

THE ORDINANCE OF FOOTWASHING: THE KINGDOM COME

By James W. Stivers

©James W. Stivers, 2002
PO Box 8701
Moscow, ID 83843

Contents

Chapter 1: The Forgotten Rite

Chapter 2: As a Baptism

Chapter 3: The Laver and the Priesthood

Chapter 4: As a Sign and Seal of the Covenant

Chapter 5: The Ordeal of Jealousy

Chapter 6: The Messianic Kingdom

Chapter 7: As a Family Ordinance

Chapter 8: The Johannine Community

Chapter 1: The Forgotten Rite

But Jesus, because he knew that the Father had given everything into his hands and that he came from God and was going to God, Rose from supper and laid aside his robe; and he took a cloth and tied it around his loins. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of his disciples and to wipe them with the cloth which was tied around his loins.

When he came to Simon Peter, Simon said to him, Are you, my Lord, going to wash my feet? Jesus answered, saying to him, What I am doing, you do not know now, but later you will understand. Then Simon Peter said to him. You will never wash my feet. Jesus said to him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with me. Simon Peter said to him, Then, my Lord, wash not only my feet but also my hands and my head.

Jesus said to him, He who has bathed does not need except to wash his feet only, for he is already all clean; so you are all clean, but not everyone of you. For Jesus knew him who was to betray him; therefore he said, Not everyone of you is clean.

When he had washed their feet, he put on his robes and sat down; and he said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and what you say is well, for I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, how much more should you wash one another's feet? For I have given you this as an example, so that just as I have done to you, you should also do.

Truly, truly, I say to you, There is no servant who is greater than his master; and no apostle who is greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them

- John 13:3-17 (Aramaic)

The above account is the foundation for a peculiar custom found among some of the so-called minor Christian sects (Pentecostal, Mennonite, United Brethren, Adventist, etc.): the washing of the saints' feet. Among mainline and

respectable denominations, it is almost never discussed. Reflecting the influence of the Celtic tradition [\[1\]](#), the Anglican Church provides for the observance of the custom annually on Maundy Thursday, the day before Good Friday. Other than that exception, organized Christianity prefers to view Footwashing as a cultural thing, unique to the era of Jesus and his disciples. Footwashing has never been raised to the level of Baptism and the Eucharist, as an ordinance of the Church and a means of God's grace. I believe that has been a tragic mistake. [\[2\]](#)

In the American context, the notion of grown men washing each others feet seems ridiculous. Every sermon I have ever heard which addressed this issue has been pejorative to the idea of its sacramental status. The excuse is offered that we do not wear sandals in America (except for hippies, I suppose), so we do not have dirty feet to wash every time we come in from the street. Footwashing is not an American custom and is not needed in worship. We are told that this story was to teach humility and was a one-time event. We have other ways of learning humility.

This line of reasoning sounds all very good. But we are never told what those "other ways" of learning humility are. And the logic confuses the utility of Footwashing with its spiritual significance. Communion is never meant to feed the hungry, but to memorialize the Atonement. Likewise, Footwashing is not concerned with cleaning feet but with priestly dominion. Saying that we can learn the principle of humility without doing humble things makes as much sense as being sorry for something bad you have done without ever saying so. It is a Gnostic deception. Gnostics used to worship by just sitting. Meditation was popular with them. Preaching was never straight-forward. Words were riddles to be decoded. Gnostics had little use for kneeling, weeping, laughing, or raising their hands in worship. They just sat there and played mind games. The Early Church rejected Gnosticism while absorbing many of its principles. The Church requires water Baptism and observes Holy Communion, but it could never see its way to accept Footwashing.

One of the reasons Footwashing has not become a sacrament is because it is mentioned only once in the Scriptures. Scholars argue that we have no indication that it was practiced in the early Church as an ordinance (although there is an allusion to it in 1 Timothy 5:10[\[3\]](#) and Hebrews 6:2). Communion was enjoined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. He makes no mention of Footwashing in that text. Footwashing does not enjoy the same degree of Apostolic ratification as does Baptism or Communion. Yet, I get the impression from these theologians that perhaps Communion would not have been accepted either, were it not for Paul's blessing. Does this betray a theological bias among

Protestants? Are they so blinded by their "Paulism" that they cannot bring themselves to believe or practice anything that was not approved by Paul? Is it not enough that our Lord said it?

The fact of the matter is that the Footwashing in John 13 is not an isolated incident without typological significance. It has a rich historical and theological context in the Old Testament. It hearkens back to the Levitical priesthood and the brazen laver at the entrance of the Holy Place. It teaches the cleansing power of the Word of God, and much, much more.

Footwashing is not a marginal issue, but lies, as I propose to show, at the center of building the Kingdom of God on the earth.

Chapter 2: As a Baptism

Jesus answered, saying to him, What I am doing, you do not know now, but later you will understand.

