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## "HUMBLE YOURSELVES, THEREFORE"

**- JOHN 13:1-15. - APRIL 26. -**

**Golden Text: – "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." – John 13:34.**

OUR Lord's ministry was about ended. He met with his twelve chosen disciples to celebrate the Passover supper, declaring, "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15.) The passover lamb which they were to eat typified our Lord himself, and the eating of it by his disciples represents how believers of the Gospel Age feed upon Christ in their hearts, and by faith appropriate to themselves the blessings secured to them through his death, "For even Christ our Passover [Lamb] is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast." (I Cor. 5:7,8.) But, inasmuch as Jesus was the antitypical Lamb, it was appropriate that the type should be discontinued; and hence it was that our Lord, following this last typical Supper, instituted the Memorial Supper of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine as representing the antitype – his broken body and shed blood.

According to the Jewish custom the Passover supper was celebrated by families, and the twelve apostles, specially chosen by our Lord and giving their allegiance to him as their Head, constituted the nucleus of the family of God – whose hearts and hopes and aims were one – for "ye are all called in one hope of your calling." (Eph. 4:4.) Judas was not excluded, although our Lord evidently knew beforehand that it was he who should betray him. This furnishes us the lesson that, as followers of Christ, we should not judge one another's hearts, nor surmise evil. After the evil of the heart has manifested itself in words or deeds is quite

time enough to separate ourselves from others who profess the Lord's name and desire to fellowship with us. True, the evil begins in the heart, before the outward act, but we should always hope that the brethren may gain the victory, and should seek to do nothing to stumble any, but everything to help them to overcome the influence of the Adversary and the weaknesses of their own flesh.

John does not give a particular account of the Passover supper, but seems to bring in merely certain valuable features and lessons connected therewith and omitted by the other evangelists. His declaration is that our Lord knew beforehand that he had reached the end of his earthly career and was specially solicitous of improving the closing hours with his particular, chosen friends and companions by inculcating some good lessons. "He loved them to the end" – completely, fully; his own sharp trials, present and approaching, did not distract him nor absorb his attention. He was, as heretofore, still thinking of and endeavoring to bless others. Nor need we suppose that this love for the twelve applied to them exclusively; rather that he viewed the twelve as the representatives of "them also which should believe on him through their word" – as he expressed the matter in his prayer to the Father. With this view in mind we can realize that what our Lord said and did to the apostles was intended to be applicable and instructive to all who have been his since then. – John 17:20.

### **SELF-SEEKING A MISTAKE**

From Luke's account it would appear that on this occasion there was a strife amongst the apostles, a contention respecting which of them should be esteemed greatest. (Luke 22:24-31.) This strife may not have been solely one of selfishness, in the evil sense of the word, but, partially prompted by love for the Master, it may have been in respect to their several positions at the table, the coveted position possibly being closeness to our Lord's person.

We remember how James and John had made request that they might be on the right and on the left of our Lord in the Kingdom, and we remember that in connection with this narrative it is declared that John was next to our Lord, and leaned upon his bosom.

Quite possibly this dispute respecting greatness arose in part from the fact that they were not in this instance treated as guests, but merely had the upper room put at their disposal; having no host, no provision was thereby made for the usual washing of the feet, and it was neglected. The matter of feet-washing in eastern countries, when sandals were worn, was not merely a compliment, but a necessity, the heat of the climate, the openness of the sandals, and the dust of the roads, making it almost indispensable to comfort that the feet be bathed on arriving at the house after a journey. Apparently this question as to which of the twelve was greatest, and as to which should perform the menial service of feet-washing for the others, had developed the fact that none of them was anxious to take the servant's position.

Apparently our Lord permitted them to thus disagree, without settling their dispute, without appointing any of their number to the menial service. He allowed them to think the matter over – time to relent and reconsider – and they even proceeded to eat the supper, contrary to custom, with unwashed feet.

Then it was that Jesus arose from the supper, laid aside his outer garment, and attaching a towel to the **[R4163 : page 110]** girdle of his under-garments, took a basin and a ewer for the water, and began to pour the water and wash the feet of his disciples. It was not the custom of the East to pour the water into the basin and put the foot into the water, but to pour the water upon the foot being washed; thus each had clean water, and little was wasted – for water is much more scarce and precious there than with us. We are to remember also that in the East at that time

tables and chairs such as we use were not in vogue. On the contrary, the tables were low and shaped somewhat like a horseshoe, and those who sat really reclined, lying upon the table, with the left elbow resting upon a pillow or divan, their heads toward the inside of the horseshoe, where there was a space provided for the food, and also a space for a servant to enter and place the food. Thus it will be seen that the feet extended backward, and could quite easily be reached without disturbing those who were eating.

### **"YE ARE CLEAN, BUT NOT ENTIRELY"**

Our Lord very evidently had already washed the feet of several of the disciples before he came in turn to Peter. Seemingly none of them offered objection, although no doubt the thought of their own contentions upon this subject, and unwillingness to serve one another, brought them blushes of shame and confusion of face. But when it came to Peter's turn he protested. It would never do, he thought, to permit our Lord to perform so menial a service. He asks, "Lord, dost *thou* wash *my* feet?" But our Lord did not stop to reprimand Peter – to give him a thorough "setting down" and scolding, as some of his followers might be inclined to do under such circumstances: he merely insisted on continuing, and treating Peter the same as the others, saying that he would explain the matter later, and that if he washed him not, he could have no part with him.

