

**LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER  
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH  
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

**Life's Washing in Love to Maintain Fellowship**

Scripture Reading: John 13:1-17, 34-35

- I. Since John is a book of signs (2:11), what is recorded in John 13 concerning foot-washing should be considered a sign, which is a symbol with spiritual significance (vv. 1-17):**
- A. Foot-washing should not be taken merely in a physical sense but rather, and even more intrinsically, in a deeper, more important, and spiritual sense.
  - B. In John 1—12 the Lord as life came and brought forth the church, composed of the regenerated ones; in their spirit the regenerated ones are in God and in the heavenlies, but in their body they are still living in the flesh and walking on the earth; this shows us the necessity of the Lord's fellowship in John 13.
- II. "Jesus knowing that His hour had come for Him to depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost...Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all into His hands and that He had come forth from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His outer garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself; then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded"—vv. 1, 3-5:**
- A. The outer garments that the Lord laid aside signify the Lord's virtues and attributes in His expression; hence, He was putting off of what He is in His expression.
  - B. The Lord's girding Himself signifies His being bound and restricted with humility—cf. 1 Pet. 5:5.
  - C. In ancient times the Jews wore sandals, and since their roads were dusty, their feet easily became dirty; if, when they came to a feast, they sat at the table and stretched out their feet, the dirt and smell would certainly frustrate the fellowship; hence, for the feast to be pleasant they needed foot-washing.
  - D. The Lord washed His disciples' feet to show them that He loved them to the uttermost (John 13:1), and He charged them to do the same to one another in love:
    - 1. "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet"—v. 14.
    - 2. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another"—v. 34.
  - E. The Lord's washing of the disciples' feet was the washing away of their dirtiness so that their fellowship with the Lord and with one another could be maintained.
- III. In our experience the defilement of the feet signifies separation from God and from one another through contact with the world; foot-washing signifies the recovery of spiritual freshness and vitality and the recovery of our fellowship with the Lord and with one another:**
- A. In our experience the washing water in John 13 signifies the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), the word (Eph. 5:26; John 15:3), and life (19:34; 10:10; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 John 5:16);

the Lord washes our feet by the work of the Holy Spirit, by the enlightenment of the living word, and by the operation of the inner law of life.

- B. This is not the washing away of our sins by the blood (1:9); this is why, after John 12, there is the need for such a sign in chapter 13; spiritual foot-washing saves us from staleness in our fellowship with the Lord.
- C. Today the world is dirty, and we, the saints, are easily contaminated; for us to maintain pleasant fellowship with the Lord and with one another, we need spiritual foot-washing carried out both by the Lord in His love and by one another in love.
- D. This is absolutely necessary for us to live in the fellowship of the divine life, which is revealed in John's first Epistle, a continuation of the Gospel of John.

**IV. For us to experience the washing, we need to spend time in the Lord's presence and with the saints who are full of the Spirit, the word, and the divine life—cf. Matt. 6:6; 1 Cor. 16:17-18; Acts 6:5, 8; 2 Cor. 1:15:**

- A. If we remain in the Lord's presence, the Lord will come to us and wash us, not with the blood but with the Spirit, the living word, and the inner life:
  - 1. Whenever we are in need of such a washing, we can just open ourselves up to the Lord as we spend time in His presence and allow the inner life to flow within us.
  - 2. Spontaneously, something living will water, flow, and wash us, and we will become clean again; our spirit will be uplifted, and our whole being will be so pleasant in the Lord's presence.
- B. "You also ought to wash one another's feet"—John 13:14:
  - 1. In our experience, the Lord Jesus Himself and the saints who have much life can afford us such a washing.
  - 2. It is the spiritual foot-washing ministered to one another that keeps us clean from the earthly touch; while we are walking and working on the earth, we not only need the Lord's foot-washing ministered directly within our spirit but also the foot-washing from the brothers and sisters.
- C. Whenever we are about to wash others' feet, we need to follow the Lord's pattern by "laying aside our garments"; this is to lay aside our attainments, virtues, and attributes:
  - 1. We must humble ourselves and empty ourselves; many wear a garment of spirituality and look down on others; they are proud of being spiritual.
  - 2. To lay aside our garments means to dethrone ourselves.
- D. To be girded with a towel means that we are bound and are willing to lose our liberty; we give up our liberty for the purpose of ministering life to our dear brothers and sisters.