- John 13:7

It was impossible that our Lord's disciples could have understood what He was doing to them in washing their feet on the night of His betrayal. It was enough that they knew it was a test of fellowship (John 13:8). The reason the disciples could not have understood what Jesus was doing was simply this: it involved the transference of priesthoods and at that point, the disciples saw Christ as a prophet and king, not as a priest.

After the Crucifixion, the reality of Christ's priesthood became clear to His followers. Their understanding matured until it culminated in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews centers its theme on the contrast between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Melchisedec. The Levitical priesthood was the shadow of Melchisedec, the type to the anti-type. Before we can come to grips with Footwashing in the New Covenant, we need to understand Footwashing among the Levitical priests in the Old.

While the terms "washing" and "baptism" are different words in the Greek, they are the same in Hebrew. Greek scholars, of course, readily acknowledge that *baptisma*, which means "to wash" or dip, is the word from which we get "baptism". In the Greek, it is a term which refers to a ceremonial washing (which was not unique to Christianity, by the way) in distinction from usual bathing which in the Greek is *nipto*. However, there is no such distinction in the Old Testament. The same term is used to describe both the ceremonial washings of the priests and the mundane task of footwashing (*rachats*, e.g. Genesis 43:24; Exodus 40:31, et al).

Considering that the language of Palestine was Aramaic (a sister dialect of Hebrew), we would have to say that John the Baptist was simply known to the people as "John the Washer". Jesus taught in Aramaic; so His words had to be

translated into Greek by the Gospel writers. It is also probable that the Epistle of Hebrews was written originally in Aramaic.

Having said that, the reference in Hebrews 6:2 to the doctrine of baptisms (plural) takes on striking significance. It suggests that **Footwashing is a foot baptism** and is a part of the foundation of the elementary principles of Christ (Hebrews 6:1). Is it possible that the Church cannot advance to perfection because, by neglecting *foot baptism*, it lacks a completed foundation? A perfect house cannot be expected from an imperfect foundation.

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.

- Hebrews 6:1-3, KJV

To what other "baptisms" could the Apostle have been referring? He could not have been referring to any ritual washings associated with the Pharisees. Jesus roundly condemned those customs (e.g. Mark 7:1-8). We cannot imagine any Christian making them a part of Christian doctrine. The only other "washing" or "baptism" in the New Testament is the foot baptism of John 13.

Notice the parallel with the Levitical washings (baptisms):

And the LORD said to Moses, And you shall anoint the laver and its base, and sanctify it. Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water.

And he set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and put water there to wash with it. And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet at it; When they went into the tent of the congregation, and when they came near to the altar, they washed; as the LORD commanded Moses.

- Exodus 40:1, 11-12, 30-33

Here was the Old Testament Footwashing. It was a baptism reserved for the priests during their service at the Tabernacle (and later the Temple). This fact

immediately establishes the believer's priestly status in the New Covenant. Jesus, the new Moses who has fulfilled all Scripture, has ordained a new priesthood to replace the Aaronic priesthood. With Aaron, we find an initial baptism, covering the entire body. Later, he washes his hands and his feet alone in order to minister. Compare it with our Lord's reply to Peter when he pled for his head, his hands, and his feet be washed:

He who has bathed does not need except to wash his feet only, for he is already all clean.

- John 13:10

One of the differences between the washings of Old Testament priests and New Covenant priests is that we no longer wash our hands (hand baptism). Old Covenant men had unclean hands; they were unrighteous men whose sins were laid up until the release on the Day of Atonement once a year. Christ's Atonement was once for all time. We are truly clean, truly righteous. Our hands are clean to exercise dominion upon the earth. Our feet are dirty, however, because the earth awaits redemption. That redemption cannot occur until the sons of God are manifested (Romans 8:18-22). The Dust is the place of the Serpent's dominion. The Christian crushes the Serpent's head, but the Serpent bites his heel. The dirt was unclean because of death. The Serpent eats dust. We do not eat dust; we walk on it. Consequently, sin affects the feet only (Genesis 3:14-15). [\[4\]](#)

From this typology, we can say that while Baptism cleanses the believer and makes him fit to enter the sanctuary. Footwashing makes him fit for ministry (see 1 Peter 3:21 and the "answer of a good conscience"). Thus, while full body baptism need only occur once as an initiatory rite into the faith, foot baptism is a rite which must be practiced repeatedly. That was why Jesus introduced it during the first Communion. Since the Lord's Supper was meant to be practiced periodically, so was Footwashing.

There is more to be learned from the Levitical footwashing, the laver, and the ministry in the Tabernacle. We will pursue these aspects with their New Covenant applications in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Laver and the Priesthood

Jesus said to him, He who has bathed does not need except to wash his feet only, for he is already all clean; so you are all clean . . .

