

A

**Discourse,**

**INVESTIGATING THE DOCTRINE**

OF

**WASHING THE SAINTS FEET:**

DELIVERED AT MONTICELLO.

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BY

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### TO THE READER.

The subject of *WASHING FEET* as a Religious duty, has for several years excited a contention, in some instances unpleasant, among the Baptists in Georgia, especially within the bounds of the Flint River and the Ocmulgee Associations.

The following discourse, in substance, was delivered last Summer in the Baptist Church at Menticello. The reasons which induced the author then to make a public expression of his sentiments on this subject, before the Church and Congregation under his ministerial instruction, were principally two. 1. He deemed it his duty to correct what he conceived to be an error, in the construction of the transaction of Christ, recorded in the 13th Chap. of the Gospel by St. John, and under which error a part of that Church seemed disposed to make the matter of *FEET WASHING* more important than a scriptural view of the case would approve. 2. As he could not conscientiously unite with those Brethren in what he thought to be an unscriptural practice, he deemed it due to himself to make an exhibition of his views on the subject, in justification of his conduct, against the censures of such as might attribute to him motives other than conscientious scruples.

The author was requested to have this discourse published shortly after its delivery, but as there was then existing a feverish excitement, which might have, perhaps, put an unelucidable construction upon such a procedure, he deemed it, on reflection, best not to comply with his first promise on the subject. But as the public agitation has passed away, he has concluded to yield to the repeated solicitations with which he continues to be pressed, to publish the discourse on feet washing in pamphlet form. Those who heard it delivered will perceive a few alterations; indeed, the sensitiveness which was then awake on the subject in general, induced the author to omit some expressions, and even pass over several arguments which he supposes, will now, since the agitation has subsided, be more likely to receive an impartial notice from those of opposite views. If any should look upon the sentiments of the piece unfavorably, all the author asks, is, that such will remember that he is entitled to his opinions, and that they who differ from them, are in christian charity, required to give his arguments a fair hearing before they condemn the sentiments exhibited in the discourse.—Therefore, under hope that it may enable many plain Christians, who desire to know and obey the truth, to arrive at a correct view of the subject of *Washing the Saints' Feet*, and under the belief that no austere critic will think it worth while to trouble either himself or the public, with any notice of its defects, it is, without further apology, committed to the press, and placed before the community.

THE AUTHOR.

## A DISCOURSE, &C.

*If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your Feet, ye ought to wash one another's Feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you—John, xiii, 14.*

That the Saviour washed the feet of his disciples, and laid them under the positive injunction to wash each others feet, is a scriptural truth, which probably none pretend to deny. But whether that injunction is applicable to christians in this day, and if so, under what circumstances, it must be performed, are questions upon which there exists much difference of opinion. It is matter of serious regret, that the difference of sentiment and practice particularly among Baptists on this subject, has in many instances, resulted in coolness of affection between churches and individuals, which the great Prince of Peace evidently never intended any of his examples or precepts to produce amongst his professed-disciples.

Perhaps the parties between whom, censorious recriminations have reciprocally passed, have been wont to carry their opinions and practice in this matter to extremes, attaching either too much or too little importance to the example and injunction of Christ, contained in the text under discussion.

Those who place the highest estimate upon the act of Jesus, in washing his disciples feet, generally assume the position that the supper at which the transaction occurred, was the sacrament of the communion. They thus connect that act of Christ with his administration of that most sacred institution, and probably attach, unconsciously, equal, if not paramount sanctity to it. On the other hand, the greater portion of the Baptist denomination, and the entire mass of other orthodox sects look upon the practice of washing the saints' feet, as having been a private duty enjoined upon the primitive disciples, but not to be considered obligatory upon christians in the present day. If we have gone too far in ranking the large majority of the Baptist denomination among those who esteem the practice of washing feet in a religious way, as obsolete, we can perhaps boldly say that none of them having sufficient education to investigate the subject, and who have given themselves the trouble to do so, pretend to hold feet washing as a religious ceremony to be performed in a church capacity. And we are satisfied that no author having ability to write either grammatically or logically, has ever attempted to prove it a standing church ordinance of similar import or authority with the communion.

