

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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WASHING

IN

LOVE

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LIFE'S WASHING IN LOVE

John 13 is a very interesting and meaningful chapter. Probably all Christians know that such a chapter about the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet exists in the Gospels. It seems easy for anyone to understand this chapter, but actually it is not at all easy to realize its true meaning. Usually, Christians merely believe that to wash the feet of others is to show love to them. Some believers even insist on the washing of feet every time they come to the Lord's table. At the Lord's table, they wash one another's feet to express their love for one another. This is not wrong unless it is made legalistic. If it is not made legalistic, then these occasions of showing love to one another by washing one another's feet are all right. Several times in the past I have washed the feet of others, and others have washed my feet. At times, we must allow the Lord to lead and guide us to do this to one another. But this matter of foot-washing signifies something more important. Everything mentioned in this gospel is a sign that indicates something deeper and spiritual. Therefore, foot-washing is also a sign signifying

something deeper and spiritual. But it is rather difficult to discover the spiritual significance of this sign. What is its deeper, spiritual significance?

Before answering this question, we must first realize the position of this chapter in the Gospel of John as a whole. It is positioned as a turning point in the Gospel. The Gospel of John is mainly divided into two sections. The first section, composed of [chapters one through thirteen](#), tells how the Lord as the eternal Word, which is God Himself, and as the Son of God came through His incarnation to bring God into man to be man's life to produce the church. The second section, composed of [chapters fourteen through twenty-one](#), unveils how the Lord as the Son of Man went through His death and resurrection to bring man into God, that man and God, God and man, may be built together as a mutual abode. [Chapter thirteen](#), at the end of the first section, is a dividing line and a turning point. It turns the record from one direction to another.

What is the central thought of the first part of the Gospel of John? It is the Lord as the eternal Word, who is the expression of God, coming to be our life, meeting all of our needs, and making us the members of His Body. [Chapter one](#) reveals the Lord as the eternal Word, that is, as the

expression of God. Then we see the Lord coming to be our life, coming that we might take Him in as our life to meet all our needs. The nine cases selected in [chapters three through eleven](#) show that the Lord as life can meet all of our needs. Then [chapter twelve](#) reveals that the Lord, as a grain of wheat, has to pass through death and resurrection to produce us, the many grains, who are being blended together as one loaf, which is His Body, the church.

The central point of the second part is that the Lord who was incarnated, crucified, and resurrected was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit. He was transfigured from the expression of God in the flesh into the Spirit so that He could come into us as life. Please notice that I use the word “transfigured.” The Lord was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit ([1 Cor. 15:45](#)) so that He might be able to come into our spirit, to be our life in our spirit, and to be one with us in our spirit. As the Spirit, He is in us, and we are in Him. Now He and we, we and He, can be mingled together as one ([1 Cor. 6:17](#)).

In the first part of John’s Gospel the Lord comes to bring God into us, and in the last part the Lord goes to bring us into God. In the first twelve chapters the Lord comes by incarnation

to bring God into man; in the last eight chapters the Lord goes by death and resurrection to bring man into God. The first section shows how He comes, and the last section shows how He goes. He comes by incarnation for Him to bring God into us. He goes by death and resurrection for Him to bring us into God.

Between these two sections [chapter thirteen](#) stands as the turning point. [Verse 3](#) says, “Jesus, knowing...that He had come forth from God, and was going to God.” He had come from God and was going to God. For this reason, I say that [chapter thirteen](#) is the turning point in the Gospel.

For quite a long time I was deeply bothered by this chapter. I wondered why foot-washing was not recorded before [chapter eleven](#) or after [chapter fourteen](#). I wondered why it was there in [chapter thirteen](#). I was troubled by the position of this chapter because I had come to realize that from [chapter one through twelve](#) the Lord as the Word had come to impart Himself as life to many people and that eventually the church came out. The church is there in [chapter twelve](#). The Lord was the Lamb of God taking away sin, He was lifted up in the form of a serpent to deal with the serpentine nature, and He was also the

grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died to bring forth many grains. In a sense, by the time of [chapter twelve](#) everything is completed. It seemed to me that there was no need for [chapter thirteen](#). So, I was troubled, thinking that [chapter fourteen](#) should immediately follow [chapter twelve](#) and that there was no need for [chapter thirteen](#) at all. I spent much time with the Lord to find out why [chapter thirteen](#) was necessary. Eventually, the Lord told me why we need to have [chapter thirteen](#) after [chapter twelve](#). It is very significant that foot-washing is found in [chapter thirteen](#). In [chapter thirteen](#), the very turning point of the Gospel of John, the Lord washed His disciples' feet. The significance of this is deeply meaningful.