- John 13:7

In the last chapter, we identified footwashing as a *foot baptism* which hearkened back to the Levitical priesthood and the ministry in the Tabernacle. Now, I want us to look at the significance of the laver. Theologians will sometimes note how the layout of the Tabernacle appears to be a theological replica of the cosmos.^[5] As it is in the cosmos, the center of the Tabernacle was the Throne of God (i.e. the mercy seat of the Holy of Holies). God's Throne in Heaven is surrounded by the angelic hosts. Likewise, the mercy seat was covered by the cherubs and the tapestry of the sanctuary was embossed with images of them, also.

Leaving the Holy of Holies, the High Priest would re-enter the Holy Place as he left God's presence. He would now be leaving Heaven and returning to Earth. On the one hand was the golden candlestick, shaped as a tree, like the Tree of Life. On the opposite side was the table of shewbread, the Bread which came down from heaven. The Holy Place is Earth, but it is Earth in Paradise, before the Fall of Man and after the restoration in Jesus Christ.

Leaving Paradise, the High Priest returns to the Courtyard the place of sanctified, but not as yet restored creation. There is the sacrificial altar and the laver, the place where he washed before entering into Paradise (the Holy Place) and then into Heaven (the Holy of Holies). What did the laver represent?

The laver was a huge tub replaced periodically with clean water. It was made of brass so pure it served as a mirror. The Priest could see his reflection in precise detail as he washed. The laver provided the Priest with a standard for self-evaluation, to make certain he was presentable to God. For if he was not properly prepared, he would have perished. This use of the laver for cleansing

as well as self-judgment has striking similarities to the New Testament description of the Word of God. Consider the following references:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved his church and gave himself for it, That he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water and by the word, In order to build for himself a glorious church, without stain or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

- Ephesians 5:25-27[\[6\]](#)

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who sees his face in a mirror; For he sees himself and goes his way and forgets how he looked. But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty and abides in it is not merely a hearer of the word which can be forgotten but a doer of the work, and this man shall be blessed in his labor.

- James 1:22-25

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

- John 15:3 (KJV)

The Old Testament enjoins the cleansing use of the Law:

With what shall a young man cleanse his way in order that he may observe thy commandments? With my whole heart have I sought thee; O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy words have I impressed on my heart, that I might not sin against thee.

- Psalms 119:9-11

The book of Hebrews tells us that all these things pertaining to the Levitical system were shadows of the eternal realities of God's Kingdom. This is readily seen in the sacrificial system which foreshadowed Christ (Hebrews 10:1). It is also true of the Tabernacle itself and its furnishings (9:1-11).

If we can say that the laver represents the cleansing properties of the Word of God, then foot baptism represents the daily cleansing we receive from meditating on the Scriptures. It is probable that a priest had his feet and hands washed with the help of a Levite assistant. He did not dip his hands and feet into the laver and pollute the entire basin. The water was dipped out and poured over the priest's hands and feet. Likewise, New Testament foot baptism requires one to be washed by a fellow believer. What this means should be obvious: Christians are to provide an edifying influence on one another on a daily basis. So says the *Didache*:

My child, day and night remember him who preaches God's word to you, and honor him as the Lord, for where His lordship is spoken of, there is the Lord. Seek daily contact with the saints to be refreshed by their discourses.

- 4:1-2[7]

There seems to be a significant departure from the Old Testament pattern in that the New Testament believer-priest has his feet washed *after* the Communion Meal *after* his fellowship with God. In the Levitical system, the footwashing was required *before* entering the sanctuary to minister. The Levitical priest washed before entering into God's world and the restored cosmos.[8] Could it be that now the Tabernacle has been enlarged to include the entire cosmos? Consider these passages:

Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the time is coming, when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will they worship the Father. For God is Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

- John 4:21 & 23

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

- Matthew 6:10

Texts like these teach us that the entire world is becoming a sanctuary. Through Christ's Atonement which rent the Temple veil, we can worship God anywhere. Like Communion, Footwashing is a memorial of a work that is already done. It is a ceremonial confession to the cleansing and restorative power of God's Word. It is an acknowledgment that the Kingdom has come.

Communion is the ordinance which takes the Christian into the heavens to eat with God. Footwashing brings him down to earth to fellowship and build-up the brethren. While in Communion, we present ourselves and minister to God, Footwashing requires the presentation of us to the Church, to minister to one another. We shall take-up the covenantal aspects of this in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: As a Sign and Seal of the Covenant

Jesus said to him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.

-John 13:8

Let us review some of the main points we have made in this essay so far. In the first chapter we introduced Footwashing as an aspect of worship with a long history in various minor Christian sects. Mainline Christianity has rarely given it recognition and that grudgingly. Never has Footwashing been held on the same level of importance as has Communion. At best, it has been treated as a second-class ordinance, even though our Lord commended it with a strong benediction:

For I have given you this as an example, so that just as I have done to you, you should also do. Truly, truly, I say to you, There is no servant who is greater than his master; and no apostle who is greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

- John 13: 15-17

"Blessed are you if you do them." Christ promises a blessing if we are a "doer of the Word".

