

Serving Love

John 13:1-15, 34-35
SS Lesson for 11/01/2020

Devotional Scripture: 1 Peter 4:8-11

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: John 13:15

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

SERVING WITH LOVING HUMILITY (JOHN 13:1-5)

Humility at the right time (1-3)

- Right time that God controls (Ps 31:15)
- Right time while Jesus' light is available (John 12:35)
- Right time because the days are evil (Eph 5:15-16)
- Right time to make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5)
- Right time to do good especially to other Christians (Gal 6:10)

Humility in action (4)

- Humility that considers others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3)
- Humility that comes from being one of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)
- Humility that should be shown toward all men (Titus 3:2)
- Humility that comes from godly wisdom (James 3:13)

Humility in service (5)

- Service that does God's work and what He has assigned us (Heb 6:10)
- Service toward the goal and call of God (Phil 3:14)
- Service that is consistent with God's will (Heb 10:36)
- Service that does good works (Eph 2:10)
- Service that is zealous (Gal 4:18)

SERVING AFTER BEING CLEANSED (JOHN 13:6-15)

Cleansed by Jesus (6-7)

- Cleansed by the shed blood of Jesus (Heb 9:22)
- Cleansed by coming near to God (James 4:8)
- Cleansed by the word of God (1 Tim 4:5)
- Cleansed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

Cleansed spiritually (8-11)

- A spiritual cleansing that is done inwardly (2 Cor 4:16)
- A spiritual cleansing that comes from being forgiven (2 Chron 7:14)
- A spiritual cleansing of the heart (Ps 147:3)
- A spiritual cleansing by the blood of Jesus (Heb 9:14)

Cleansed unconditionally (12-13)

- Unconditional through Jesus and His Word (1 Peter 1:22)
- Unconditional through the light of Jesus (1 John 1:7)
- Unconditional through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)
- Unconditional through Jesus sprinkled our hearts (Heb 10:22)

Cleansed as an example (14-15)

- An example of His forgiveness (Ps 86:5)
- An example of His grace (Rom 5:15)
- An example of the greatness of His love (Eph 3:18-19)
- An example of the power of His love (Rom 8:39)

SERVING WITH LOVE (JOHN 13:34-35)

Love that is commanded (34)

- God commands to love Him (Deut 6:5)
- God commands to love as God has loved us (John 13:34-35)
- God commands to love by living a life of love (Eph 5:1-2)
- God commands to love as God has taught (1 Thess 4:9-10)
- God commands to love with sincerity (1 Peter 1:22)

Love for others (35)

Love others by the gift of love (1 Cor 13:2-3)
Love others by loving as a brother (Heb 13:1-3)
Love others by turning a sinner from the error of their way (James 5:20)
Love others by being willing to lay down life for them (John 15:13)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

The Setting (13:1-5)

Peter's Protest (13:6-11)

Getting to the Point (13:12-17)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The apostle John was one of Jesus' closest associates. Jesus trusted him enough to task him with the care of Jesus' own mother, Mary, at the cross (John 19:26-27). Church tradition says that John later moved to the great city of Ephesus, taking Mary with him. There he ministered for many years, dying sometime between AD 95 and 100. His exile to Patmos is also well known (Revelation 1:9). There are five books in the Bible written by John: the Gospel, 1-3 John, and Revelation. The other three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because they share much of the same perspective. John's stands alone, with much unique content. It was written after the other three, likely between AD 90 and 94, though dates both earlier and later have been suggested. All four Gospels include a retelling of the last supper, but the earliest surviving account is from Paul. He shared a description of the supper, material he learned from the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23a), about 25 years after the actual event. While the accounts from Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39; and 1 Corinthians 11:23b-26 are similar, the way John records the story is quite different. The focus of the other accounts (the bread and cup) are in the background of John's last supper. Rather than the institution of the elements of the Lord's Supper, John includes two things the other accounts leave out. The first is the content of our lesson today. The second is nearly five chapters of Jesus' oral teaching and a lengthy prayer (John 13-17), mostly unique material found nowhere else in the New Testament.

