

John 13:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?

Analysis

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Peter's reaction to Jesus washing his feet reveals the natural human recoil from grace—the pride that resists receiving unmerited service. The phrase **Lord, dost thou wash my feet?** (Κύριε, σύ μου νίπτεις τοὺς πόδας/Kyrie, sy mou nipteis tous podas) places emphatic pronouns in stark contrast: Thou (σύ) —the Master, and my (μου)—the servant. The present tense nipteis (wash) suggests Peter interrupted Jesus mid-action, shocked at what was unfolding.

The verb νίπτω (niptō) specifically means to wash a part of the body (usually feet or hands), distinct from λούω (louō), which means to bathe the whole body—a distinction Jesus exploits in verse 10. Footwashing was the task of the lowliest household slave, so degrading that Jewish law forbade requiring it of Hebrew servants (only Gentile slaves). Yet here stands the Lord of Glory, the one Peter confessed as **the Christ, the Son of the living God** (Matthew 16:16), performing the most menial service.

Peter's question contains both reverence ('Lord') and resistance. He grasps the incongruity but not yet the theology. This scene dramatizes the incarnation itself: the Word became flesh and took on the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). The Creator serves His creatures. The Judge cleanses the guilty. Pride says, 'I must serve You'; grace says, 'Let Me serve you.'

Historical Context

This scene occurs in the upper room during the Last Supper, hours before Jesus's arrest (John 13:1-2). Jewish Passover meals required ritual purity, and guests arriving with dusty feet from Jerusalem's streets would need washing. Normally, a household servant performed this task upon arrival. The disciples' failure to wash one another's feet reveals their persistent dispute about greatness (Luke 22:24)—each considered himself too important to serve.

First-century Jewish culture was intensely hierarchical. Rabbis held exalted status; disciples served masters, never the reverse. Peter had witnessed Jesus's divine power—walking on water, raising the dead, commanding nature. The cognitive dissonance of seeing this Lord kneel before him with a water basin was profound. Roman foot-washing customs differed somewhat from Jewish, but throughout the ancient Near East, the act signified the washer's inferior status. For Jesus to wash His disciples' feet inverted all social and religious order.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Why does receiving unmerited service from Christ feel more difficult than serving Him through our own efforts?
2. In what ways does our spiritual pride manifest as resistance to God's grace rather than gratitude for it?
3. How does Jesus's willingness to perform the most degrading service challenge our concern for status and reputation?

Interlinear Text

ἔρχεται οὖν πρὸς Σίμωνα Πέτρον· καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ
cometh he **Then** **to** **Simon** **Peter** **and** **saith** **unto him**
G2064 G3767 G4314 G4613 G4074 G2532 G3004 G846

ἐκεῖνος, Κύριε σύ μου νίπτεις τοὺς πόδας
Peter **Lord** **thou** **my** **dost** **G3588** **feet**
G1565 G2962 G4771 G3450 G3538 G4228

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