LOVING TO THE UTTERMOST

[Verse 1](#) says that the Lord “loved His own who were in the world” and that “He loved them to the uttermost.” Because of this love, the Lord washed the disciples’ feet. Hence, the foot-washing is a matter of love, a love to the uttermost. Without this, the Lord’s love toward us would not have been to the uttermost but would have fallen short of our need. This shows the importance of foot-washing. This is our uttermost need. In the nine

foregoing cases, the Lord has met all our needs. After all this, we still have the need of foot-washing. Therefore, the Lord has to take care of this by showing us His love to the uttermost.

KNOWING ALL HAD BEEN GIVEN TO HIM

Verse 3 indicates the reason why the Lord washed the disciples' feet. It was because He knew "that the Father had given all into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going to God" (v. 3). At that time He realized three things: (1) that the Father had given all into His hands; (2) that He had come forth from God; and (3) that He was going to God. Because of these three things He washed the feet of His disciples. The "all" that the Father had given Him was mainly the disciples. His coming forth from God had brought God into His disciples, and in His going to God He was to leave these disciples. The Father had given the disciples, and the Lord had brought God into them, but now He was going to leave them. By His coming forth from God and His bringing God into them, a relationship between the disciples and God in Him came into existence. Now He was going to leave them. After He had left them, how could this relationship

between the disciples and God be maintained? It is to be maintained by the foot-washing. Foot washing is to wash away from the feet all the dirt that frustrates the fellowship of the relationship between God and man. In doing it, the Lord showed His disciples the way for them to maintain their relationship with God in Him.

This kind of understanding can be confirmed in a negative sense by [verse 2](#), which says that at that time the devil had “already put into the heart of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, that he should betray Him.” The aim of the devil’s evil doing is to keep people away from the relationship with God. But what the Lord did in washing the disciples’ feet was to keep His disciples in the relationship with God in Him. While the devil was working to keep people away from this relationship with God, the Lord did the work of foot-washing as a way to keep His disciples in the relationship with God in Him.

LAYING ASIDE HIS GARMENTS

When the Lord Jesus was about to wash His disciples’ feet, He laid aside His garments ([v. 4](#)). Garments here, in figure, signify the Lord’s virtues and attributes in His expression. Hence, to lay aside His garments signifies the putting off

of what He is in His expression. If the Lord had remained in all that He was in His virtues and attributes, He would have been unable to wash His disciples' feet.

GIRDING HIMSELF

When the Lord had laid aside His garments, He girded Himself with a towel ([v. 4](#)). Figuratively speaking, for the Lord to gird Himself meant that He was bound and restricted with humility ([cf. 1 Peter 5:5](#)). In humility He gave up His liberty so that He might minister to His disciples.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE WORD, AND THE LIFE

The Lord washed the disciples' feet with water ([v. 5](#)). Here water signifies the Holy Spirit ([Titus 3:5](#)), the Word ([Eph. 5:26](#); [John 15:3](#)), and the life ([John 19:34](#)). As we shall see, the Lord washes us spiritually by the working of the Holy Spirit, by the enlightening of the Word, and by the operating of the inner law of life. In the Scriptures, each of these items is symbolized by water.

WASHING AWAY THE DIRT OF THE EARTHLY TOUCH

The Lord has come through incarnation to

bring God into us and He is going through death and resurrection to bring us into God. Both transpire in our spirit. As far as our spirit is concerned, God has been brought into us by the Lord's coming, and we have been brought into God by the Lord's going. Yet, as far as our physical body is concerned, we are still here on this earth. In our spirit we have been joined to something heavenly, spiritual, and eternal, but in our body we are still on the earth. In our spirit the Lord has brought God into us ([2 Tim. 4:22](#)) and us into God, in our spirit we are one with God ([1 Cor. 6:17](#)), and in our spirit we are in the heavenlies because we are in God. But in our body we are still on earth. As far as our regenerated spirit is concerned, we are no longer the old creation; we are the new creation. However, as far as our body is concerned, we are still in the old creation and on the earth. On one hand, we are the new creation, we are in God, and we are in the heavenlies. This is true, and this is a reality. On the other hand, we are still in the old creation, still on this earth.

Although we have the divine life and have become the church, we are still living in this fallen flesh on the earth. Through the earthly touch we are often dirty. This is inevitable, for we cannot

avoid the earthly touch. Our feet are the members of our body that touch the earth. Day by day we are touching the earth with our feet. In the ancient days of Judea, the people mostly went everywhere by walking, by contacting the earth with their feet. Whenever they contacted the earth their feet certainly became dirty. Consequently, foot-washing was a necessity for them. Spiritually speaking, it is the same for us.