But we, at the same time, suppose that those who have entirely exploded the practice of washing feet as a religious duty, whether Baptists, or others, have verged to that extreme, which makes less of the Saviour's example and injunction upon this subject, than was originally intended. It seems to us possible, that there lies a pathway of duty between those extremes, upon which, if we could strike, and make it plain, we should probably render a useful service to the cause of christian union.

In the discussion of our text, it must not be forgotten, that the Saviour in the most emphatical terms, urged his example as the rule of conduct by which his disciples were to be governed in the matter of washing feet. "For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you." The circumstances then which combined to constitute that example, must be ascertained and carefully observed. Because the simple act of washing feet, aside from the prominent circumstances under which Christ performed it, could not be an imitation of his example, and would not therefore be a fulfilment of his injunction expressed in the text.

Let us then enquire—I. Whether it was the sacramental supper in Jerusalem, or a usual evening repast in Bethany, at which Christ washed his disciples feet.

In noticing the history of the case as described in the thirteenth chapter of the gospel by John, we think there can be produced scriptural testimony sufficient to satisfy an unprejudiced mind that the supper at which Christ performed that act, and enjoined his example in such performance, was not the supper of the sacrament, but a common meal.

It is perhaps universally admitted, that Christ had partaken of the paschal supper, when he proceeded to institute and administer the sacramental supper. Then to shew that, the supper at which the case of washing the disciples feet occurred, was previous to the passover, will prove, that the act of Jesus in washing feet, was not connected with the sacrament of the communion. It might seem that John intended to leave no ground for disputation on this point. For he commences his description of the case by specifically stating the time of washing feet to be previous to the passover. He begins by saying, "now, before the feast of the passover." And when Judas left the table after the feet washing, under the determination to betray Christ, and Jesus said to him, "that thou doest, do quickly," the other disciples supposed, as Judas was their treasurer, that the Saviour had directed him to procure things necessary "against the feast" which was doubtless the passover, the stated anniversary of which was near, but of course not arrived, as the necessary arrangements for it were not then made.

But it is objected by those who contend for the identity of the communion and supper, from which Jesus rose when he washed the disciples feet, that the term "feast" as used by the evangelist John, did not mean the paschal supper itself, but the "feast of unleavened bread," which was consequent upon the passover, and continued seven days. To which we would say, that the evangelist Luke, tells us the "feast of unleavened bread" was styled the passover, and which he shews most explicitly to have been from beginning to end, consequent upon Satan's entering into Judas.

Our objectors, however, admit, that the circumstance of Satan's entering into Judas, after receiving the sop, occurred at the same supper at which the feet were washed. Says St. Luke, "Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the passover, and the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. Then he went his way and communed with the chief priests and captains how he might betray him unto them; and they were glad and covenanted to give him money. And he promised and sought opportunity to betray him unto them, in the absence of the multitude. Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed, &c." Luke xxii, 1---8. All of which seems most unequivocally to prove, that the interview of Judas with the Jewish Council to make the arrangements for betraying Christ, and which was after the entering of Satan into Judas at the feet washing, took place previous to the day upon the night of which the paschal supper was eaten, and after which the sacrament of the Lord's supper was instituted. We think this argument without further remark on this point, should be considered sufficiently conclusive to correct the error of those who make the case of washing feet, the closing scene of the communion, and an indispensable appendage to that most solemn ordinance. But many have been so long accustomed to think John was describing in the 13th chap. of his gospel, those events which the other evangelists

represent in connexion with the Lord's supper, that it will require nice distinctions to produce conviction over the prejudice and prepossession which have given sanction to their long established opinions. We must therefore dwell yet longer upon this point. It should be remembered that John did not write his gospel account till long after the others were given, and that his object was to record chiefly those instructions of Christ, and those circumstances of his history, which had been omitted by the other evangelists. Hence, it may be observed, in the writings of John, that few of the events recorded by the other historians, are even alluded to, unless to particularize some of the attending circumstances, passed in silence by the rest of his brethren. Therefore John makes no mention of the sacramental supper, and but seldom alludes to the institution or administration of the other gospel ordinance, as we recollect to have observed.