Key Verse: John 13:15

15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

13:1. Jesus knew that the time had come (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 12:23, 27; 17:1) **for Him to leave this world and go to the Father.** Jesus' death and resurrection were now imminent. He had come to die in obedience to the Father's will. His coming was also an act of love for all mankind (3:16). But He has a special love for His sheep: He **loved His own.** Then He **showed them the full extent of His love** His humble service (13:1-17), His teaching (13:18-17:26), and finally His death (chaps. 18-19) are in view. All three revealed His love.

13:2-4. At the evening meal before the Passover, **the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot... to betray Jesus.** Jesus had predicted this (6:70-71). Later Satan actually entered Judas (13:27). Yet **God** was in control of all events leading to Jesus' death. Jesus **knew** (cf. vv. 1, 18) His sovereign authority, His origin, and coming destiny; yet He voluntarily took the place of a slave, washing the feet of His disciples. His action contrasts sharply with their self-seeking (cf. Matt. 20:20-24; Mark 9:33-34; Luke 22:24-30) and pictures His whole ministry on earth (cf. Phil. 2:5-8).

13:5. Foot-washing was needed in Palestine. The streets were dusty and people wore sandals without socks or stockings. It was a mark of honor for a host to provide a servant to wash a guest's feet; it was a breach of hospitality not to provide for it (cf. 1 Sam. 25:41; Luke 7:40-50; 1 Tim. 5:10). Wives often washed their husbands' feet, and children washed their parents' feet. Most people, of course, had to **wash their own feet.**

13:6-8. Peter sensing Jesus' reversing of their natural roles, asked why He, Peter's **Lord**, should **wash the feet** of His servant Peter. In Peter's question the word **You** is emphatic in the Greek. **Jesus** said that **later** (after His death and resurrection) Peter would **understand. No... You shall never wash my feet,** Peter replied. Apparently he did not feel that Jesus should act like a servant toward Peter. This is another case of

Peter's thoughtless speech (cf. Mark 8:32; 9:5). **Jesus** responded, **Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me.** This does not mean, "Unless you are baptized you cannot be saved," but, "Unless I wash your sins away by My atoning death (cf. Rev. 1:5) you have no real relationship to Me" (cf. 1 John 1:7).

13:9-10. Peter continued to miss the spiritual lesson, but he was certain of his desire to be joined to Jesus. Therefore he asked Jesus to wash his **hands** and **head as well** as his **feet**. **Jesus answered, A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.** (Some Gr. mss. omit the words "his feet.") Roman Catholics sometimes have interpreted verse 10 to mean that after infant baptism only penance is needed. A preferable interpretation is that after salvation all one needs is confession of sins, the continual application of Jesus' death to cleanse one's daily sins (cf. 1 John 1:7; 2:1-2). When Jesus added that **not every one of you is clean**, He was referring to Judas (cf. John 13:11, 18). This suggests that Judas was not converted.

13:11. Judas had rejected the life-giving, cleansing words of Jesus (cf. 6:63; 15:3), so he was yet in his sins. Judas did have his feet literally washed, but he did not enter into the meaning of the event. John stressed Jesus' supernatural knowledge (cf. 2:25; 4:29) of Judas' deception.

13:12-14. After giving this object lesson in humility the Lord questioned the disciples in order to draw out the significance of the lesson: **Do you understand what I have done for you? He asked them** (cf. v. 7).

Teacher (*didaskalos*) and **Lord** (*kyrios*) show that Jesus is on a higher level than they. Yet He had done a humble service for them. Meeting others' needs self-sacrificially is what they ought to do too.

