

“Endless Love to the End”

(Part 3)

John 13.12–20

¹²So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?” ¹³You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ¹⁸I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.’ ¹⁹From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. ²⁰Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” [NASB]

HOPE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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I. Hearing

I have no doubt that the most intriguing, compelling, and beautiful mountains in the world are located in the Highlands of Scotland. But they will break your heart if you expect them to fill your heart. I have no doubt that the most serene, quiet, and unspoiled countryside in the world is found in the Islands of Scotland. But it will break your heart if you expect it to fill your heart. I have no doubt that the most precipitous cliffs, prismatic waters, and pristine beaches in the world are found along the coasts of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. But they will break your heart if you expect them to fill your heart.

Heart-breaking beauty. There is one beauty and one beauty alone that will not break your heart if you expect it to fill your heart. That Beauty is the Lord and Teacher Jesus Christ. He alone can wash you that you shall be whiter than snow. When He fills you with Himself, then and only then will your heart be filled and not empty. When other people, places, or things promise to fill your heart, take heed: they will only break it. When He who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, who is before all things and in whom all things consist, when He fills your heart, your heart will be filled indeed.

We pick up now, with Jesus explaining what He did when He washed the disciples' feet. Now Jesus explains discipleship, Jesus orders discipleship, and Jesus distinguishes discipleship.

II. Jesus Explains Discipleship (12–14)

First, Jesus *explains* discipleship. He understands that they likely are without a clue about what He has done, for what He has done is entirely outside their experience. *He* has washed *their* feet. Remember, this was the lowliest of low actions. Probably most servants would not even be required to do this for guests. Rather, the host would provide a bowl of water so that guests could wash their own feet after their hot and dusty journey.

Jesus explains discipleship. By their own words, they have acknowledged Jesus' superiority. They have called Him Teacher and Lord. By their words, they have put Him above themselves. Now, Jesus says, it is time for them to acknowledge His superiority by their actions. It is time for them to do what He has done. It is time for them to imitate Him. It is time for them to say, “If the Teacher and Lord has done this thing, then it is only right for me to do this thing.”

Jesus had earlier told the crowd who had followed Him, ^{Lk6.46}“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.”

Disciples of Jesus acknowledge His superiority by their actions, imitating Him. Here's the catch: They can only acknowledge His superiority by their actions, if they receive His humility in their hearts. The One who is far above them had lowered Himself beneath them. He lowered Himself to serve them. He lowered himself to love them who had hated Him. He lowered Himself to wash their feet.

You can wash someone's feet without lowering yourself. You can do it arrogantly, with a chip on your shoulder, despising the person whose feet they are, looking forward to the day when you can make them wash your feet instead. That's the way Judas would have washed feet.

Judas could not accept that the very superiority of Christ is what liberated Him to stoop to the lowly position of washing peoples’ feet.

Disciples of Jesus receive His lowly service and acknowledge His greatness by imitating Him, by doing as He did.

III. Jesus Orders Discipleship (14–17)

Second, Jesus *orders* discipleship. There is a necessary *order* to being a disciple of Jesus. The order is quite simple, but it is impossible to reverse. The order is this: firstly, Jesus must wash your feet. *Then*, secondly, you must wash one another’s feet.

You cannot serve one another as a disciple of Christ until you have been served by Christ. To try to do so is arrogant. It is to say, “I can become like Christ on my own, thank you very much.” That is lifting yourself above Christ to pretend to be low like Christ. A slave is not greater than his master. You can’t do unto others until Christ has done unto you. You can’t serve others with a humble heart until Christ has served you with a humble heart. There is no greater service than service with a lowly heart. Great service with a self-exalted heart is nothing but devilish service. That’s the way Judas would serve.

