

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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TO MAINTAIN

FELLOWSHIP

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Living Stream Ministry
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John 13 is a turning point in this Gospel, showing the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet. The significance of this act is deeply meaningful, signifying to us the Lord's washing of the believers by the Holy Spirit ([Titus 3:5](#)), the Word ([Eph. 5:26](#); [John 15:3](#)), and the inner law of life ([John 19:34](#)). Here I want to share something about the foot washing by the believers among one another ([vv. 12-17](#)). We not only need the foot washing that is exercised directly by the Lord Himself, but also the mutual foot washing of one another. The Lord told us to wash one another's feet. Sometimes we must keep the Lord's word literally, but to an even greater degree we must keep His word spiritually. We must wash one another's feet by ministering the work of the Holy Spirit, by ministering the enlightenment of the Word, and by ministering the operation of the inner life. In this way, I help you, you help me, and we help one another to be washed in the work of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the Word, or in the operation of the inner life. Whenever

we brothers come together for fellowship and prayer, we need to minister the spiritual foot washing to one another. It is the spiritual foot washing ministered to one another that keeps us clean from the earthly touch. Dear brothers, have you considered how much you need this kind of mutual foot washing? While you are walking and working on this earth, you not only need the Lord's foot washing ministered directly within your spirit but also the foot washing from the brothers and sisters.

FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF THE LORD

When the Lord washed the disciples' feet, He laid aside His garments. In figure, garments signify the Lord's virtues and attributes in His expression and to lay aside His garments signifies the putting off of what He is in His expression. If the Lord had maintained the expression of His virtues and attributes, He would have been unable to wash the feet of the disciples. Likewise, whenever you are about to wash others' feet, you need to lay aside your attainments, virtues, and attributes. This is real humility, the genuine humbling of yourself. We need to humble ourselves to such a degree that we can wash others' feet.

In the Scriptures, a garment signifies what we do and how we act. Whatever we do and however we act becomes our garment. If you have good behavior, you have an excellent garment, something that is beautiful and glorious. However, if you want to minister spiritual foot washing to others, you must lay aside what you have attained, what you have been doing, and how you have been behaving. Every time you come together with the brothers to minister some spiritual foot washing to them, you must lay aside the way you have conducted yourself. This means that you must humble yourself. Do not think that your conduct is good enough. Your deeds and behavior might have been very beautiful and glorious, so you become proud. You are proud of your garments, proud of what you have been doing. On the other hand, I may think in my heart that I am so humble and that you are too proud. With this kind of attitude and motive, we can never minister any foot washing to others. I need to lay aside all of my good deeds and forget all of my virtues. This laying aside of the garments is very practical. Whenever you are proud, you can never minister spiritual foot washing to anyone. You must be humble and lay aside your garments. To lay aside your garments

means to humble yourself, to empty yourself, to take something off of you and to strip something from you.

Allow me to speak very frankly. During my Christian life, I have met a good number of brothers and sisters in my travels to various places. Many are so spiritual, but they are also proud. They are proud of their spirituality. They wear a garment of spirituality. When they come together, they look down on others, thinking that the others have never seen a heavenly vision or known anything spiritual. What is this? This is their pride. They are proud of being spiritual. If we take this attitude, it will be impossible for us to minister foot washing to others. Whenever we come together with the saints, on the contrary, we must take off our garments and forget our attainments. We must be carefully aware of this matter. We all have been guilty of this attitude. How often we have had the thought: “Oh, they do not know the church life; they do not know how to walk in the spirit; they have never learned the lessons of the inner life.” This is pride. If we take this proud attitude, we can never help others. We must lay aside our garments, our attainments, our spirituality. We must lay aside all degrees of spirituality and become

simple and general, saying to ourselves, “I am nothing, and nothing within me is special. I have only a towel, a piece of cloth, to gird me.” We should not come to each other in the uniform of a policeman, otherwise, we shall be fearful and scared of one another. Sometimes people come threateningly with the attitude of a policeman wearing a uniform. Some come wearing a uniform of spirituality, while others wear the uniform of the deeper life, and still others are clad with the uniform of the so-called gifts. They all must lay aside their uniforms before they can minister any kind of foot washing to others. We should not say this to others; we must say it to ourselves.

