

Renewal overview 6. Unless I wash you... John 13:1 - 17

Try to imagine this: While in your home one day you hear a deafening trumpet-blast. You rush outside and see the sky being torn open. A heavenly cavalry, too vast to count, comes thundering to the earth, led by a rider on a white horse bearing the name, 'King of kings and Lord of lords'. Then, before you can comprehend what is happening, Jesus Christ enters your house, takes off his royal robes, gets down on his knees, and begins scrubbing your dirty floors. Perhaps this scenario will help you relate to the shock felt by Peter and the other disciples on the evening when their Lord stripped off his outer garment, wrapped a towel around his waste, and began to wash their dirty feet.

John, one of the disciples there on that evening, begins his gospel with this statement about Jesus (the Word), *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (1:1) John goes on to say, *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (1:14). Over twelve chapters John tells of his eyewitness accounts of Jesus glory stories. Then suddenly, in chapter 13, John records the following, *"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."* (13:3 - 5)

Stripping off his outer garment would have left Jesus wearing only a short undergarment, with a towel for an apron. As Jesus crouched over a basin of water at his disciples' feet he would have looked more like a humble house servant than like a respected rabbi - or the Son of God. Christ's undignified behaviour was too much for Peter to bear. He protested, *"No Lord! You shall never wash my feet."* Christ's reply requires our full attention, *"Peter, unless I wash you, you have no part with me."* (13:6 - 8) What Jesus is declaring to Peter (and to us) is that if we can't accept Christ's humble act of removing dirt from the feet of his followers, then how can we accept Christ's greater act of servitude when he died upon a cross to cleanse us of the inner-filth of our sins?

Christ's foot washing ceremony teaches us that pride has no place in his kingdom. If we come to Christ then we must do so confessing to him our sins and our complete reliance on his sacrificial death to make us clean before God. Furthermore, since it is the nature of the glorious Son of God to forgive and serve us, then it must be the nature of his servant-followers to forgive and serve one another.

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1. How has Jesus shown his disciples the full extent of his love? (John 13:1)
2. How did Jesus' knowledge of his Father's plans and will encourage him to do what he was about to do? (13:3 - 5)
3. Why did Peter protest against Jesus' humble act of service? (13:6 - 8)
4. What did Jesus mean by his statement, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."? (13:8 - 10)
5. Why has John highlighted the presence of Judas in this story? (13:2, 10 - 11)
6. What does Jesus want us to learn from this event (13:12 - 17).
7. How do we, as Christ's followers, 'wash one another's feet'? (13:14)
8. How has Christ's humility challenged you?