Even many of those circumstances recorded in the gospel by John, which on a cursory view, seem to be evidently identified with descriptions given by the other evangelists, will on a minute comparison be found to be entirely different. For instance, there appears on first reading the account, a resemblance between the circumstances recorded by John, in connexion with the supper at which the washing of feet was transacted, and those events recorded by the other evangelists as having transpired at the paschal feast. And many, without comparing the accounts, have upon that apparent similarity of descriptions, identified the case recorded in the thirteenth chapter of John with the institution of the sacramental supper.

But it should be observed, that the mention of those events predicted by Christ at the paschal feast, represented their fulfilment as being just on the eve of consummation. To the disciples collectively, he said, after they had eaten the passover and received the sacrament, "All ye shall be offended because of me *this night*." To Peter he said, "verily, I say unto you, that *this night* before the cock shall crow thou shalt deny me thrice." "Behold he is at hand that doth betray me, &c. see Mat. xxvi, 31. 34. 46.

The rest of the evangelists are equally specific, in limiting the accomplishment of those predictions to that very night—see Mark xiv, Luke xxii.

Whereas, Jesus in the conversation with the disciples recorded by John, shewing that Judas would betray him and Peter deny him, represented that expression of those predicted events, as being some time previous to their accomplishment. As if to leave no doubt upon the minds of his disciples, that the predictions he was about to utter in accordance with the prophecy he had just quoted from Psalm xli, 9, were not to receive their fulfilment till a future period of some days to come, he introduced them with this preface. "Now" (marginal translation "From henceforth" shewing an intervening space of time) "I tell you before it come that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he, John xiii, 19. Indeed this prediction seems to resemble that general prophetic instruction which Jesus delivered to his disciples concerning his death before his arrival at Jerusalem, and which seems to have been repeated at different times for the purpose of giving the impression of its expected fulfilment, the more force,—says Matthew (xvi, 21)—"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and be raised again the third day." In the next chapter (xvii, 22) he repeats the same prophecy. "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, the son of man,

shall be betrayed into the hands of men and they shall kill him and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceedingly sorrowful"—see also Mark ix.30,31. We may then very rationally suppose, that the conversation described by John as having occurred after washing feet, ensued upon a repetition of that general prediction of his death, quoted from the Jewish Scriptures, and the accomplishment of which had been by him limited to the approaching feast; and that John records some particulars omitted by the other evangelists in reference to the traitor by whom this prophecy should be brought to its fulfilment, and in regard to the manner in which it would affect the disciples. The correctness of this view of the subject will appear still more probable when we call to mind that John in the two preceding chapters, records the journey and arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem, corresponding to the record of that fact given by the other evangelists, and who inform us that on his way to the feast, he repeated to the disciples, the prediction that he should there be betrayed, see John xi.54,55—and xii.1,12—compared with Mat. xx. 18,19—Mark x.33,34—Luke xviii.31,34. Besides, the circumstances recorded by John, in xiii, chap. are different from those given by the other evangelists in connexion with the paschal supper. The sign given by Christ at the supper to which John alludes, as designating the traitor was a sop dipped by Jesus and handed to him. "Jesus answered and said, he it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it," and this signal appears to have been given secretly, perhaps in a whisper to the beloved disciple who was near to him, as it was not understood by the rest, see John xiii.23--30; which fact will account for the repetition of the conversation at the feast, where the designation made by Jesus in answer to the enquiry of the disciples, was, "it is one of the twelve that dippeth with me in the dish"—Mark xiv. 20—see also Math. xxvi.23—and Luke xxii.21.

But as we have been thus particular in proving that the example of Jesus in washing his disciples feet was not connected with the Lord's supper, which was instituted at Jerusalem, it may not be amiss before dismissing this part of the investigation, to shew that John was, in this chapter, describing events which occurred at Bethany.