It is not an easy thing to lay aside our garments and humble ourselves in order to wash others’ feet. Suppose a certain brother offends me unconsciously. Although he is unaware that he has offended me, I am conscious of the offense. What should I do? I must look to the Lord for His grace not to condemn my brother, but to wash his feet. If I try to wash him without the grace, the result will be a big blow up. Why? Because he offended me it will be so easy for me to rebuke him, even without having the intention of doing so. I need to lay aside my garments

and come down to his level. Whenever we have the sensation that someone has offended us, we always consider ourselves higher than that person, thinking that he is lower, that he owes us something, and that we have a claim upon him. Herein lies the difficulty. You need to put aside your garments, lower your standard, and come down from your throne. In a sense, laying aside your garments means to dethrone yourself. Do not sit on the throne judging your brother saying, “You offended me, you offended me.” As long as you have this attitude, the tail of the fox will come out. Eventually, you will rebuke the offending brother, and the result will be a quarrel, for he will deny that he did anything to offend you. Immediately, the entire situation becomes a sinful one.

Not only do we need to lay aside the garments of our attainments, but we also need to be girded with a towel. This means that we must be bound, that we must lose our liberty. The feet were washed with water and also wiped with the towel with which the Lord was girded. In other words, the more we are willing to be bound for the sake of others, the more we shall be able to minister to others and wipe their feet. Otherwise, the more we are free, the more we shall damage

others. Brothers, when we come together, we must not only lay aside our attainments, but we must also be bound and be willing to lose our liberty. We simply give up our liberty for the purpose of ministering something to our dear brothers and sisters. We must be willing to be girded and bound in order to minister something that wipes the brothers' and sisters' feet.

As the brothers need the foot washing, so do the sisters. Sorry to say, the sisters are easily offended. Nevertheless, in the church life we cannot stay away from one another. In the family life, the person who works the most gets the most dirty. The same is true in the church life. The more responsibility you bear, the more dirt you collect, for the more people you must contact. The more you contact people, the more you will become dirty. The best way to keep yourself clean is never to contact anyone, just as the best way to keep your hands clean is not to touch anything with them. Some of you perhaps are expecting to become leaders in the church life. Humanly speaking, if you are wise, you will never be involved with the leadership, for that is a very difficult job and causes you to become dirty easily. As a leading one, an elder in the

church life, you cannot avoid touching certain situations and speaking to certain people. People will come to you continually. Be assured that no one who comes to you is clean, for the clean ones will never come, because they do not have problems. Whoever comes to you is a person with a problem. Sometimes a sister with a problem will come to you again and again, not leaving you until she has caused you to be angry with her. Once she has left you, you find that you are completely dirty. Between you and her there is the need of a big foot washing. Without such a foot washing the pleasant fellowship between you could never be restored.

This is the reason why a local church may be very happy at the beginning, but after a period of time some in it may become dirtied. Although they still come to the meetings, they do not come pleasantly, with a pleasant spirit. Perhaps they will recall how certain brothers or sisters have offended them. They may attempt to smile and pretend to like others, but what kind of fellowship could they have? They need the foot washing. They need the ministry of life.

In washing one another's feet, we do not need to say, "Brother, I love you, I am going to wash your feet." Foot washing needs a great deal of

life. We need life in order to wash others' feet. Foot washing requires much life to be ministered to others. This is quite difficult. Remember, foot washing is by water, not by blood. We need much water. Water is the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life. We need to be full of the life water. If we are full of the life water, we shall wash one another's feet simply by being with them without having any intention of washing their feet. When we are with others, the water just flows. It even flows unconsciously. As we are with another saint, the water will flow over him again and again, and his feet will be washed. The dirt and the unpleasant smell between us will be gone. We shall be brought into pleasant fellowship. How we need this!

I say again that whenever we come together we need to lay aside our garments. Do not keep your standard, your position. Do not consider yourself as being on a higher level than others. This consideration must be laid aside. Exercise the living water and cause it to flow and others' feet will be washed.

The Gospel of John is altogether a book of life and everything in it is related to life. Foot washing is a matter of life. It is not merely a physical practice that is carried out, as it is in some

Christian groups, at every Holy Communion service. However, if the Lord so leads we may occasionally wash one another's feet physically. In 1952, in Taipei, the four elders one night washed the feet of at least five hundred brothers. That really touched their heart and their spirit. It was a real help. Nevertheless, we need not do this in a legal, formal way.

Everything in this Gospel is a matter of life, and we must practice life to such an extent that among us we have an abundance of the water of life to wash one another's feet. Some saints are full of the living water. When you come and sit with them for half an hour, your feet are washed. They may not talk to you about your dirty feet or even touch the matter of foot washing, but if you stay in their presence for half an hour, your feet are washed. After that half hour you will be so close to the Lord. Your fellowship with Him will be intimate and pleasant. Also your fellowship with others will be sweet. Among us we need many that are full of the water of life who can wash the feet of others.