13:15-16. The foot-washing was **an example** (*hypodeigma*, "pattern"). Many groups throughout church history have practiced literal foot-washing as a church ordinance. However, present culture in many lands does not call for the need to wash dust from the feet of one's guests. Whereas the Lord's Supper was practiced by the early church as an ordinance, it apparently did not practice foot-washing as an ordinance in church gatherings. This passage emphasizes inner humility, not a physical rite. A Christian widow's practice of "washing the feet of the saints" (1 Tim. 5:10) speaks not of her involvement in a church ordinance but of her humble slavlike service to other believers. Not to follow the example of Jesus is to exalt oneself above Him and to live in pride. **No servant is greater than his master** (cf. John 12:26).

13:17. God blesses His servants not for what they **know** but for their responses to what they know. Christian happiness (**you will be blessed**) comes through obedient service (**if you do them**, i.e., **these things** Jesus commanded).

13:18-19. Jesus had just said that blessedness comes through obedience (v. 17). Now He added that there would be no blessedness for one of the disciples. His selection of Judas was not an accident or a failure in God's plan. Jesus chose a betrayer among His 12 disciples (cf. 6:70-71) in order **to fulfill the Scripture**, namely, Psalm 41:9. As David was betrayed by his trusted table companion Ahithophel, who then hanged himself (2 Sam. 16:20-17:3, 23), so Judas, Jesus' close companion, betrayed Him and then hanged himself. Though Judas' deed was foreknown by God, he was fully culpable. The fact that Jesus knew all this in advance (**before it happens**) and that it fit the Scriptures helped the disciples after the fact to **believe** God sent Jesus (John 13:19; cf. 14:29).

13:20. As Jesus has a high and holy dignity because of His commission from the Father, so the disciples represented Jesus. **Anyone** who accepted the disciples was thus accepting Jesus, the **One** they represented, and in turn that person was also accepting the Father.

13:21. Jesus was troubled in spirit. The word "troubled" is *etarachthē* ("stirred or agitated"), the same word used of Jesus in 11:33; 12:27 (also used by Jesus in 14:1, 27). Being human, Jesus was troubled over Judas' soon betrayal of His love and friendship. Being divine, Jesus knew in advance that it would happen. Jesus sensed the spiritual hardness and deadness which sin had produced in Judas. The word **testified** and the formula **I tell you the truth** stress the solemn announcement of Jesus' words.

13:22. That anyone in this close fellowship could do this to Jesus was almost beyond comprehension. Judas had covered his tracks so well that none of the others suspected him.

13:23-24. Simon Peter, the leader and perhaps the most emotional disciple, wanted to deal with the traitor. Luke (22:38,49-50) mentioned that the disciples had two swords! **The disciple whom Jesus loved** was evidently John, the author of this Gospel (cf. *Introduction*). John and Judas were **reclining next to** Jesus, but Peter's position at the table was not near enough to ask Jesus privately. So he **motioned to** John and asked him to **ask** Jesus whom He meant.

13:25-27. By **leaning** John could touch **Jesus**, so **he asked... Lord, who is it?** Giving the morsel **to Judas** was an uncaught sign of recognition to John, but it was also the Lord's final extension of grace to **Judas**. A host's giving a morsel **of bread** to a guest was a sign of friendship. How ironic that Jesus' act of friendship to Judas signaled Judas' betrayal of friendship. **Satan entered into him** (cf. v. 2) is one of the most terrible expressions in the Scriptures. Satan now used Judas as his tool to accomplish his will. **Do quickly** is literally "do it more quickly," which may imply Jesus' words spurred Judas to act in God's proper timing.

13:28-30. Since **no one** grasped the significance of Jesus' words, even the beloved disciple must have missed the intent of the sop until later. As **Judas... went out**, no one thought anything but good of him. They assumed that he, as the group's treasurer (cf. 12:6), was going **to buy food for the Passover feast or to give something to the poor** He had deceived his peers but not Jesus. **And it was night** in any other Gospel might simply be a time notice, but in John's Gospel it probably also has symbolic significance. Judas was leaving the Light (8:12; 12:35, 46) and going out into the darkness of sin (3:19).