In the commencement of ch. 12, John gives this information: "then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead whom he raised from the dead." After describing the particulars of a supper prepared there for him by Lazarus and his sisters, he states on the next day, Jesus entered Jerusalem amid the acclamations and reverential regards of the admiring multitude. When Matthew records the case to which John here alludes, he informs us, that after Jesus had given an exhibition of divine power and authority among the caviling rulers "he left them and went out of the city into Bethany, and he lodged there," and represents that next morning he returned to the capital—Mat. xxi. 1, 17, 18—which shews that Jesus had his lodging at Bethany some five or six days preceding the passover and by reference to the history of his visit to the paschal feast as given by Saint Mark and Luke, it will be indisputably plain that Jesus was in the habit for something like a week before the passover, of spending the day at Jerusalem, in delivering instructions concerning the kingdom of God and returning at evening to Bethany to lodge—see Mark, chap. xi, and verses 1, 11, 12, 15, 20, 27, and Luke, chap. xxi, verse 37, 38.

After Matthew and Mark mentioned the visit of Jesus to Jerusalem to attend the feast of the passover which seems to correspond to the statement of John, in chapter xii, 1, specifying the time to be six days preceding the feast, they proceed with a detailed account of occurrences till they come to a meal at the house of Simon the le-

her "in Bethany," which they both state to be two days before the paschal feast, and consequent upon which, they represent Judas holding consultation with the Jewish rulers and making arrangements to betray his master. Now, as John describes the circumstance of Satan's entering into Judas as having taken place at the supper where Jesus washed his disciples feet, which, was "before the passover," and as Matthew and Mark describe the arrangements with the priests, for betraying Christ to which act Judas was instigated after Satan entered into him as following the supper at the house of Simon the leper, which preceded the passover, therefore it seems to be a logical conclusion, that the transaction of washing the disciples feet occurred at the supper in Bethany; specified to have been just two days preceding the feast of the paschal anniversary. Our inquiry then, as to the time and place, when and where, the example of Christ in washing his disciples feet, was given, results in what we conceive to be a rational & fair conclusion, that the transaction occurred at a common evening repast in Bethany, some short time antecedent to the Jewish feast of the passover. We have been thus minute in the investigation of this part of the discussion, because we think that misconstruction on this point, constitutes the grand source of error in those who attach that sort of importance to the practice of washing feet, which ranks it with the ordinances of the gospel, and gives it an elevated stand in front of all christian obligations. And we trust, at any rate; that such will at least be induced, by our course of reasoning on this point to exercise a charitable feeling for those of us who consider that Christ's example in washing feet, was never designed to be arrayed in the imposing authority and awful sanction with which it would seem clothed by its supposed connexion with the Lords' supper. We proceed to ascertain,

II. Whether the example of Christ in washing the disciples feet, was performed merely as a religious ceremony or as a necessary service, preparatory to their evening repast and retirement for sleep.

Here too, we seem to feel confident that resources of rational argument are at hand, which might readily be wielded even by a blunt pen or stammering tongue with that success which would fasten conviction on any reasonable mind not too firmly enchained in the fetters of invincible prejudice. The reply of Jesus to Peter will at once render it palpably plain, that the feet of the disciples needed cleansing at the time he proceeded to wash them.

After Peter had refused to suffer his master and Lord to perform the menial service of washing his feet, and had upon the remonstrance of the Saviour consented for him to wash not only his feet but also his hands and head, "Jesus saith unto him, he that is washed needeth not, save *to wash his feet*, &c," which sentence by supplying the elliptical omissions according to the original, would be, he that is washed (or bathed) has no need to wash his hands and head but has need to wash his feet only; and we think it would be giving an illiberal construction to the above quotation, not to admit it as the avowed declaration of Christ that the act of washing feet was necessary at that time. We are aware that many suppose, from the fact of the Saviour's arguing the propriety of his washing Peter's feet, from the necessity of his receiving spiritual cleansing, to make him a partaker of salvation that therefore the act of washing feet on that occasion was of spiritual import and should now be used as a religious ceremony, emblematical of spiritual operation. To which we would say, that the refusal of Peter to allow his Lord to wash his feet, furnishes positive evidence that the act proposed by Christ was not by Peter understood to be a spiritual but corporeal cleansing, which they were accustomed to perform for themselves; and that