A person cannot love another like Jesus loves until he or she has been loved by Jesus. You cannot even call Him your Lord, until He has loved you and served you by putting His Spirit into you. ^{1Co12.3}“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

Thus John says in his letter, ^{1Jn4.7}“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [You see, you cannot love until God causes you to be born again. This comes from God, not from you.] ... ⁹By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

This is the order of discipleship to Christ. Be loved by Christ. Then and only then can you love like Christ.

IV. Jesus Distinguishes Discipleship (17–20)

Third, Jesus *distinguishes* discipleship. ¹⁷“If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ¹⁸I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against me.’”

You could read this story and take it as a mere moralistic directive. You could say, “Jesus is the great example for us to follow.” You could say the right things, join the right church, immerse yourself in the right charities. All this, and you could miss the entire OT and NT gospel of grace. This will happen if you read the second half of v17 without reading the first half. “Blessed are you if you do these things.”

Here’s the catch: Jesus said, ¹⁷“*If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*” But if you do *not* know these things, you are *not* blessed if you do them. If you do *not* know that Jesus has lowered Himself to wash your feet, then you are *not* blessed by washing someone else’s feet. If you do *not* know that you are loved by Jesus, then you are *not* blessed by loving one another.

If you are trying to be blessed without being loved by Jesus, then you are doing what Esau did. Esau was stammering and yammering to get himself blessed ^{Gen27.34} but all was for naught, for ^{Rom9.13}“Just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’” ^{Mal1.2f} If you are trying to be

blessed without being loved by Jesus, then you are doing what Judas did. You are raising your heel against Him.

Jesus distinguishes between true disciples and false disciples. True disciples know they are loved by Jesus; know they have been served by Jesus; know they have been washed by Jesus. False disciples do not know this, nor do they think they need to be loved, served, and washed by Jesus. They think they can fill their own hearts with persons, places, and things that are full of grandeur, beauty, and serenity. They will pretend to be His friend, but they are always looking for ways to lift up their heel against Him and stamp Him out of their life.

In fact they have no life. The only way to have life is to receive it from God who sent His own Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Jesus distinguishes between those who are disciples of Christ and those who are disciples of the serpent who struck Christ's heel... and whose head Christ has crushed upon the cross.

V. Doctrine

A disciple of Christ is one who is served by Christ and then serves Christ; who is loved by Jesus and then loves Jesus.

VI. Receiving

Well I suppose that seems obvious enough. That's okay; Christianity is not made up from deep dark secrets. When the Spirit of Christ opens our eyes and our understanding, things we could not receive before become not only clear but irresistible. So sometimes it is astonishing how we can muddle up the simple gospel of God's love.

It is neither complex nor complicated that Jesus loved us by suffering in our place the death we deserved for our sins and rebellions against God. It is neither complex nor complicated that by the blood of His death, Jesus washed away the legal guilt—all of it—that sentenced our consciences to terror in the approaching judgment of God.

It is neither complex nor complicated that the perfect obedience of Christ *has* to be rewarded, and as Christ took our punishment, we get His reward. It is neither complex nor complicated that God must and will make us perfectly holy like Jesus, so that we whom He loves can be with Him where He is forever.

But we sure do have a way of muddling things that are not complex, so that our lives get quite perplexed. I will give you two such areas for which this passage is the answer.

A. The disciple of Christ is neither legalist nor antinomian.

First, we so easily muddle our lives with respect to the Gospel and the Law. This passage tells us that the disciple of Christ is neither legalist nor antinomian. This passage is the antidote to legalism and the liberty from antinomianism. You've heard these words aplenty, and you know I frequently look for fresh ways to define them so you can know fresh ways to fight them. Simply put, a legalist uses God's law as a covenant of works. An antinomian says God's law holds no obligation in the covenant of grace.

A legalist will tell you that you must repent before God can love you; the Gospel says you will only repent after you know God loves you. A legalist will tell you God can't love you if you don't obey the commandments; the Gospel says that only when God loves you will you obey the commandments.

