washing in reference to ourselves and our duty and office in the midst of our brethren. We learn, first, that *there will always be need of service in the church* and always need of service in the particular direction of promoting purity. The apostles were twelve strong men, surely they

did not require a servant! Yes, they did. They must have a servant. They could not do without a servant and therefore their Lord supplied the vacant place. And now that the Lord is gone, His church still needs servants and servants to wash feet, or else all will go amiss. On earth the church will never be so clean that it will have no need of foot-washing. The church will never be able to dispense with purifying service till the Lord shall come.

You, my brother Christian, may never expect to join a church where there will be nothing for you to do—do not even desire such a position of idleness. We shall never get among a community so pure that we shall see no faults in our brethren and never shall we ourselves be so good that they will see no faults in us. Therefore, let us render and receive a happy, mutual service in the church by which the sanctification of one and all will be promoted. In those words, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another’s feet,” our Lord speaks as though He would have us reckon upon acting as servants for the benefit of each other. Let us cheerfully accept the position.

We see next that *we are not to advocate the abrogation of such service*, or pretend that we have reached a point at which we can dispense with it. The stoic would say, “Washing feet! What is the good of it? What need of washing a man’s feet? If he needs it, let him wash them himself. The first law of nature is self-love—let every man see to it himself. What have I to do with my brother’s feet? Let him wash his own. What has he to do with my feet? Let him mind his own business.”

That is anti-Christianity, but Christianity says, “I am willing that others should help me to be holy and I am also willing to help others to the same end. I am so imperfect that I am willing that anybody should point out my faults and rebuke me for them, and I am so anxious that my brother should be holy that I will lovingly help him to conquer sin.” Sometimes it is more humbling to have your own feet washed than to wash other people’s and hence sometimes our naughty pride says, “You shall never wash my feet.” Yet it must be so and pride must sit still like a child and be both washed and wiped.

Again, I perceive that to many it is easy to stoop to the poor, but hard to yield to their equals in estate or in ability. I know those who will do a thousand things for a poor man, but they would not do the like service to those of their own rank. You say, “As for that poor soul, I do not mind conceding many points to him, but this other man will crow over me if I yield to his weakness, and he will expect me to do it again, and so I may be thought to be a person of no spirit, who can easily be put upon and made a general hack.”

That also is the speech of anti-Christianity. True Christianity impels us to render and to accept that service which is mutual among true saints. He who kindly reminds me of my faults helps me to be better—let me not be angry with him, but value him for his faithfulness. On the other hand, I must never hint at a failing in a brother unless I believe that he will be the better for it and even then I must do it gently, for I am not to scald my brethren’s feet, but to use cool, sparkling, living water in the washing of them. Refining by fire is God’s work—refreshing with water is ours. We are to rebuke in love, not in wrath. We are to wipe as well as wet, to comfort as well as correct.

In the world, they criticize—that is the business of the public press and it is very much the business of private circles. Hear how gossips say, “Do you see that spot? What a terrible walk that man must have had this morning—look at his feet! He has been very much in the mire as you can see, for there are the traces upon him.” That is the world’s way. Christ’s way is very different. He says nothing, but takes the basin and begins to wash away the stain. Do not judge and condemn, but seek the restoration and the improvement of the erring.

Say to your faulty brother, “I am very anxious if I may take away your spots. I would not wish to point them out if I did not feel that I should thereby help you to get rid of them.” I fear that many professors follow the world’s way and indulge in what we call gossip, which is usually slander and misrepresentation, or in other words, lying. The best of men may have to endure this, but it is a great pity it should be so. Why will people find pleasure in throwing dirty water over their neighbors? Do you make yourself any better by blackening others? Do you expect to rise by pulling others down? Scorn such attempts. An ambition which suggests such evil means is only worthy of a fiend. O you who truly



love your Lord, cease from cruel witticisms, and spend your strength in humble and loving washings of your brethren's feet and so shall we all become happier, because more like our Lord.