he objected, not because his feet had no need of being washed that night, but because his reverential respect for the person of Christ could not approve the condescension of his blessed Lord to the most servile office. It would indeed seem, that Jesus intended to prevent the impression that the act in which he was then engaged was of a spiritual nature, by his replying to Peter in substance, that they who were spiritually washed were clean every whit, and that such needed not on that occasion wash corporeally the hands or head but the feet only, and we think it a reasonable conclusion, that the great Saviour appealed to the necessity of being washed by him spiritually to become partaker in the high interests of his spiritual kingdom, not for the purpose of teaching Peter that the act of washing feet was ceremonial and figurative of spiritual operation, but to remind Peter of what great things he had done for his soul, and to teach him his dependence upon his spiritual Saviour, to whom he was under the strongest obligation to yield implicit obedience and unhesitating submission in all things temporal as well as spiritual.

By referring to the general circumstances of the case and the customs of those times, we may obtain further evidence, shewing that the act of washing feet was necessary on that occasion. It was shown under the former head of our investigation, that Jesus and his disciples were in the habit of lodging in Bethany, and spending the day in Jerusalem. So that Jesus and his disciples daily walked four miles in going to Jerusalem and back to Bethany, which are about two miles apart. After they had spent the day in traversing the crowded streets of the capital and had returned to their lodgings, it would be natural to suppose them hungry and much fatigued, particularly as the whole region of their travels was very mountainous, and that after supper, sleep would be next in requisition. And if we farther consider that the people of that day and country wore sandals (see Mark vi 9.) a species of shoe consisting of a sole fastened to the bottom of the naked foot by straps which extended over the top of the foot and lashed about the ankle, we shall at once discover that it was indispensable to their comfortable rest to have the feet washed before retiring to sleep.

Moreover, it must not be forgotten, that the position at the table according to the custom of that day, was to recline on a couch, leaning on the left elbow, with the face towards the table, and the right hand at liberty to be used in eating, while the feet were extended at length upon the couch. Hence it was necessary to have the feet washed, perhaps not only at supper, but at every meal.

Here it may not be amiss to call to remembrance, the scriptural fact, that these sources of necessity had given rise to the usage of washing feet, which had from time immemorial, been observed among the Jewish people. As the men of the East performed travelling chiefly on foot, and wore only sandals, they found it necessary to personal comfort to wash their feet whenever they stopped, either to eat and rest in the day, or to sup and tarry through the night. Hence it was reckoned among the first acts of civility and hospitality, to present a travelling guest with water to wash the feet. Thus, when Abraham invited the visiting angels to rest with him and take a little refreshment, he proposed to bring them water to wash their feet, as his first act of hospitality; and when they had proceeded to Sodom and were invited by Lot to tarry at his house all night, he proposed to them to wash their feet among the promised comforts of his hospitable entertainment—see Genesis xviii, 4, and xix, 2.

When Abraham's servant was sent to seek a wife for Isaac, Rebecca's brother on receiving him in the house, speedily furnished water for him to wash his feet, and for his men to wash their feet. See Genesis, xxiv, 32.

When Joseph's brethren were conducted into his house, the steward proceeded without delay to place before them water to wash their feet—Genesis, xliii, 24. When David sent for Uriah to return from the army, he directed him to go home, wash his feet, &c. Other instances of that custom among the ancient Israelites might be produced if necessary—see Judges xix, 21—Song v, 3. And that the same custom was common in the days of Christ, may be inferred from his complaint against the Pharisee who invited him to eat with him, but gave him no water to wash his feet—see Luke vii, 44. The circumstances of this custom, render it evident too, that it was not numbered among the typical ceremonies enjoined upon the Jews by divine command, neither among those “divers washings,” which they held as sacred traditions from their elders, and which Christ reprobated, but that it was the result of necessity arising out of the nature of the case.