Dirtiness is different from sinfulness. To be sinful is one thing and to be dirty is another. You may be absolutely sinless and yet be very dirty. Perhaps nothing is wrong, but you are dirty simply because of the earthly touch. Do you realize that we are still in the body and are still walking on this earth? We constantly touch the earth, and this makes us dirty. As a result, much of the time we are not clean. Therefore, we need foot-washing.

TO MAINTAIN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD AND WITH ONE ANOTHER

Do you know the time when the Jews washed their feet? They especially washed their feet when they came to a feast. A feast is a center for fellowship. At that time the Jews wore sandals, and

since their roads were dusty, their feet easily became dirty. If, when they came to a feast, they sat at the table with dirty, out-stretched feet, the dirt and smell would have frustrated the fellowship. Therefore, for a pleasant feast, they needed foot-washing. When the guests were invited to a feast where they fellowshipped with one another, they had to wash their feet before the fellowship. Without the washing, the fellowship would have been hindered. Before they could come together to feast and fellowship at the table, they had to be washed. Otherwise, they simply could not have had pleasant fellowship. Furthermore, they did not sit at the table like we do; rather, they reclined on the floor with their legs outstretched without any chairs or benches. If their feet were dirty, the bad odor would have been awful. Sometimes they journeyed a long distance on a muddy road. As a result, their feet became very dirty and the smell was offensive. If they had come together and stretched out their feet, the fellowship would not have been very pleasant.

Since the Gospel of John is a book of signs, what is recorded here concerning foot-washing must also be considered as a sign having a spiritual significance. We should not take foot-washing merely in a physical sense, but rather

in a spiritual sense. Since this is a sign, the significance of washing feet is that it is for fellowship with the Lord and with one another. If you just come and stretch out your feet without washing, the fellowship between you and others will be hindered. While we are in this world, we touch the earth day by day. This earth we touch makes us dirty and hinders the fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Therefore, foot-washing means that while we are still on this earth, the Lord as the life-giving Spirit washes our feet, that is, the Lord always keeps our walk clean from every kind of dirt due to the earthly touch. Today we must realize that the Lord is eager to wash and keep us clean from the dirt that we gather from our contact with the earth.

In chapter thirteen the Lord established an example by washing the disciples' feet that they might have a pleasant time of fellowship, enjoying the Lord and one another. We need such foot-washing today. Foot washing should not be merely a matter in the physical way. It should be more in the spiritual way which means a great deal to our spiritual life. Today the world is dirty, and we, the saints, are easily contaminated. For us to maintain pleasant fellowship with the Lord and with one another we need spiritual foot-washing.

DIFFERENT FROM THE WASHING AWAY OF SIN BY THE BLOOD

As we have already pointed out, to be dirty does not mean that we are sinful. Many times you are not sinful, but you are dirty. Dust is everywhere. How easy it is to get dirty. While you are living on earth, even if you sit there without moving, you will become dirty. This earth is full of dirt. Thus, in doing anything, you will get dirty. Even as you are driving along the street on the way to the meeting, your eyes may accidentally see something that causes you to become dirty. Before you got into the car your spirit was living and uplifted, but after driving for ten minutes, although you had no intention of seeing anything, simply by seeing certain things on the way to the meeting place, you were dirtied and your spirit went down. Sometimes, even in our fellowship we can become dirty.

For things that are sinful we need the cleansing of the blood, but for things that are dirty and not sinful we need the spiritual washing. We need a washing by the Holy Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life.

Because being dirty is very close to being sinful, it is difficult to make a distinction between

them. It is not easy to give a clear illustration. Perhaps one day you are unhappy with your wife. It is not sinful for a husband to be unhappy with his wife. He did not hate her or say anything bad about her or to her. He was not angry with her. He was simply somewhat unhappy with her. Many times the wives love their husbands excessively. Husbands need the love of their wives, but sometimes a wife's love is excessive. Sometimes the wives love the husbands with a kind of love when there is no need of that kind of love. When love is needed, it is sweet, but when love is given overabundantly, it is excessive. Such overbounding love can become a disturbance. Suppose a wife, out of concern for her husband's health, wants him to wear a topcoat when he does not really need one. She fears that he will catch cold and wants him to wear extra clothing. Such a concern is a bother to the husband and it causes him to be unhappy. Such unhappiness is not sinful. The husband does not say a word; he does not express anything. He is just a little unhappy with his wife. That little unhappiness will frustrate the pleasant fellowship between them.

What should we do in such a case? Perhaps you will apply the blood, saying, "Lord, I was unhappy with my wife for loving me too much.