13:31-32. After the departure of Judas, the events leading to Jesus' death fell into place quickly. **Jesus** was then free from the tension which Satan in Judas had produced. Also the long tension building up toward His death (Luke 12:50) would soon be over. The words **glorified** and **glorify** occur five times in these two verses. Jesus' unique glory was revealed in His death. The Father was also glorified in Jesus' death because God's love, His condescension, and His righteousness were made known (cf. John 1:14; Rom. 3:21-26). The words **God... will glorify Him at once** looked ahead to the Resurrection and the Ascension.

13:33. **My children** translates *teknia*, ("little children"; the diminutive of *tekna*, "children"). This term of love expressed Jesus' concern for them. It is used only here by Jesus in this Gospel. John used it seven times in his first epistle (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), and Paul used it once (Gal. 4:19). Jesus announced once again that He would be gone and they would not be able to find Him (cf. Matt. 23:29; John 7:34; 8:21; 12:8, 35). This was true in both His death and His Ascension.

13:34-35. The 11 disciples would survive in His absence by obeying His example of **love**. The command is **new** in that it is a special **love** for other believers based on the sacrificial love of Jesus: **As I have loved you, so you must love one another**. Christians' love and support for one another enable them to survive in a hostile world. As Jesus was the embodiment of God's love, so now each disciple should embody Christ's love. This love is a sign to the world as well as to every believer (1 John 3:14).

13:36-38. **Peter**, quick to speak, picked up on what Jesus had said about going away (v. 33). He wanted to know **where** Jesus was **going** (cf. Thomas' similar request; 14:5). Peter's love was such that he wanted to be with Jesus. But **Jesus replied** that it was not possible right then for Peter to be with Him. **Peter** could not conceive of any situation that would make Jesus' words necessary. He was certain that his love and courage were up to any challenge, including death. **I will lay down my life for You**, he affirmed. But Peter did not know himself as well as he thought, nor did he know the satanic power at work against him (cf. Luke 22:31-32). Jesus' prediction of Peter's defection (**you will disown Me three times**) must have completely shocked the other disciples. They may have wondered if Peter was the traitor (cf. John 13:21-25).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Serving with Loving Humility (John 13:1-5)

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

2 And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him,

3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God,

4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.

5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Humility at the right time (1-3)

Right time that God controls (Ps 31:15)

15 My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.

Right time while Jesus' light is available (John 12:35)

35 Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.

Right time because the days are evil (Eph 5:15-16)

15 Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Right time to make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5)

5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

Right time to do good especially to other Christians (Gal 6:10)

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Humility in action (4)

Humility that considers others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3)

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Humility that comes from being one of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Humility that should be shown toward all men (Titus 3:2)

2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

Humility that comes from godly wisdom (James 3:13)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Humility in service (5)

Service that does God's work and what He has assigned us (Heb 6:10)

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Service toward the goal and call of God (Phil 3:14)

14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Service that is consistent with God's will (Heb 10:36)

36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Service that does good works (Eph 2:10)

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Service that is zealous (Gal 4:18)

18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.

Serving after being Cleansed (John 13:6-15)

6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

8 Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"

10 Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

11 For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."

12 So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"

13 You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Cleansed by Jesus (6-7)

Cleansed by the shed blood of Jesus (Heb 9:22)

22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Cleansed by coming near to God (James 4:8)

8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Cleansed by the word of God (1 Tim 4:5)

5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

Cleansed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Cleansed spiritually (8-11)

A spiritual cleansing that is done inwardly (2 Cor 4:16)

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

A spiritual cleansing that comes from being forgiven (2 Chron 7:14)

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

A spiritual cleansing of the heart (Ps 147:3)

3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

A spiritual cleansing by the blood of Jesus (Heb 9:14)

14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Cleansed unconditionally (12-13)

Unconditional through Jesus and His Word (1 Peter 1:22)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Unconditional through the light of Jesus (1 John 1:7)

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Unconditional through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Unconditional through Jesus sprinkled our hearts (Heb 10:22)

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Cleansed as an example (14-15)

An example of His forgiveness (Ps 86:5)

5 You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.

An example of His grace (Rom 5:15)

