

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

The Glory of the Word That Washes – Part 2

READ [John 13:1-30 \(ESV\)](#)

REVIEW

In John 13:1-30 Jesus takes a physical/cultural tradition, foot washing, and applies a spiritual meaning to it. Jesus is showing His disciples that through salvation and the gift of justification their standing before Him is clean. But earthly reality requires that we consistently have our daily lives by the Word that our sins be forgiven. Within the context of this object lesson that He is providing, He makes 2 stunning statements:

- a. He says to Peter in John 13:8 that without daily washing, the disciple is not in union with Christ; and
- b. In John 13:14–15 Jesus teaches that in the same way that He washed the disciple's feet, so the disciples ought to wash one another's feet.

So that I'm clear about these two points: I understand Jesus to be saying that regular confession of sin is evidence that you have been justified and redeemed. Jesus seems to make this clear: "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean."¹

And secondly, I understand Jesus to be saying that life in the Body of Christ includes brothers and sisters washing one another's feet, meaning helping one another be cleansed through the daily contact with sin. Now some take this exhortation of Jesus to simply mean that His disciples are called to humbly serve one another – to be a servant to one another. Surely that must be minimally true. But contextually I cannot escape the example that Jesus was clearly portraying, that points to the daily cleansing of sin.

There is yet a third important point. It is found in John 13:20 (ESV), "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." Outstanding expositors often take this verse as Christ pointing His apostles to their future work of ministry. It is a fearful task to differ from such commentators who are godly, learned, and faithful. But humbly and with some fear I suggest that we cannot divorce this statement of Christ from the context of spiritual foot washing. This is a place where you must be Berean and examine and test my teaching.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 13:10). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

In summary, I believe the passage teaches that:

1. Those who are redeemed are positionally clean.
2. Those who are redeemed require regular washing of the Word to cleanse daily transgressions.
3. Those who are redeemed should be willing to go to other disciples with the Word in humble service seeking to correct and restore them from their daily transgressions.
4. Those who are the redeemed should go to one another as sent by Christ and ought to be received as one would receive Christ.

This leads me to try to answer 2 questions:

1. If you are already totally forgiven why do you have to confess your sin?
2. How do you go and seek to wash the feet of a brother or sister?

WHY DO CHRISTIANS HAVE TO CONFESS SIN?

This a common question. In 1 John 1:9 (ESV) we read, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This seems to fly in the face of verses like this one:

“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God . . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:11–12, 14 ESV)

I believe the Bible answer the question in at least 2 ways and the first comes from the passage we are studying.

1. Confession of sin is evidence that you are a Christian. There are several attitudes and actions in the Bible that we do, not to make us Christians, but because we are Christians. We forgive. Jesus said if you don’t forgive, you won’t be forgiven (Matthew 6:15). Good works, pursuing holiness, persevering in the faith, etc. are all Biblical evidences that one is saved. This passage as well as 1 John 1:9 add another. The evidence you believe your sins are forgiven in Christ is ongoing confession of sin. So that’s the first reason. Sensitivity to and confession of sin is evidence of the New Birth.
2. When we place our faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, the Eternal Judge becomes our Eternal Father. We are adopted into His family. All that we are can now expressed through the reality that God is my Father. We are adopted, children of our Heavenly Father. Now if a son does something wrong to his father the son has negatively affected his fellowship with his dad.

He remains the son of his father, but the relationship suffers. So when John wrote his first epistle calling us not to deny that we have sin and calling us to walk in the light and confess our sin, he says that he wrote it for this purpose: *"And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."* (1 John 1:4, ESV) The second reason we regularly confess our sin is (as David wrote) that our joy may be restored (Psalm 51:12).

HOW DO YOU GO TO ANOTHER CHRISTIAN AND APPLY THE CORRECTION OF THE WORD?

First, you should note that this issue is not a rare topic in the Bible; and it is without dispute that we are called to go to exhort one another. Jesus washed us *with the washing of water by the word* (Ephesians 5:26), we should use the same "water" in ministering to others.

- a. James 5:16 (ESV), "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."
- b. Hebrews 3:13 (ESV), "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."
- c. Colossians 3:13 (ESV), "Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Here are some points that you should keep in mind as you consider obeying Christ in this matter:

1. The issue at hand is truly and obviously a sin. Matthew 18:5 says, 'If your brother sins against you . . . and Galatians 6:1 says, "If anyone is caught in any transgression . . ." Christians are not sent out on a proverbial "witch hunt". The sin is clear, obvious, open, and indisputable. One person told me that they used to pray for people and ask God to reveal to them where that person is struggling or sinning so they could go and help them. True story!
2. Galatians 6:1-2 reminds us that our attitudes are important. Only those who are spiritual should go to a brother or sister to correct them. Now right away that seems like a ticket out of the problem. "Oh, I'm not spiritual," might be the response. The context means "living and walking according to the Spirit (5:16) or clearer those people who express the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (5:22-23). It means that you go with humility, love, peace, kindness, etc. To "be filled with the Spirit" is a command, it is not a ticket out of the problem.
3. You go, according to Galatians 6:1-2 with the intent to restore, not destroy. Our words are to be helpful, edifying, or as the passage says, "gentle". A great example of this is Paul's letter to

Philemon where he brings exhortation to him and says, “though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you.”²

4. The Bible gives us a process. “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.³ I hear of so many people who stop at step 1. Why should you go through the embarrassment and pain of seeing this matter through? The passage gives us a hint: “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”⁴ James is even clearer: “*My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*” (James 5:19–20, ESV). Timely, loving intervention is a supreme act of rescue.
5. Lastly, we should know as John 13 confirms, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.*” (John 13:20, ESV). Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 18. “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*” (Matthew 18:20, ESV). To lovingly, kindly, gracefully, truthfully seek to bring correction on a brother or sister is to act in the power, presence, and blessing of Christ.

APPLICATION

Unfortunately, the Church has adopted one of three approaches to responding to sin in my life and yours. Sometimes we just hope it will go away or someone else will deal with it. Sometimes we tell others about it and we gossip. Sometimes we refer the matter to the pastors and elders and hope they will do what we find uncomfortable in doing. I love these words of Spurgeon:

“In the world they criticize: this is the business of the public press, and it is very much the business of private circles. Hear how gossips say, ‘Do you see that spot? What a terrible walk that man must have had this morning: look at his feet! He has been very much in the mire you can see, for there are the traces upon him.’ That is the world’s way. Christ’s way is very different. He says nothing, but takes the basin and begins to wash away the stain. Do not judge and condemn, but seek the restoration and the improvement of the erring.”⁵

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Phm 8–9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 18:16–17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 18:15). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁵ The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon, Volume 25: Sermons 1451 to 1510, <https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1499.pdf> Page 8

If I have properly understood the teaching of Christ in John 13, thus far, and understood the multitude of verses in the New Testament on this topic, we are to “wash one another’s feet”. Going to a brother or sister to correct or admonish is extremely hard. But hear again the words of our Savior:

“If I then, 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 also should do just as I have done to you . . . If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (John 13:14–15, 17, ESV).