In the second chapter, we identified Footwashing as a foot baptism. While the initiatory rite of baptism should only occur once, foot baptism should be as frequent as Communion; for Footwashing was an integral part of that first Communion meal that Jesus had with His disciples (John 13:2,4,8-10). A Communion meal cannot be considered complete without Footwashing.

Finally, in the previous chapter, we found that the theological significance of foot baptism was all mingled with that of the priesthood of the believer, hearkening back to the Levitical priesthood, but which has been replaced by

that of Melchisedec (Hebrews 5). Believers are priests, ministering to one another (1 Corinthians 12:14-26). And since this ordinance signifies the cleansing and transforming power of the WORD MADE FLESH (John 1:14), it should not surprise us that Paul gives greater emphasis upon the gift of prophecy as one which edifies the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:3). The *spoken* WORD, mingled with faith, moves mountains (Matthew 21:21). The gift of prophecy, unlike tongues, is a public gift, and presupposes the gathering of the Church for mutual edification (1 Corinthians 14). So it is among believers, that as we speak to one another in daily conversation, our words, mingled with Scripture, provide edification and cleansing.

Since many symbolisms of the Old Testament all converge and are fulfilled in Christ, it should be expected that the ordinances of worship should also be consolidated in the New Testament. For instance, water baptism is taken from the various ceremonial washings of the Old Testament priesthoods, the crossing of the Red Sea, circumcision, and more. The Lord's Supper consolidates the Old Testament feasts, sacrifices, and covenantal meals all into one memorial rite.

Likewise with Footwashing, it is an ordinance with varied aspects and applications. It has a pedagogical value in teaching the humility of a servant. It teaches us that we serve a God who has a servant's heart. Service, humility, and self-sacrifice characterize the horizontal relationships of the Holy Trinity. We rule by serving and we serve by shining the light of God's Word in our conversation and behavior.

So, while Communion concerns itself with our vertical relationship with God at our Father's table, Foot baptism has to do with our horizontal relationships. The Lamb that was slain is the focus of Communion. The Church, empowered by the Spirit of God and made into the image of Christ by conforming to His law-word, is the focus of Footwashing.

There is more, but I must digress briefly to answer an objection. Some say that these are mere symbols, the ordinances are just symbolism. In which I reply, "Yes, they are just symbols. But they are God's symbols and He honors His symbols. Men invent symbols all the time. Witness Freemasonry. Witness organized sports. Witness the red, white, and blue. If man's pathetic symbols have power, how much more do God's, our Creator!

The importance of the Christian ordinances ought not to be underestimated. They should still be observed, even if they are not understood or accompanied

by an emotional charge. As we are taught by the Great Commandment, we do them for God, and for one another, not for ourselves (Mark 12:29-34).

Without the ordinances, a man can say he is a Christian, but only in the same sense that a man can call himself a husband, yet never has copulated with his wife: he is one in name only. "Faith without works is dead." Confession is the beginning. I cannot truly call God my Father, if I refuse to eat at His table. I cannot truly call a man "brother," if I refuse to wash his feet.

When we look at organized Christianity, what do we see? For the most part, we see the well-intentioned religion of men. It bears little resemblance to what we see in the Bible. Without Footwashing, the Church is still in the heavens at Christ's table. With Footwashing, the Church comes down to Earth and brings the Kingdom of Christ with her; for Christ is the Head and Lord of the Church. Where the Church is, there is Christ.

On this I am compelled to quote Augustine at length:

But apart from this moral understanding of the passage [our text in John 13], we remember that the way in which we commended to your attention the grandeur of this act of the Lord's was that, in washing the feet of disciples who were already washed and clean, the Lord instituted a sign, to the end that, on account of the human feelings that occupy us on earth, however far we may have advanced in our apprehension of righteousness, we might know that we are not exempt from sin; which He thereafter washes away by interceding for us, when we pray the Father, who is in heaven, to forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. . .

Can we say that even a brother may cleanse a brother from the contracted stain of wrongdoing? Yea, verily, we know that of this also we were admonished in the profound significance of this work of the Lord's, that we should confess our faults one to another, and pray for one another, even as Christ also maketh intercession for us. . .

For what else does the Lord apparently intimate in the profound significance of this sacramental sign, when He says, "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you;" but what the apostle declares in the plainest terms, "Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye"? Let us therefore forgive one

another his faults, and pray for one another's faults, and thus in a manner be washing one another's feet.

It is our part, by His grace, to be supplying the service of love and humility: it is His to hear us, and to cleanse us from all the pollution of our sins through Christ, and in Christ; so that what we forgive to others, that is, loose on earth, may be loosed in heaven.[\[9\]](#)

- Emphasis added

Notice how Augustine elevates this ordinance to a sacramental status. As a sign and seal of the Covenant, the visible Church cannot be built without Footwashing. Footwashing is a sign and seal of the Church. Judas Iscariot was present for the Communion Meal. He did not leave to commit his betrayal until after the Footwashing. The ordinances manifest the immanence of God in worship. It brings people close to God for evaluation, judgment and salvation. Closeness to God brings life to the righteous. Closeness to God for the sinner burns him up; for God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Because he was unwilling to confess his treason, Footwashing made things too hot for Judas.