15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

An example of the greatness of His love (Eph 3:18-19)

18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

An example of the power of His love (Rom 8:39)

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Serving with Love (John 13:34-35)

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love that is commanded (34)

God commands to love Him (Deut 6:5)

5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

God commands to love as God has loved us (John 13:34-35)

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

God commands to love by living a life of love (Eph 5:1-2)

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

God commands to love as God has taught (1 Thess 4:9-10)

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

God commands to love with sincerity (1 Peter 1:22)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Love for others (35)

Love others by the gift of love (1 Cor 13:2-3)

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love others by loving as a brother (Heb 13:1-3)

1 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Love others by turning a sinner from the error of their way (James 5:20)

20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Love others by being willing to lay down life for them (John 15:13)

13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Setting (13:1-5)

1 Just before the Passover feast, Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world to the Father. He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he should betray Jesus. 3 Jesus, because he knew that the Father had handed [all] things over to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 got up from the meal, removed his outer clothes, took a towel and tied it around himself. 5 He poured water into the washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel he had wrapped around himself.

The washing of the feet of one's guests was expected in Jesus' day, as we can see from Luke's Gospel:

44 Then, turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss of greeting, but from the time I entered she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfumed oil (Luke 7:44-46).

Normally, the host would not do this washing himself, because it was regarded as a very demeaning task. We get some idea of just how menial it was from the comment Abigail makes to David in the Old Testament: "Then she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, 'Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord'" (1 Samuel 25:41, NKJV).

Foot washing was understood in the same way by John the Baptist:

When John the Baptist desired to give expression to his feeling of unworthiness in comparison to Christ, he could think of no better way to express this than to say that he deemed himself unworthy of kneeling down in front of Jesus in order to unloose his sandalstraps and remove the sandals (with a view to washing the Master's feet)."

I believe our Lord's washing of the disciples' feet in John 13 is further explained by a comment that is found in Luke's Gospel:

24 A dispute also started among them over which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 So Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called 'benefactors.' 26 But it must not be like that with you! Instead the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:24-27).

It would not at all surprise me if this dispute occurred just as the disciples were entering this upper room. The "table" was not like our kitchen "tables" at all. The meal would have been served to these disciples as they reclined in a u-shaped arrangement, with our Lord at what we might call the "head of the table." Some suggest that Judas was sitting beside Jesus, at His right hand, in the place of honor. I wouldn't be surprised. Each place at the table had its own social ranking. This is why our Lord can say:

8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, because a person more distinguished than you may have been invited by your host. 9 So the host who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give this man your place,' and then with shame you will start to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, go and take the least important place, so that when your host comes he will say to you, 'Friend, move up here to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who share the meal with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:8-11).

I believe that when the disciples entered this upper room, they were all intent on sitting in the places of honor—at our Lord's right and left hand (see Matthew 20:21-23). I can almost see them pushing and shoving their way into the room, hurrying past the basin of water, where a servant normally would have been present to wash the feet of the guests as they entered, in preparation for the meal. This may well have been the time that the disciples argued among themselves about who was to be regarded as the greatest. After all, every one of them would have to establish their "ranking" among the 12 if they were to be seated according to their greatness. I can see our Lord, quietly observing His disciples as they squabble. I can imagine Him making His way to the washbasin, and filling it with water, while His disciples continue to argue with each other, completely oblivious to what He is doing. And then they suddenly become silent as they realize that He has taken the lowest position of all—lower than the lowest of the 12—the position of a servant (and not a high-ranking servant, either). To their amazement, they observe Jesus, working His way from one of them to the next, first washing a pair of dirty feet, and then drying them with the towel that is wrapped about His waist. The argument seems to end with the words of our Lord in verses 12-17. They may not understand all that He has done, but they must have had enough sense to know it was time to be stop bickering and be quiet.

