

## John 13:6-8

*John 13:6 (ESV) Jesus came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?”<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”<sup>8</sup> Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me.”*

This lively interchange between Jesus and Peter – Peter resisting Jesus from washing his feet, and Jesus insisting on washing Peter’s feet – illustrates an important spiritual principle for those who wish to be effective in Jesus’ service.

Although Jesus literally washed His disciples’ feet after His last dinner with them, He made it clear that this washing signified another cleansing that they would understand only later: *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”* Jesus was about to go the cross to take onto Himself their true moral guilt, and to suffer the righteous judgment of His Father for their sins. Only later, after Jesus’ resurrection and with the help of the Holy Spirit, did His disciples understand what He did for them through His death.

What did Jesus mean when He insisted to Peter: *“If I do not wash you, you have no share with me?”* Was Jesus saying that Peter could not be forgiven of his sins unless he received Jesus’ death for his sins? This is true, of course, but their following interchange disallows this interpretation:



<sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”

Jesus insisted that Peter (along with the other disciples, except for Judas) had already “bathed,” and was “completely clean.” This is clearly an assurance to Peter that, through his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, he was already completely forgiven. The New Testament letters give this same assurance to all who receive Jesus as their Savior (see Romans 8:1; Colossians 2:13,14).

But in order to have a “share” with Jesus, Peter must be willing to submit to Jesus’ “foot-washing.” The word “share” is the Greek word *meros*. Along with the related Greek word *meris*, the idea here is to have an assigned portion or role in a partnership.\* Jesus is saying: “Peter, you are already completely forgiven. But if you want to be in effective ministry partnership with Me, you must allow Me to spiritually cleanse you as often as I say that you need it.”

Jesus has invited us to collaborate with Him in inviting others to believe in Him, and in helping believers to mature in Him. In fact, He has given each and every one of us a unique role in this ministry. Jesus, through His Spirit, plays the “Senior Partner” role; we depend on Him to supply the spiritual power, wisdom and guidance we need to play our roles. But this role is the great privilege of our lives – to be members of Jesus’ Body, His personal agents to specific people that He brings across our paths.

We are grateful to be in partnership with Jesus, and we want to play our roles effectively. Being effective involves many things, but of highest importance is that we have “washed feet!” “Dirty feet” in this passage refers to spiritual defilement from living in an evil world, and from wandering into sin ourselves. We cannot avoid this defilement.

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\* In Acts 19:27, certain silversmiths use *meros* to refer to their common business venture. In Acts 8:21, Peter uses *meris* to refer to the ministry of leading people to faith in Jesus so that they receive His Spirit.



Withdrawing from people in this world would betray our calling, and sin emerges from our fallen natures even without influence from others. But thank God, the same Jesus who cleansed us forever from our guilt can also cleanse us from sin's defilement and restore us to usefulness in His work!

The only requirement is that we allow Jesus to tell us when our feet are dirty, and that we agree with His assessment. But though this is easy enough to understand, it is humbling to do. Like Peter, we would much rather preserve our pride by denying our defilement, or by blaming others, or by washing ourselves. But this only prevents Jesus from cleansing our hearts and filling us with His Spirit once again to work through us. Much better to agree with Jesus' evaluation!

The human author of this passage, the apostle John, wrote about this same cleansing in his first letter:

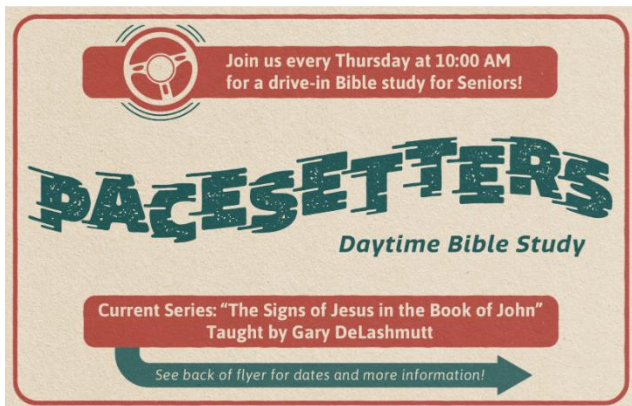
*1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him (God) and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; <sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

“Walking in the light” does not mean living a sinless life. It means simply that we stay close to Jesus, and that we let Him tell us when our feet are dirty. No need for daily morbid introspection, or generalized guilt, or public self-flagellation. When Jesus speaks to our hearts about a specific attitude or action – whether directly or through another Christian friend – we simply humble ourselves before Him and agree with His correction. Then we can count on real fellowship with our Christian friends, and we can count on Jesus to cleanse our hearts so that so that we move forward in restored intimacy with Him in His service! As often as we need this cleansing, we may have it because Jesus loves us and delights to help us and be in partnership with us!



*Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You died for all of our sins so that we may be completely forgiven when we receive You as our Savior. Thank You that You know our moral weakness better than we do, and that You tell us that our feet are dirty only so that You can wash them and restore us to partnership. Help us to not be surprised when You show us that our feet are dirty again. Help us to simply cast ourselves on Your mercy so that we can experience Your love and empowering afresh!*

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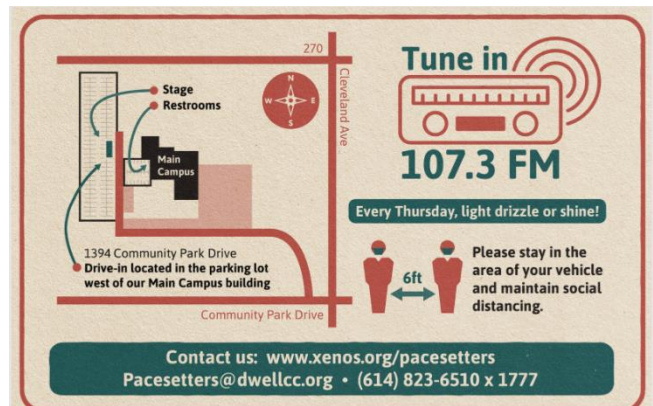


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