In this respect, Communion and Footwashing, in tandem, serve as an Ordeal of Jealousy (Numbers 5). It is as an Ordeal of Jealousy that we see Christ's reign manifested in these two ordinances.

That will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The Ordeal of Jealousy

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them

-John 13:17

The Kingdom of God is manifested on Earth and in history through the workings of Divine Providence, the sanctions of His Divine Law, and the prophets of the Church.[\[10\]](#) In a special sense, it is manifested gloriously among God's people in worship. Our Lord said that when any two or three of us gather in His Name, His presence is there with us (Matthew 18:18-20). He comes to save and to judge.

Thus, we find the ordinances are of particular importance in this regard. They are the focal point in Christian worship, when the people of God formally present themselves to His table and to one another. It becomes a time of judgment and redemption, as the Apostle declares:

Therefore whosoever shall eat of the Lord's bread and drink of his cup unworthily shall be guilty of the blood and body of the Lord. For this reason, let a man examine himself and eat of this bread and drink of this cup. For he who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks to his condemnation; for he does not discern the Lord's body. This is the reason many are sick and weak among you, and many dying. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by our Lord, we are simply chastened, so that we may not be condemned with the world.

- 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Judgment unto redemption - that is the effect of the Lord's chastening of His people. He does not use the rod upon bastards (Hebrews 12:5-11), for they await judgment unto damnation. Thus, Communion is presented by the Apostle here as a source of physical consequences to the believer if he is found unfaithful:

But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

- 1 Corinthians 10:20-22

This aspect of Communion as a test of faithfulness has direct relation to the typology found in Numbers 5 concerning the Ordeal of Jealousy:

And the priest shall set the woman before YAHWEH, and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering; and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causes the curse.

- verse 18

On the larger context of this Ordeal, theologian Ray Sutton offers this commentary:

The most prominent feature of the whole occasion, however, is the jealousy of the husband. In the Bible, envy is a sin, for it is covetousness; but jealousy, the guarding of what is properly one's own, is not a sin but a virtue. God is Jealous. Wherever the Bible mentions the jealousy of the Divine husband, one will find an ordeal of jealousy for the church, the bride.

God's jealousy is accompanied by ordeal. He uses the signs and seals of the covenant itself to bring about eventual judgment if the person involved is guilty.

Christian baptism enters one into an Ordeal of Jealousy in that it unites him with Jesus' baptism-death. To have put on Christ through baptism is to have put on His Ordeal of Jealousy. Of course, Christ is the one who bears it. Thus, baptism symbolizes the judgment waters that would have come if it were not for the cleansing of Jesus. In other words, baptism cleanses, but too

much water drowns. That is judgment unto death (i.e. the Red Sea and the flood).

The second completes the picture. The Lord's Supper symbolically visualizes eating Jesus' body. So, one ingests what he had been baptized with. If, however, he eats Jesus unlawfully, he drinks unto his own judgment. The two sacraments are therefore inseparable, and the points of contact with the Ordeals of Jealousy are clear. God is still a jealous God (1 Corinthians 10:22) and he makes this known as He has done in the past.

- *The Geneva Papers* [\[11\]](#)

Rev. Sutton argues for an organic unity to the Testaments and the sacraments but fails to mention the significance of Footwashing (foot baptism). This is unfortunate. For at that first Communion Meal, it was not complete until Jesus had washed His disciples' feet. And as an Ordeal of Jealousy purging the Church, Judas Iscariot did not leave the supper, until *after* his feet were washed. Thus, the Communion Meal as an Ordeal of Jealousy is not finished until the Footwashing:

Jesus said to him, He who has bathed does not need except to wash his feet only, for he is already all clean; so you are all clean, but not everyone of you. For Jesus knew him who was to betray him; therefore he said, Not everyone of you is clean.

- John 13: 10-11

After Jesus finished the Footwashing, He sat down and explained to His disciples what had just happened. Judas realized that he was that wicked servant (vs. 27, cf. Matthew 24:45-51). When Jesus offered Judas a piece of bread, he took it and immediately excommunicated himself (v. 26-30, 18). [\[12\]](#)

In not practicing Footwashing it allows the Church a nominal Christianity. People can eat the Lord's Supper, as did Judas, and remain in fellowship because the rubber never meets the road. In so doing, organized Christianity allows self-deception and allows for the Church to fill with tares. There is no accountability, no judgment, and no cleansing. The Lord's Table becomes the Table of Devils and of a syncretistic Christianity, a Gnostic Christianity (1 Corinthians 10).