Two verses out of five focus on the actual washing of the disciples' feet by our Lord. Three of the five verses provide us with background information, which John believes his readers need to know in order to properly understand the Lord's actions. We might say that verses 1-3 provide us with information that gives us insight into our Lord's "state of mind." This "state of mind" of our Lord is expressed by John, both in terms of what Jesus "**knew**" (see verses 1, 3, 11), and in terms of why He did what He did (namely, His great love for His own).

John tells us Jesus "**knew**" that "**his time had come to depart from this world to the Father**" (verse 1), and that the Father had "**handed [all] things over to Him**" (verse 3). As He had come from the Father, so He was returning to the Father (verse 3). We are no doubt tempted to read this in a way that is different from and contradictory to what John is actually saying. We might be reading the text something like this: "Jesus, knowing that He was about to suffer on the cross of Calvary ..." We have already read of our Lord's agony over His coming alienation from the Father on the cross (12:27-28), and John does not wish to repeat this again. Here in our text, John emphasizes that Jesus knew His earthly mission was nearly complete, and that He was returning to the Father in heaven. He knew that everything had been given over to Him by the Father. In other words, He knew that everything was as it should be, and that He was in complete control. *It is our Lord's sovereignty that is being stressed here, and not His suffering.*

John wishes us to understand that Jesus washed the disciples' feet at a time when others would not have been inclined to do so. Jesus was in complete control. Jesus was God's CEO. When men find themselves in this position, they are tempted to behave very differently: "Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions exercise authority over them'" (Mark 10:42). In spite of who He was; in spite of the fact that all authority had been given to Him, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. In spite of the fact that He could have required men to minister to Him, catering to His every whim, *Jesus humbled Himself by washing the feet of His disciples*. This was truly an amazing thing! Jesus humbled Himself, knowing that He was soon going to be exalted higher than anyone in all of human history.

If John is emphasizing the fact that Jesus *knew* all these things, he is at the same time stressing the fact that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as an expression of His great love for them: "He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end" (John 13:1b).

The act of washing His disciples' feet was our Lord's way of showing them (and us) how much He loved them. Do you remember in chapter 11 when those standing around at the tomb of Lazarus saw Jesus weeping, they remarked, "**Look how much he loved him!**" (11:36b)? I think John is now saying to his readers, "Look how much He loved us!"

Peter's Protest (13:6-11)

6 Then he came to Simon Peter. Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus replied, "The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not every one of you." 11 (For Jesus knew the one who was going to betray him. For this reason he said, "Not every one of you is clean.")

It is as though Peter has been watching Jesus draw nearer to him, as He makes His way around the table, washing the feet of each of His disciples. And when Jesus reaches Peter's feet, he does what seems to be the pious or humble thing to do—he declines. He asks His Master if He thinks He is going to wash *his* feet. The inference is that Peter will have no part of this. We might paraphrase his words this way: "You don't think you're going to wash *my feet*, do you, Lord?" If the disciples thought it was inappropriate for them to wash the feet of their peers, they would surely think it inappropriate for the Master to wash their feet. Even Peter could see this, and thus he resisted having his feet washed by the Savior.

Peter's words may appear humble, but they are really arrogant. In the first place, Peter is arrogant enough to think *he* knows better than Jesus what is appropriate and what is not. He knows that Jesus is deliberately washing the feet of every disciple, and yet Peter is so bold as to correct Jesus, as though He was wrong. John Calvin comments:

This speech expresses strong dislike of the action as foolish and unsuitable; for by asking what Christ is doing, he puts out his hand, as it were, to push him back. The modesty would be worthy of commendations, were it not that obedience is of greater value in the sight of God than any kind of honour or service, or rather, if this were not the true and only rule of humility, to yield ourselves in obedience to God, and to have all our senses regulated by his good pleasure, so that every thing which he declares to be agreeable to Him shall also be approved by us, without any scruple.