One cannot help admiring the noble traits in Peter's conduct, even though with the same breath we be forced to acknowledge some of his weaknesses; and herein all the Lord's followers find a lesson of encouragement, for though they find weaknesses and imperfections, if they find also the heart-loyalty to the Lord which was in Peter, they may continue to have courage and hope and to press on as did he, from victory to victory, and at last to have the prize, the reward of faithfulness.

When Peter learned that there was more meaning to the washing of the feet than merely its kindness and comfort, and its reproof of the lack of the spirit of humility amongst the disciples, he wanted, not only his feet, but also his hands and his head washed. Noble, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent Peter! But our Lord explained that this was not necessary, saying, "He who has been bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but is wholly clean." (V. 10 – *Diaglott.*) Public baths were in use at that time, but even after having taken a general bath, on return to the home it was customary to complete the matter by washing the feet; and this seems to be the inference of our Lord's remark. The apostles had been with our Lord, for three years, and under the influence of his spirit of love, meekness, gentleness, patience, humility, had been greatly blessed – by "the washing of water through the Word" spoken unto them. – John 15:3; Eph. 5:26.

### **HUMILITY DESPISED BY THE WRONG-HEADED**

There is an intimation in the Lord's words that the spirit of pride which had manifested itself among them had been inspired to some extent by their treasurer, Judas, – as evil communications always are corrupting. (I Cor. 13:33.) This final lesson from their great Teacher was a very impressive one upon the eleven, whose hearts probably were in the right condition to receive the reproof and the lesson; but upon Judas, although his feet also were washed, the effect evidently was not favorable. The spirit of evil which had entered into him before the supper – the desire to obtain money, and the proposition to obtain it by betraying the Lord, evidently continued with him, and instead of being moved aright by our Lord's humility and service, he was the more moved in the opposite direction – to think little of him. So it is with all who have professed the Lord's name in every time. Those instructions, examples and experiences, which are working out blessing and proving beneficial to some, are proving injurious to others. The Gospel, in its every phase, is either "a savor of life unto life, or of

death unto death." As it was God's goodness and mercy that hardened Pharaoh's heart, so it was the love and humility of Jesus that hardened Judas' heart, and these principles are still at work, and may be witnessed in the harvest siftings today. – 2 Cor. 2:16; Exod. 7:13.

After accomplishing the work of washing the feet of all, our Lord resumed his outer garment and reclined again at the supper (this was the Passover Supper – the Memorial Supper of bread and wine being instituted afterward). Our Lord now improved his opportunity and explained to them the meaning of what he had done. He pointed out to them that this menial service did not signify that he was not the Lord and Master, but signified that as Lord and Master he was not unwilling to serve the lesser members of Jehovah's family, and to minister to their comfort, even in the most menial service; and that they should not have been unwilling, but glad to render such service one to another.

The example which our Lord set was not so much in the kind of service (feet-washing) as in the fact of service. Nothing in this example, as we understand it, was in the nature of a ceremony to be performed by the Lord's people annually, weekly, monthly or at any other time; but the principle of his service constituted the *example*, and is to be observed amongst his followers at all times – they are to love one another and to serve one another, and to consider no service too menial to be performed for each other's comfort and good.

Those who have interpreted this to signify a ceremony similar to the symbolical ceremony of the Memorial Supper and the symbolical ceremony of Baptism are, we think, in error. There seems to be nothing symbolical in it. It is merely an illustration of the principle of humility which is to attach to every affair of life. If any of the Lord's people need washing, or need any other assistance of a menial character, their brethren should gladly and

joyfully serve them; and whosoever possesses the spirit of the Lord will surely render such service; but to insist, as some do, that each of the Lord's people should first wash his own [R4163 : page 111] feet and have them clean, and then that each should wash one another's feet ceremoniously, is contrary to his *example* which he instructs us to follow. The example was a *service*, and not an inconvenience and ceremony.

Once a year, on the day before "Good Friday," the pope washes the feet of twelve aged paupers, who are brought from the streets and duly prepared by a preliminary washing in private. The pope's ceremonious washing is done in the presence of many notables. A similar ceremony is performed annually by Emperor Francis Joseph of Austro-Hungary. Neither of these ceremonies, however, is, to our understanding, according to our Lord's example, but contrary to it – likewise the ceremonious washing performed by some denominations of Christians.

All who are truly the Lord's followers should heed carefully and follow exactly the true example of the Master's spirit of meekness, humility and service to the members of his Body. The whole thought is contained in his words, "The servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things [if you appreciate these principles applicable to all the affairs of life], happy are ye if ye do them [if you live according to this rule, loving and serving one another]." – Vs. 16,17.

Feelings of emulation, strife and vain-glory seem to specially beset those of the Lord's people who are possessed of any degree of talent or ability or honorable situation in life, and especially those who are in influential places in the Church. These, therefore, need to be specially on guard against these besetments of the flesh, remembering that, as some one has said, "There is a pride that looks *up* with envy, as well as a pride that looks *down* with scorn."

The Lord's followers are to remember that pride in any person, in any station, respecting any matter, is highly reprehensible in God's sight and displeasing to him. "The Lord resisteth the proud, but showeth his favor to the humble." Hence, all who would abide in the Lord's love have need to be very careful along this line – to keep very humble, very lowly in conduct, and particularly in mind. – Jas. 4:6; I Pet. 5:5.

