

Where's the Foot Tub?

By David Wright

One night just before the crucifixion, Jesus shared a meal with his disciples. Customarily, a servant washed guests' feet before seating them at the table, but no servant was present on this occasion. Who would humble himself and do the servant's task? Each of the apostles considered himself too important, and so Jesus "rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then 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" (John 13:4-5).

After resuming his place at the table, Jesus said that "if I [...], your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15). To honor this teaching, some churches gather periodically for a foot-washing service. Are the churches of Christ failing to obey the Lord in this matter? Where is our foot tub?

Actually, the Lord and his apostles never assembled to wash feet. Neither did the church of the NT. In the John 13 narrative, Jesus simply met a practical need. Feet were dirty, and he washed them.

The Lord expects his followers to do the same as they go about their daily lives. Does a child with learning disabilities need help with a simple math assignment? Does an elderly woman need help cutting her toenails? Does an elderly man need help getting a bath? Does an injured neighbor need someone to cut his grass for a few weeks? Then the true disciple is to humble himself and perform the needed task. Assembling annually to wash perfectly clean feet misses Jesus' point entirely.

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