An antinomian, on the other hand, will tell you that when God loves you, the commandments impose no duty upon you. The Gospel, however, says that when Christ loves you, you are to

love one another... and the commandments themselves tell us what love is and what love is not.

Okay, those are the definitions you’ve heard from this pulpit in the past. Today, Jesus’ explaining, ordering, and distinguishing discipleship gives us a fresh definition of legalism and antinomianism. Here it is:

*Legalism is thinking you are loving when you know nothing about being loved.
Antinomianism is thinking you are loved when you know nothing about loving.*

If you hear today’s teaching as a moralistic lesson, you are hearing it as a legalist. You have the order backward. You think you can love one another by washing one another’s feet, when your own feet have not been washed by Jesus. You think you are loving others, but you know nothing about being loved by Jesus. This passage is the antidote to legalism. You cannot love others until you are loved by Christ.

You may be passionate about your involvement in politics, in cultural criticism, in church analysis. You may be zealous in what is right and what is wrong. You may be quick to despise the unrighteousness you see in this church or other churches. But do you know you are loved by Jesus?

Only when you know you are loved by Jesus, can you face, admit, and confess the unrighteousness in your own soul. Only when you know you are loved by Jesus, can you really care about the years of tears pent up in another soul who, even without your railing, has some certain knowledge of the unrighteousness in him.

Here is the antidote to all that inflamed zeal. Here is the antidote to thinking you love others but know nothing about being loved: “I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet.” Let your soul be filled with the One who washes your feet, and then just see if your zeal against sinners remains white-hot.

Here also is the liberty from antinomianism. Antinomianism is thinking you are loved when you know nothing about loving. If you hear today’s teaching as saying that once Jesus has washed your feet you are free to do as you please, you are right... as long as what you please, is to do unto others as He has done unto you. Jesus makes quite clear the obligation—the duty—of the commandments upon those whose feet He has washed.

Nothing is more binding than antinomianism, for antinomianism locks out all assurance of God’s love. Breaking God’s commandments is nothing short of hatred for God and for your neighbor. ¹Jn4.8“⁸The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” ¹⁹“We love, because He first loved us... ²¹And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

Here then is liberty from antinomianism. If you find yourself frequently upset because your teachers suggest ways that you might more fully love and serve your brothers and sisters in the church, then it may be possible you don’t know so much about loving as you think you do. But if you willingly receive instruction on washing others feet, you will find yourself ever more assured that your own feet have been washed by the Lord and Teacher.

Legalism is thinking you are loving when you know nothing about being loved. Antinomianism is thinking you are loved when you know nothing about loving. Knowing Christ has washed your feet is the antidote to legalism. Knowing your duty to wash one another’s feet is the liberty from antinomianism.

B. The disciple of Christ has no identity but Christ.

The other area, quickly, is this: The disciple of Christ has no identity but Christ. Jesus does not tell the disciples they should wash one another's feet because their own feet have been washed. No, Jesus tells the disciples they should wash one another's feet because *Jesus* has washed their feet. Your identity as a Christian is not as one whose feet are washed. Your identity is as one whose feet *Jesus* has washed. Your identity is not in your washing of feet. Your identity is not in your clean feet. Your identity is in Jesus, the Person who has washed your feet. All other identities lead to depression. Again, all other identities lead to depression. This is grace at work.

Your identity is not found in your Christian productivity. That is the claim of legalism, and it will produce depression entangled with times of nonproductivity real or perceived.

Your identity is not found in your Christian liberty. That is the claim of antinomianism, and it will produce depression when you feel the weightiness of the second great commandment, to love one another as Christ has loved us.

No, saint, your identity is found only in Jesus Christ, your Savior, your Teacher, your Lord. When the roaring lion of depression rears up against you, remember the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Lamb who was slain on the cross. He has served you. He has loved you. He will not allow your depression ultimately to overcome you, but He will use it in due time to refresh in your own heart the joy of Christ Himself being your identity.