

John 13:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

Analysis

For I have given you an example (ὑπόδειγμα, hypodeigma)—not merely illustration but pattern to be followed. Jesus explicitly states His purpose: modeling replicable behavior. The perfect tense "have given" indicates lasting effect—this example stands as permanent template for Christian conduct.

That ye should do as I have done to you (καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα, kathōs egō epoiēsa)—the comparative "as" demands conformity to Christ's standard. This is imitatio Christi, imitation of Christ, as ethical foundation. Jesus doesn't merely teach servanthood abstractly; He embodies it, then commands: "do likewise." The pronoun emphasis ("I" have done) underscores that Christ's own action validates the command. This principle extends beyond foot-washing to all Christian ethics—believers must pattern their lives after Christ's self-giving love demonstrated supremely at the cross.

Historical Context

Ancient moral philosophy used exempla (examples) for teaching, but typically cited legendary heroes. Jesus offers Himself as the pattern—unprecedented claim to moral perfection. Paul later develops this theology extensively (Philippians 2:5-8, Ephesians 5:1-2). This verse became foundational for monastic traditions emphasizing humble service and for Protestant ethics of imitating Christ's character.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What specific aspects of Jesus' character in this passage should shape your daily conduct?
2. How does following Christ's example require self-sacrifice in your current relationships?

Interlinear Text

ὑπόδειγμα	γὰρ	ἔδωκα	ὑμῖν	ἵνα	καθὼς	ἐγὼ	ποιῇτε
an example	For	I have given	to you	that	as	I	have done
G5262	G1063	G1325	G5213	G2443	G2531	G1473	G4160

ὑμῖν	καὶ	ὑμεῖς	ποιῇτε
to you	G2532	ye	have done
G5213		G5210	G4160

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 11:29 (Parallel theme): Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

1 John 2:6 (Parallel theme): He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

1 Peter 2:21 (Parallel theme): For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Ephesians 5:2 (Parallel theme): And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

Romans 15:5 (Parallel theme): Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

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