This foot-washing among disciples *should be done very cheerfully*. Nobody asked the Master to bring the basin—no one would have thought of such a thing. It was His own heart of love that made Him do it, out of spontaneous affection for those whom He had chosen. Let us also be ready to perform any office for our brethren, however lowly. If there is a position in the church where the worker will have to toil hard and get no thanks for it, take it and be pleased with it. If you can perform a service which few will ever seek to do themselves or appreciate when performed by others, yet occupy it with holy delight. Covet humble work and when you get it, be content to continue in it.

There is no great rush after the lowest places—you will rob no one by seeking them. The first place we must have an election for and poll the whole community, but for the very lowest there is no great ambition—therefore select such a place and while you will escape envy, you will also gain a quiet conscience. If we were Christ's more thoroughly, we should cheerfully and voluntarily push ourselves into the places of self-sacrifice, counting it our chief honor to serve God and the church in ways which are obscure and despised, because in so doing we shall be saved from the pharisaic spirit which desires the praise of man.

When we do anything for Christ's people, not only should we do it cheerfully, but *thoroughly*. How well our Lord took up the servant's place. He disrobed Himself until He stood prepared for His task in much the same undress as an attendant at the Turkish baths, who takes off all his upper garments. Our Lord was ready to do His work. He put off all that would hinder Him, for He meant real washing and not a mere form. When you are going to serve your brethren, do it heartily. Give your Lord zealous and earnest service. Strip to your shirt sleeves, if need be, to serve Christ and His people. Do not attempt to play the fine gentleman—is it not far nobler to be a real Christian?

Observe how each point of our Lord's procedure is marked by the evangelist. "He rose from supper and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself. After that He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." He might have left them to wipe themselves, but no, He must finish His love work. "He wiped them with the towel wherewith he was girded."

Whenever you serve a brother for Christ's sake, do it thoroughly. Begin it heartily, go on with it steadfastly, and do not leave off till the deed is done. If anything is to be done slovenly, let it be something which is done for yourself, but Jesus and His people must have the best which our ability can render. Give the saints of God the pick and choice of your productions—if you wash their feet, wash them well. The foot of the meanest servant of Christ is more honorable than the head of the greatest emperor that ever wore a diadem. It will be seen in eternity to be a greater honor to have performed the most menial service for a true child of God than to have been honored and decorated with stars and garters in the service of the mightiest monarch. Lay yourselves out for thorough service of your Lord in His people and try to be always doing this.

I feel quite sure of my ground in having said that this foot-washing was meant to be a type of what our Lord is always doing, because He puts it thus, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet." Evidently the inference would be, "If I did this but once, you ought to wash one another's feet once." But since the moral is, "You ought always to wash one another's feet," the doctrine is that in effect our Lord is always washing the feet of His people.

Let us carry out the lesson and be always in a servant's attitude among our fellow disciples. Let us always be on bended knee with the basin and the towel near at hand. Let us always be willing to relieve those who are in need, to restore those who stumble, to reclaim those who wander, and to edify and perfect all the body of Christ as far as our ability will permit. Be it ours to promote the holiness of our entire fellow Christians at all times.

You say it is the pastor's business to look after the church. I know it is, but the true pastor's wisdom is to set the members of the church looking after one another. "Bear you one another's burdens and so

fulfill the law of Christ.” In my own case, the pastorate of one person over five thousand members is ridiculous, unless it be exercised by impressing all the members with the necessity, the duty, the privilege of mutual oversight—each one seeking to do good to the other according as he has opportunity. Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus, who washed His disciples’ feet. Love one another, I do implore you, and in honor prefer one another. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let brotherly love continue and ever so live that when your Master looks down upon you He may joy and rejoice in you, as I trust He does this day.

May this, our beloved church, be for many a year a pattern of unity and peace within, and of strength and activity without, so that a witness may be borne for pure and undefiled religion, and a model set up in which shall be seen the handiwork of the Spirit, who creates love in the hearts of the saints. Little children, love one another. Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 13:1-17**  
**HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—186, 262, 263**

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Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).