I apply Your blood to this situation.” But that does not work. You need another kind of washing, not the washing by the blood, but the washing by the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life. Who can afford you this kind of washing? Firstly, the Lord Jesus Himself and secondly, a saint or saints who have much life. You need to spend time in the Lord’s presence. Remain in the Lord’s presence and the Lord will come to you and wash you, not with the blood, but with the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life. It is difficult to say just when He completes this washing. Sometimes it only takes a few minutes to wash the dirt away; at other times it may take half a day. Whenever you are in need of such a washing, just open yourself up to the Lord as you spend time in His presence and allow the inner life to flow within you. Spontaneously, something living will flow, water, and wash you, and you will become clean again. Your spirit will be uplifted and your whole being will be so pleasant in the Lord’s presence. This is the washing with the living water in the presence of the Lord.

It is very easy for brothers and sisters who live and serve together to offend each other unconsciously. They may not fight with one another, for fighting is sinful. They simply offend one

another unconsciously. Perhaps you offend me without being conscious of it. However, I am full of the consciousness of the offense. As a result, we both have become somewhat dirty. Thus, it will be difficult for us to maintain a pleasant fellowship with one another. Even if we say nothing and try to learn the lesson of the cross, we still find that our fellowship becomes dead. We need to be washed. Perhaps the brothers who live together in the brothers' house come together to pray. Some of them are quite living and others are not at all living because they have become dirtied and their spirits are down. Sometimes all of the brothers may be numb and down in their spirit. It is not because they all have become sinful. They do not criticize one another or fight with one another. Nevertheless, all the brothers have become dirty simply because they have lived together for a length of time without having the proper foot-washing. They also need to have their feet washed.

To be dirty is very close to being sinful. If you go just a half step beyond being dirty, you will be sinful. This kind of dirt frustrates our fellowship. The more I look at you, the less my spirit is able to rise up. The more you look at me, the more your spirit goes down. Even if we speak to each

other, we cannot speak pleasantly. We can never pretend to be what we are not. If our spirit is pleasant, then our words will also be pleasant. However, if we do not have a pleasant spirit yet we pretend to be pleasant in our words, the situation will become worse. Do you know why so many times the brothers and sisters cannot pray when they come together? It is because they all have become dirtied. They all need the foot-washing for one another.

The Lord washes our feet by the working of the Holy Spirit, by the enlightening of the Word, and by the operating of the inner law of life. Today, the Lord always exercises the washing by the Holy Spirit within us, by the Word of God in the Scriptures enlightening us, and by the inner life operating within us. The Lord may wash us many times a day. I can testify that the Lord washes me several times within one day by the Spirit, the Word, and the inner life. I must walk on the earth because I live on the earth. I cannot avoid the earthly touch. I have to deal with my relatives and with the dear brothers and sisters. Sometimes a friend comes to visit me. I cannot avoid meeting with him. But after his visit, I feel dirty. This is the earthly touch. Moreover, I must deal with the stores whenever I go shopping.

After I have been to a department store, I have the feeling that I have been to Hades. When I come out of that store, I need to be washed immediately. Every time I go shopping, my feet touch the earth and become very dirty. But the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the inner life are working and operating to wash me continually. Otherwise, I could not maintain my fellowship with the Lord.

After one week's accumulation of the earthly touch, do you feel the need of the washing when you come to the Lord's table on the Lord's day? Indeed, you do feel the need for the washing of feet to cleanse you from the dirt that you have accumulated from the earthly touch during the week. We need the washing, not only the washing of the blood, which is for sins, but the washing by the work of the Holy Spirit, by the enlightenment of the Word, and by the operation of the inner life to cleanse away the dirt that comes from the earthly touch.

Now we know the real meaning of foot-washing. It is a matter for maintaining fellowship in life. It is not merely a physical matter; rather it has to be a spiritual practice. We must allegorize this sign and not merely understand it in a physical way. According to the spiritual

meaning of this sign, we need to allow the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life to wash away all the dirt that we have accumulated while living in the flesh and walking on this dusty earth.

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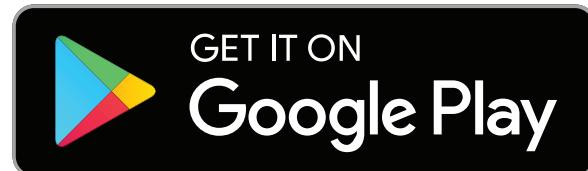
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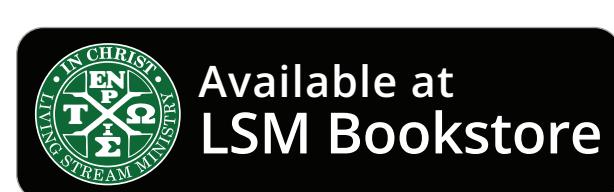
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