We may be inclined to excuse Peter's resistance at first, but his second protest is a more serious error. Jesus responded to Peter's first protest by saying to him, "**You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things.**" In other words, Jesus not only indicated that He knew what He was doing and that it was right, but that Peter would understand this also, later on. Jesus is urging Peter both to trust and to obey Him. Calvin writes:

Hitherto Peter's modesty was excusable, though it was not free from blame; but now he errs more grievously, when he has been corrected, and yet does not yield. And, indeed, it is a common fault, that ignorance is closely followed by obstinacy. It is a plausible excuse, no doubt, that the refusal springs from reverence for Christ; but since he does not absolutely obey the injunction, the very desire of showing his respect for Christ loses all its gracefulness. The true wisdom of faith, therefore, is to approve and embrace with reverence whatever proceeds from God, as done with propriety and in good order; nor is there any other way, indeed, in which his name can be sanctified by us; for if we do not believe that whatever he does is done for a very good reason, our flesh, being naturally stubborn, will continually murmur, and will not render to God the honour due to him, unless by

constraint. In short, until a man renounce the liberty of judging as to the works of God, whatever exertions he may make to honour God, still pride will always lurk under the garb of humility.

Let me look at Peter's protest from a somewhat different perspective. Has Peter protested against the omniscience (knowing all) and the sovereignty (absolute control) of our Lord? In addition to this, Peter is protesting against divine *grace*. Think of it for a moment. Peter is, with a fair measure of false humility, rejecting our Lord's actions as though he is undeserving (which, of course, he is). That is the point. What Jesus does for His disciples, He does out of love and grace. And this is precisely what Jesus is about to point out to Peter. Would he resist having Jesus wash his feet, on the premise that he is unworthy? Then he must also reject having his sins washed away by the shed blood of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, for he is unworthy of this as well. To reject grace in principle is to reject all grace, period. And so Jesus says to Peter: "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

With this statement, Peter is brought back to reality, to his senses. It was like a slap on the face. If Peter was too quick to protest our Lord's gracious act of washing his feet, he was not too quick to repent of his foolishness. And that he does. We all can identify with Peter when he speaks before he thinks; would that we might identify with Peter in his ability to forsake his folly and cling to the Savior. Whatever Peter's faults, he deeply loved the Savior. The thought of having no part with Him (as it would be with Judas) was too much. Now, far from resisting a foot washing, Peter is ready for a full bath. More than anything else, Peter wants to identify and to participate fully in all that Jesus will graciously grant.

Ever so graciously, Jesus denies this request of Peter. If he should mistakenly desire too little of Jesus, neither should he ask for more than is needed. He is clean; he does not need a bath, but just a foot washing. Jesus is also speaking to Peter on a spiritual level. One who has been bathed and thereby cleansed by His shed blood does not need to be "washed" this way over and over again; he needs only to be washed. These words certainly appear to lay to rest the belief of some that men must be saved over and over again.

Jesus knows everything, including the fact that Judas had already purposed to betray him. And so Jesus clarifies that the "cleansing" of which He speaks does not belong to all who are with Him at the moment. This (like nearly everything else Jesus said at this moment of time) must have gone completely over the heads of the 11. Jesus wanted them to remember that even before His betrayal by Judas, He had spoken of it. Jesus was in control of this as well. *He was not a victim, but the Victor* (see verses 1-3).

Getting to the Point (13:12-17)

12 So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and do so correctly, for that is what I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example: you should do just as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the solemn truth, the slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent as a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

The first thing we should observe from these verses is that our Lord taught His disciples by His deeds, and not just by His declarations. How different Jesus is from the Pharisees:

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and his disciples, 2 "The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. 3 Therefore, pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by people, for they make their phylacteries wide and their tassels long. 6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, 7 and to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have people call them 'Rabbi'" (Matthew 23:1-7).

Jesus has washed the feet of the disciples purposefully. It was a task that needed doing, and our Lord did it. It was also a way that Jesus could demonstrate His unfathomable love for His disciples. But beyond this, it was a lesson which the disciples desperately needed to learn, a lesson in humility. These men were still looking at leadership from a "secular" point of view, rather than from a divine perspective. The secular world looks upon leadership as the opportunity to be served. A leader has many people "under him," and thus he "uses" them to minister to his own needs. In the kingdom of God, a position of leadership is simply a place of service. No matter where one finds himself on the leader-follower scale, *the Christian is to serve God by serving others*. Leadership is simply one place of service. It enables one to serve as others cannot.