BY LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Each of us must learn how to love the brothers and sisters by ministering the spiritual foot

washing to them. Sometimes when I come to visit you, you can minister some sort of foot washing to me by showing your love toward me, and I have to show the same love toward you so that some foot washing will be ministered to you to cleanse you from the earthly touch. We must do this, otherwise, the fellowship between us could not be maintained. Fellowship can only be maintained between one another when love ministers such a foot washing. Many times I have enjoyed the spiritual foot washing from quite a number of brothers and sisters. It is impossible to tell you how many times I have experienced this kind of foot washing. More than twenty-five years ago, when I was working with the leading co-workers such as Brother Watchman Nee and others, I received much help by this kind of foot washing from them. Every time I contacted them, I sensed some sort of foot washing to keep me clean from the earthly touch. They loved me and showed their love to me by ministering the spiritual foot washing to cleanse me from the earthly touch.

By putting these principles into practice, we shall see how real they are. You can simply apply them in your home life and in your church life from this very hour. Immediately, you will then

minister some sort of foot washing and wiping to your brothers and sisters. This is what we need. This is the real love that maintains the fellowship among us. It is by this kind of foot washing and wiping that the spiritual fellowship can maintain the church life. Without it, the church life cannot be maintained because the fellowship will have been damaged by the earthly touch. We need the spiritual foot washing to cleanse us from the earthly touch and to keep our spiritual fellowship in a good condition. Then it is possible to realize the church life. If the church life is to be kept fresh, new, pleasant, and living, we continually need this foot washing. Every local church needs this. In the matter of fellowship there must be no frustration among the saints. Every church needs to pray for this.

The Lord came to bring God into us and He went to bring us into God. Now there is the real mingling of the divine Spirit with our human spirit. Humanity is mingled with divinity, and divinity is mingled with humanity. This is the church, the Body of Christ. In their spirit, the Christians are heavenly, eternal, and spiritual ([1 Cor. 6:17](#)), but in their physical body they are still on this earth and in the old creation.

Hence, there is the need for them to be kept clean from all the earthly touch in order that the fellowship of the Body and the fellowship with the Lord might be maintained. This fellowship is maintained by foot washing. This is very, very important because the fellowship with the Lord and with one another can never be maintained without it. Without it, the church life cannot be realized. In fact, the reality of the church life would be gone. Therefore, the daily foot washing definitely needs to be exercised by the Lord Himself on the one hand and by all the saints on the other. Then we shall be able to maintain an excellent fellowship with which we shall have the real church life.

WASHED BUT NOT IN THE FELLOWSHIP

Though the foot washing is for fellowship in life, it was not so with Judas. He was washed, but he was never in the fellowship because he was a false one ([vv. 18-31a](#)). Before the Lord washed the disciples' feet, the Devil had already put into Judas' heart that he should betray the Lord ([v. 2](#)). After the Lord's washing, Satan even entered into him ([v. 27](#)). After that, Judas left, and it was night ([v. 30](#)). He surely had entered into the dark night for his eternity. From the

very beginning, he was not in the fellowship with the Lord and he could never have been in it regardless of how much he was washed (vv. 10-11). This warns us that the real foot washing is only for the people who are genuinely in the fellowship with the Lord.

PETER BEING ABOUT TO FAIL

Peter was in the genuine fellowship with the Lord, and the Lord's washing did keep him in this fellowship. He was willing to remain in this fellowship with the Lord, but he failed by denying the Lord three times when the Lord was being tried. Peter had the desire to remain in the fellowship, but he did not have the strength to do it, because, before the Lord's resurrection, His resurrection life had not been imparted into him. At that time, the Lord was ready to suffer the death of the cross, but His disciples were not yet equipped to follow Him in His suffering. So the Lord told Peter that he could not follow Him then (vv. 36-37) because Peter had not yet received Him as the resurrection life. But Peter would follow Him (v. 36; 21:18-19) after He imparted Himself into him as resurrection life through His resurrection. To remain in the fellowship of the Lord maintained by the foot

washing requires the strength of resurrection life.
We can never do it by our natural man.

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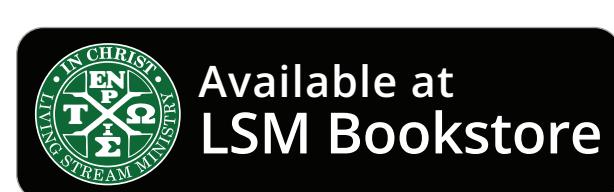
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