**V. Each of us must learn how to love the brothers and sisters by ministering the spiritual foot-washing to them to cleanse them from the earthly touch; this keeps them new, fresh, and living; our loving one another in this way is a sign that we belong to Christ—vv. 34-35:**

- A. We can summarize defiled feet as staleness in our fellowship with the Lord; clean feet, however, denote fresh fellowship with the Lord:
  - 1. Not many can say today that they treasure and love the Lord as much as they did five or ten years ago; many people have to say that they do not have the same feeling that they had a year ago.
  - 2. Their feet are defiled, and they have become weary; this is spiritual weariness; it is the loss of spiritual freshness and vitality.
- B. The Lord is always fresh, and He wants us to be fresh all the time, not spiritually enervated; this is why He makes us lie down in green pastures, He leads us beside

waters of rest, and He restores our soul; foot-washing sustains an intimate fellowship between us and the Lord and rekindles our spiritual vitality and spiritual freshness—Psa. 23:2-3; Acts 3:20; cf. Deut. 34:7.

- C. We should never allow ourselves to become old, which is to be set, settled, and occupied; we must keep ourselves empty, open, fresh, new, living, and young with the Lord; we need to pray that the Lord as the Spirit of reality would guide us into the reality of Psalm 110:3—“Your people will offer themselves willingly / In the day of Your warfare, / In the splendor of their consecration. / Your young men will be to You / Like the dew from the womb of the dawn.”

**VI. There must be an enigmatic freshness, power, nourishment, and supply within us that will drive others to seek after God by our presence; others should desire to seek after God, and their spiritual energy should be revived as a result of meeting us and speaking to us—cf. Acts 20:20, 31:**

- A. We need the renewing of the Holy Spirit day by day so that we can always be fresh and invigorated—Titus 3:5; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.
- B. Foot-washing means recovering our former feelings, bringing us back to the freshness and newness of life (Rom. 6:4), and giving us fresh strength (Psa. 27:1, 4) to recover how we previously treasured the Lord as our first love by giving Him the first place in all things (Rev. 2:4-5; Col. 1:18b).
- C. We cannot wash others’ feet unless we enjoy the Lord as our overcoming life and obtain the Spirit’s help to live out such a life; the Spirit within us is our Comforter, the One who takes care of our case, our cause, and our affairs—John 14:26; Phil. 1:19-21a.
- D. Every one of us needs our feet washed, and every one of us needs to be prepared to wash others’ feet; among all the services that Christians minister to one another, nothing is more crucial or precious than foot-washing—“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them”—John 13:17.

**VII. Foot-washing is a matter of the Lord’s loving us to the uttermost in order to meet our uttermost need; each of us must learn how to love the brothers and sisters by ministering the spiritual foot-washing to them:**

“How can we wash one another’s feet? Suppose you have completed your day’s work and feel tired. You cannot utter any praises from your mouth. In the evening when you come to the meeting, someone asks you to pray. Halfway through your prayer, you cannot go on, and you stop. You feel as if your prayer is nothing more than a composition. However, perhaps one brother in the meeting has a fresh spirit, and his prayer refreshes your spirit. Your spiritual energy is renewed. This is washing one another’s feet. Many times when we come to the meeting, we find the saints’ spirit weak and downtrodden. We pray and read the Word, but nothing seems to work. The reason for this is that everyone’s feet are defiled, and there is no basin to wash the feet. It is as if something is quenching our spirits. If someone would stand up at this point and wash everyone’s feet by offering a prayer or saying a few words, the whole meeting will be refreshed. Without the basin and without the foot-washing, everyone’s spirit is bound. The same is true in our family life. A brother or sister may unexpectedly drop by your home and fellowship a short while or give a testimony, and everyone in the family is brought into the presence of God. Before that time there was a separation between them and God, but after such a simple conversation, all the separation is gone. This is washing one another’s feet. Those who do this are precious in the Lord’s eyes.

“We should have an ambition before the Lord to wash others’ feet. In order to wash others’ feet, we must have the water; that is, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and

be in constant fellowship with the Lord. For this cause we must live in the Holy Spirit daily. Only then will we have the living water to wash others' feet. Every time we come to the meeting, we must have the living water to wash others' feet" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 42, pp. 281-282).

**VIII. Without the spiritual foot-washing, the church life cannot be realized, and the reality of the church life would be gone:**

- A. In order to wash others' feet, we must daily be filled with the Holy Spirit, be in constant fellowship with the Lord, and live in the mingled spirit—Eph. 5:18; 3:19; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4, 6.
- B. Therefore, the daily foot-washing definitely needs to be exercised by the Lord Himself on the one hand and by all the saints on the other hand; then we shall be able to maintain an excellent fellowship with which we shall have the real church life.
- C. "Now I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because these have filled up the lack caused by your absence; for they refreshed my spirit and yours. Acknowledge therefore such ones"—1 Cor. 16:17-18; cf. 2 Cor. 7:13.
- D. May we have fresh spiritual experiences every day; Romans 15:32 says, "I may refresh myself and rest with you"; this is the result of foot-washing.