

# PLAIN SPEECH

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“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

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## MUST WE HAVE FOOT-WASHING SERVICES?

*“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (Jn. 13:1-15).*

From the preceding text some folks teach that local churches ought to conduct foot-washing services, reasoning that Jesus instituted such via command. Sometimes some of those who advocate foot-washing in the local congregation are so-called brethren. Leroy Garret wrote: “...a service like this (foot-washing)... would be an oddity to most of us in Churches of Christ, mainly because ‘We’ve never done it that way.’ It is for our own good that we realize that there are adventures into meaning and truth, especially in reference to Body life, that we have not yet explored. *A meaningful foot-washing service may be one of them*” ([http://www.leroygarrett.org/restorationreview/article.htm?rr32\\_05/rr32\\_05c.htm&32&5&1990](http://www.leroygarrett.org/restorationreview/article.htm?rr32_05/rr32_05c.htm&32&5&1990)).

Are Garrett, his cronies, and the varied denominationalists right? Ought local churches to be conducting foot-washing services? No. The remainder of this article will demonstrate why local churches are **not** to be engaging in the foot-washing business.

First of all, simply because Christ gave a command to someone while He was upon the earth, does not automatically mean said command is something required of all people until He returns. This truth is not hard to see for the honest student of scripture. For example, Jesus one time said to a man with an infirmity, “*take up thy bed, and walk*” (Jn. 5:8). Should the local church then be having miraculous healing services? No. Another time Jesus said to a blind man, “*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam*” (Jn. 9:7). Should local churches then have indoor swimming pools? Duh! Luke recalled what Jesus had said, writing: “*And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me*” (Acts 1:4). Must every local church be in Jerusalem? C’mon.

Second, one must understand why Jesus did what He did after the Passover supper had ended (Jn. 13:2). When one looks at the extended context of the setting, one discovers that after the supper had ended the disciples were arguing amongst themselves about who would be the greatest in the kingdom (Lk. 22:24). They should have already known the answer (Mt. 23:11). Thus, what they failed to grasp in word, Jesus taught by example. He showed them who the greatest was – the humble servant. Jesus is teaching individuals an object lesson about humility and service, **NOT** instituting foot-washing services for local churches.

Third, it must be understood that Jesus did not institute foot-washing. Foot-washing, as an act of hospitality, was practiced in the ancient near-east long before God came in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). See: Gen. 18:1-4; 19:1-2; 24:32; 43:24. As an act of hospitality, foot-washing falls within the context of individual action within the home (cf. 1 Tim. 5:9-10), **NOT** something local churches, as a collectivity, should be doing.

Fourth, local churches must have authority for everything they do (Col. 3:17; Jn. 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Tit. 1:5). A practice may be authorized via commandments from God (kept in context), approved examples (kept in context) and necessary conclusions (kept in context) – Acts 15:12-18. So then, where do we find, in the New Testament, foot-washing services being practiced by local congregations? Where is the authority for such? It’s not there; and that, my friends, is where this issue (or any other issue) begins and ends! The authority for literal foot-washing (humble hospitality) exists for individuals (1 Tim. 5:9-10), but **NOT** for the local church; and not everything individuals are authorized to do are things local churches can do (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:1-5).

When one understands the points above and still insists local churches must be in the foot-washing business, they’re dishonest.