Jesus employs the greater/lesser logic here. He is the sovereign God, the supreme leader. This is what John emphasizes in the first verses of chapter 13. Knowing this, our Lord purposefully sets out to wash the feet of His disciples. If He, as the sovereign God, can wash their dirty feet, then surely they should do likewise to one

another. Rather than arguing with each other about who is regarded to be the greatest, they should be humbling themselves by serving one another. Rather than striving to possess the “rights” of the one who ranks highest, they should seize the opportunity to serve others by doing menial tasks. Put differently, even those “on the top” can and should minister “from the bottom up.” In a “top-down” world, this is a revolutionary concept.

The last statement of our Lord, recorded in verse 17, is profoundly important: “**If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them.**” They really didn’t understand this yet, like everything else. But even when they are able to grasp this teaching academically, the important thing is not the *knowing* of this truth, but the *doing* of it. We are not blessed so much by what we know as we are blessed by the doing of what we know. This applies to far more than just this one command. It applies across the entire spectrum of biblical knowledge. There are some folks who do not *know* as much as others, but they *do* far more than those “in the know.” Again, it is Calvin who observes:

... for knowledge is not entitled to be called true, unless it produce such an effect on believers as to lead them to conform themselves to their Head. On the contrary, it is a vain imagination, when we look upon Christ, and the things which belong to Christ, as separate from ourselves. We may infer from this that, until a man has learned to yield to his brethren, he does not *know* if Christ be *the Master*. Since there is no man who performs his duty to his brethren in all respects, and since there are many who are careless and sluggish in brotherly offices, this shows us that we are still at a great distance from the full light of faith.

(Adapted from [URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/menial-service-john-131-17](https://bible.org/seriespage/menial-service-john-131-17))

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Is your “whole body ... clean” but you still have dirty feet from pride and lack of love? Is your heart, your inner being, truly clean? Washing your feet or your hands will not clean your heart. No doctor prescribes handwashing for heart disease. Jesus does not seek people with hard, dirty spirits who have immaculate personal hygiene. He wants those with “clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:4; contrast Matthew 23:25-26). Jesus bids us to take action. As we serve others, we follow Jesus. When we humble ourselves, our hearts are changed. Loving service will help our hearts stay clean. Can you think of someone you can serve this week? Remember, they will not know you by your love if you do not show your love in service.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Loving Is Serving - Jesus gathered His 12 disciples together for the final meal before His crucifixion. He used this precious time to prepare them for what was coming and give clarity concerning their future ministry. During the meal, Jesus proposed several challenges for them to continue His work. They would need to extend themselves with deep compassion, going out among the people in order to minister to their needs. To show them what He meant, Jesus got up from the table and began to wash His disciples’ feet. No one had bothered to do the menial task of washing everyone’s feet before the meal. But Jesus chose to do so. He demonstrated deep love and servant-centered humility.

Peter’s Objections - Peter protested Jesus washing his feet. However, Jesus made it plain that Peter must allow this to happen, so he told Jesus to then wash him thoroughly. Jesus explained that Peter did not need to be bathed all over. When an unbeliever confesses and trusts Christ’s finished work on the Cross for his or her sins, that is like a complete bath, a total cleansing from sin done once and for all (Heb. 10:17). However, though your sins are forgiven, we have daily sins, like dirty feet. Our sinful attitudes and actions hinder the closeness that is possible between us and God. So, there is no need for a head to toe “bath/” but we must ask the Lord to search our heart to “see if there be any wicked way” in us (Ps. 139:24, KJV) that needs “washing.”

Loving Each Other Sets Apart the Christian - After the foot washing, Jesus called His disciples to follow His example. This Christlike love marks the believer. Jesus repeatedly said to love God and love one another, and His crucifixion on the Cross showed just what that love is like.