Refusing to partake of the sacraments because of the fear of judgment is no solution. It is self-excommunication and a unity with the heathen. It takes us out of God's providential care and discipline, and exposes us to satanic attack. Do we here find the reason for Church' impotence? [\[13\]](#)

If the Church is powerless to complete the Great Commission, then we have a failure of the very mechanism required to fulfill Bible prophecy and bring the consummation of history. The eschatological dimension of this ordinance will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: The Messianic Kingdom

But Jesus, because he knew that the Father had given everything into his hands and that he came from God and was going to God, Rose from supper and laid aside his robe; and he took a cloth and tied it around his loins.

- John 13:7

For those of you who are not familiar with theological jargon, the term "eschatology" refers to the end of time. Literally meaning "the doctrine of the last things," it deals with the Biblical subjects of judgment, prophecy, the resurrection, and so on. My focus here is on how Footwashing advances fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and hastens the consummation of history (2 Peter 3:12). This eschatological dimension accounts for the series title: *The Kingdom Come*. One's view of Bible prophecy does not necessarily have to complicate your view of Footwashing. Obedience does not require understanding, but it does help. And it does make a difference. Understanding is prerequisite to Christian self-government. Self-originated choice to do what is right, without the need of external coercion and restraints, is what we mean by "integrity" which is the essence of holiness. We expect this with maturity: understanding resulting in right choices.

Fortunately, we can practice the ordinances of the faith without understanding their full meaning. I am confident that the Philippian jailer did not fully understand the subtle meaning of baptism, but he and his household were baptized anyway (Acts 16).

I am a postmillennialist, and as a postmillennialist I see the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20) and the Messianic Kingdom (Matthew 28:18) as one and the same. Hermeneutically sound dispensationalists make a distinction between the two. And that need not be a problem. However, a powerful heresy of hyper-dispensationalism engulfed American fundamentalism during the 20th Century. It denied that we are in the Messianic Kingdom. Your views on the Millennium are not important in terms of your Christian salvation. But your

view on the Messianic reign is critical. To deny Christ's present kingdom and rule of the nations is a satanic deception. It is a denial of the sovereignty of God, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Divine Providence, and more. It is a surrender of life and the world to the devil and humanistic man.

Then will come the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. And the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

- 1 Corinthians 15:24-26

Notice the reference here to "his feet" (see also Ephesians 1:22). Christ subjugates all principalities and powers and places them under his feet, "making a show of them openly" (Colossians 2:15). We are His feet - His messengers - and it is through us that He tramples the Serpent's head (Genesis 3:15 cf. Romans 16:20). [\[14\]](#)

A Gnostic Christianity wants to forget the Great Commission and take flight from the world. It wants liberation from flesh into the life of the spirit. The result is a neglect or even contempt for the ordinances of the faith. For Gnostic-infected Christians, Footwashing is such an earthy thing which is beneath the higher spirituality of the illumined. Footwashing would be a good antidote to the Gnosticism in the Church. But there is more.

Footwashing is a ritual openly declaring that the Church has been in Heaven, and has returned to Earth to mediate the rule of Christ: first, among the brethren, and then, unto the nations. The Messianic Kingdom is manifested in time and on Earth when Christ, the ascended Lord, is present among His people (Matthew 28:20), especially so in worship (Matthew 18:18-20). His kingdom is made known through the sanctions of the Law (Psalms 2), the workings of Providence (1 Corinthians 15) and the preaching of the Word (Romans 10:9, 10). He advances His kingdom until all foes, including death, are vanquished.

If we accept the premise that Foot Baptism is where the rubber meets the road, where the governmental and covenantal aspects of the ordinances are completed, where the blessings and cursings are ritually invoked, then the kingdom has come. As kings and priests, we are reigning with Christ.

Chapter 7: As a Family Ordinance

Truly, truly, I say to you, There is no servant who is greater than his master; and no apostle who is greater than he who sent him.

- John 13:7

A most remarkable thing about Christianity is its orientation toward the family. In a sense, all religions, including pagan religions, reflect various perceptions of family life. Most pagan religions are based upon a magical view of sex. Male and female become cosmic universals in the pagan mind equal and opposite polarities in a fertility faith. That is why pagans tend to think in dualistic categories and view all of life in sexual terms.

Monistic faiths, such as Unitarianism, Judaism, and Islam, also borrow familial symbols. But they are austere and abstract symbols. God is a creator and ruler distant and impersonal. These religions tend to produce statist and bureaucratic systems to replace the family, or else an authoritarian family structure.

Christianity, on the other hand, sees God - not as a king or judge or even creator - but first as a father, a loving father. Trinitarianism (or three-ism) creates an organic unity and diversity to the heavenly family. The persons of the Godhead each have their proper place and dignity. A creed which in any way diminishes one or more persons of the Holy Trinity, upsets that glorious balance in doctrinal understanding, and shows up, eventually, in the breakdown of the family in society.

