

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	έγὼ	ποιῆτε
an example	For	I have given	to you	that	as	I	have done
G5262	G1063	G1325	G5213	G2443	G2531	G1473	G4160
ὑμῖν	καὶ	ὑμεῖς	ποιῆτε				
to you	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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