Notice that Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize into the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). In other words, Christian converts must be "washed," not with water, but with the "name."

While many denominations argue over the mode of baptism, it is not the water, but the Sacred Name which cleanses the believer. Learning the theological significance of each of those names - the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit - becomes the means of spiritual rebirth. Notice, it is the Trinitarian formula which is to be taught as the primary Christian doctrine, not the "Bride and Bridegroom" imagery, nor the militant imagery of some pagan religions. It is familial titles which are ascribed to the persons of the Trinity.[\[15\]](#)

Not only does Christianity describe its deity in familial terms, its religious rites are familial as well. As when a baby is first born, he is washed and clothed and brought to his mother's breast, so it is for the new Christian: he is washed (baptized), clothed (by the Holy Spirit) and nourished by the milk (the Word). We find the universal ordinance of worship is not sex, not a confession, not a lecture - but a meal: the Communion Meal. We come to God's house to eat dinner with Him, something families do in their homes.

Footwashing is also a familial ordinance. In the ancient home, one washes his feet and hands before eating. This is because in Biblical times, you ate while reclining. Someone's feet would likely be directly behind your head. After walking in sandals on the dirty streets, one's appetite could be lost if someone at dinner had not washed his feet. Westerners sit upright at tables while eating and wear shoes. Clean hands are more important than clean feet. This cultural fact has diminished the importance of Footwashing. But foot baptism during Christian worship was something readily understood by the typical family in the Early Church.

With all of this Biblical imagery of the family and the home, it should not surprise us that the Early Church worshipped in homes. In fact, very often the home was the only place they could worship. But it was really the best place for worship.

Converts were generally from an extended family network. It was logistically superior to anything else. If worship consisted in things people do at home, would it not be better to worship at home? Imagine the obstacles in restoring a truly Biblical worship today. Everyone had the opportunity to teach, sing, and prophesy in the Early Church (1 Corinthians 14). Can you do this in a mega-church? Large groups and large places promote worship by specialists while the people are largely passive. Small groups tend to force everyone's participation.

Consider baptism. Rushdoony notes that baptism in the nude was common in the Early Church, not unlike the practice of the Levitical priests (*Institutes of*

Biblical Law, vol. 1, p. 758). Baptism was thus not a grand, public spectacle, but a private affair done before trusted witnesses. The home served as a better place to baptize.

The Lord's Supper was part of the weekly Agape Feast. Organizing a weekly church dinner as a part of worship is not feasible in most churches; yet, it is practical in the home church, as is Footwashing. Footwashing requires additional time for confession, reconciliation, prayer, and testimony. Nor is it possible in the typical church today. It cannot be crammed into the one hour most Christians are reluctantly willing to give up once a week.

During the time the ordinances are done, the home is transformed into a sanctuary. God honors His symbols. The mundane becomes holy by the consecration, by the prayer and invocation of covenant sanctions (1 Timothy 4:5).

No elaborate ritual is needed for foot baptism. A prayer for the one being washed, a kiss upon the neck, a word of encouragement, a spirit of humility and service - these are all that are needed. At my wedding ceremony, my bride and I shared a Communion Meal. When we first arrived at our new home that night, I washed her feet. As the years have gone by, we have introduced Footwashing to each of our children. It is a family observance which we have included with Communion. We choose our partners by lots. That avoids favoritism. If there is strife, we make sure the antagonists are matched-up. Footwashing greatly contributes to the healing of strained relationships. God's people have robbed themselves by its neglect.

Chapter 8: The Johannine Community

This chapter has been published as “The House of Bethany: A Study on Footwashing, the Johannine Community & the Family of Jesus” as a part of the catechetical training of the Cambrian Episcopal Church of the Grail. Go to <http://2046AD.org> for current information.

Footnotes:

[1] See the liturgical tradition of Celtic Spain (*Interpreter's Bible Dictionary* & Philip Schaff's, *History of the Christian Church*)

[2] St. Augustine of Hippo felt the same way. In his Commentary on John's Gospel, of Footwashing, he writes:

And wherever such is not the practice among the saints, what they do not with the hand they do in heart . . . But it is far better, and beyond all dispute more accordant with the truth, that it should also be done with the hands; nor should the Christian think it beneath him to do what was done by Christ. For when the body is bent at a brother's feet, the feeling of such humility is either awakened in the heart itself, or is strengthened if already present.

- *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers*, v. 7, p. 306 (Schaff edition)

Readers may recall my frequent criticisms of Augustine in other writings. It does not diminish the fact that he was an earnest and brilliant Christian leader. In many respects he was a victim of his times.

[3] It is cited by Paul in 1 Timothy as a qualification for women to be formally enrolled into the order of widows. It is not clear, however, whether Paul is referring to the ceremony in John's Gospel or whether he was referring to the mundane tasks of service. In those times, this service of hospitality was done usually by the host's wife or servant. Within the context of the other qualifications for the order, the latter is probably the most accurate. Paul required "widows" to have performed the service of a deaconess. Yet, what is tantalizing about Paul's description is his specification of washing "the saints' feet," in distinction from that of "strangers." "Lodging strangers" is a required condition to enter the order - presumably because of its charitable and evangelistic value - yet the woman is not expected to wash their feet. She is expected to discriminate and to wash the feet of "the saints" only. This suggests a spiritual ministry within the covenant community. And Augustine links this text in Timothy to the ordinance in John 13 and identifies it as a test of humility (*NPNF*, v. 7, *ibid*)

[4] Again Augustine can be cited on this point:

But the topic on which we were speaking, and which led to our entering on this inquiry, was our Lord's washing His disciples' feet, after the disciples themselves had already been washed, and need not, save to wash their feet. And we there saw it to be understood that a man is indeed wholly washed in baptism; but while thereafter he liveth in this present world, and with the feet of his human passions treadeth on this earth, that is, in his life-intercourse with others, he contracts enough to call forth the prayer, "Forgive us our debts." And thus from these also is he cleansed by Him who washed His disciples' feet and ceaseth not to make intercession for us. - Ibid, p. 303

[5] James Jordan's book, *Through New Eyes*, contains a good introduction to the symbolism of the tabernacle. <http://www.freebooks.com>

[6] So it is interpreted by Augustine:

Accordingly the Church, which Christ cleanseth with the washing of water in the word, is without spot and wrinkle, not only in the case of those who are taken away immediately after the washing of regeneration from the contagious influence of this life, and tread not the earth, so as to make necessary the washing of their feet, but in those also who have experienced such mercy from the Lord as to be enabled to quit this present life even with feet that have been washed. But although the Church be also clean in respect of those who tarry on earth, because they live righteously; yet have they need to be washing their feet, because they assuredly are not without sin.

-*Ibid*, p. 302

[7] In the context of his discussion of Footwashing, Augustine says of the Word:

Let us rejoice in the hearing that comes from the noiseless speaking of the truth within us. For although, when the sound is outwardly uttered, as by one that readeth, or proclaimeth, or preacheth, or disputeth, or commandeth, or comforteth, or exhorteth, or even by one that sings or accompanies his voice on an instrument, those who do so may fear to defile their feet, when they aim at pleasing men with the secretly active desire of human applause. Yet the one who hears such with a willing and pious mind, has no room for self-gratulation in the labors of others; and with no self-inflation, but with the joy of humility, rejoices because of the Master's words of truth.

- *Ibid*, p. 304

[8] Of course, if we equate Communion with the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb, we might say there is a parallel to the sacrificial altar at the entrance of the Tabernacle. In this case, the New Testament Footwashing would be in correct sequence with the Priestly procession into the sanctuary.

[9] *Ibid*, p. 307

[10] Psalms 2, 1 Corinthians 15, Matthew 28:18 are examples which demonstrate the present reign of Christ. By "the prophets," I mean those duly ordained representatives of the Church who proclaim God's Word.

[11] For works by Rev. Ray Sutton, see <http://www.freebooks.com>

[12] Augustine makes this very same correlation in his dissertation on Footwashing (*Ibid*, p.308) who quotes 1 Corinthians 11:29 in reference to Judas.

[13] See the author's book, newly revised and enlarged: *The Seed of Cain and the Revival of Mystic Humanism* (2003). Contact: Cambrian Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 8701, Moscow, ID 83843

[14] Although Augustine operates from an amillennial perspective, he does connect key prophetic texts in with his dissertation:

For this cause is it said in the Song of Songs, "I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" For one so speaks when he is constrained to come to Christ, and in coming has to bring his feet into contact with the ground. But again, there is another question that arises. Is not Christ above? hath He not ascended into heaven, and sitteth He not at the Father's right hand? Does not the apostle expressly declare, "If ye, then, be risen with Christ, set your thoughts on those things which are above, where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God. Seek the things which are above, not things which are on earth?" How is it, then, that to get to Christ we are compelled to tread the earth, since rather our hearts ought to be turned upwards toward the Lord, that we may be enabled to dwell in His presence?

And then, of the Church and its preachers, he refers to the vision of Jacob:

O wonderful sacramental symbol! O lofty mystery! Does she, then, fear to defile her feet in coming to Him who washed the feet of His disciples? Her fear is genuine; for it is along the earth she has to come to Him, who is still on earth, because refusing to leave His own who are stationed here. Is it not He that saith, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"? Is it not He that saith, "Ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"? If they ascend to Him because He is above, how do they descend to Him, but because He is also here? Therefore saith the Church: "I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" . . . She says it in those who preach Christ, and open to Him the door, that He may dwell by faith in the hearts of men. . . "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth Him that sent me."

- *Ibid*, p. 302-304, 308

[15] See author's book, *The Mother Heart of God* (1997) from the Cambrian Episcopal Church