There is therefore no reasonable doubt, that Christ and his apostles under the same sort of necessity which gave existence to the above universal custom, habitually washed their feet, every night on retiring to supper and to rest, from the wearisome travels and fatiguing labors of the day. All that is new then in the case mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of John's gospel history, is, that instead of each one as usual washing his own feet, Jesus proceeded to wash their feet for them. The design of which evidently was to set them a general example of humility and brotherly kindness. And he enjoined upon them to wash one another's feet, that in so doing they might give evidence of their mutual affection, by manifesting an humble spirit of willingness to perform for each other the lowest service, when needed to promote their comfort.

Then, since Jesus did not perform for his disciples the menial service of washing their feet, when it was as to the literal act, unnecessary, but absolutely needed, as shewn by the assertion of Christ, and the circumstances of the case taken in connexion with the customs of the times, we must therefore infer that his injunction to wash one another's feet did not require the disciples to meet with clean feet, simply for the purpose of performing the act merely as a religious ceremony. We should rather presume that his meaning was, that in travelling about for the diligent performance of their great Masters' service, they ought to wash one another's feet whenever they needed cleansing, instead of each one as usual, washing his own feet.

But once more let us examine—

III. Whether the sacred writers speak of this example of Christ in a manner which attaches to it the character of a public church ordinance, or only that of an inferior private duty.

Although the disciples, during the Ministry of Christ, frequently appeared dull of apprehension in regard to many of his instructions, and especially his prophetic annunciations concerning his approaching death, yet we must recollect his having told them that the holy spirit whom he promised to send to be their guide should “lead them into all truth.” We are then bound to admit that the sacred penmen who wrote under the inspiration of the holy spirit correctly comprehended the true import of Christ's instructions when they recorded their historical accounts, or issued their epistolary advice and comments on gospel duties. Nor can we for a moment imagine that the evangelists & apostles in giving the written history of gospel transactions and delivering the necessary instructions to the converts from idolatry, would either pass in silence any gospel ordinance, or mention in a way which would lessen their importance any \*

Christ's commands, or prescribed christian duties. We must therefore infer, from the comparative silence of the disciples, both evangelists and apostle, on the act of Christ in washing their feet, that his example and injunction on that subject, could have been designed in their conception, to have reference only to private duties among christians, and not to be observed in the character of a public church ordinance or even religious ceremony. It is altogether probable, that the apostles, in compliance with this example and injunction of their Lord and Master, while so actively engaged in their missionary labors, both among Jews and Gentiles, frequently, when necessary, washed one another's feet. But that they considered it a mere common-place duty of too private import and too little weight to compare with the spiritual concerns of men, may be inferred from the partial notice assigned it in the epistles. It seems that none of the apostles thought it of sufficient importance to have a place in their instructive and exhortative addresses either to Jewish or gentile Churches. Nor is mention made of it in any of the private epistles, except one bare allusion to it in the letter to Timothy. In specifying the qualifications which should entitle an aged widow to the charitable bounty of the Church, Paul in requiring a course of conduct giving evidence of her exemplary piety, says, "if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every work," 1. Tim. v. 10.

The meaning of this allusion, to washing feet, we may safely infer, was that Timothy should ascertain upon the application of a poor widow for the support of the brethren, whether among those charitable deeds which had impoverished her, such as taking care of the children of deceased poor Christians and supplying the necessaries of life to infirm or helpless living Christians, she had also acted hospitably to travelling saints or ministers. And whether among those acts of hospitality rendered to such she had for their comfort washed their weary feet previous to their supping and retiring for sleep, according to the custom of Christians in compliance with the example and injunction of Christ upon that subject. And as this bare allusion, which is the only hint at the practice in all the apostolic writings, ranks feet washing with private duties, it of course forbids the idea of its being entitled to a place among the ordinances of the gospel, or even among public Church acts.

Nor does the notice given to this example of Christ by the evangelists, suggest the propriety of attaching to it any special importance. Indeed so unimportant did the sacred historians themselves think this duty, that none except John, however minutely particular in recording the numerous instructions of Christ on other points of duty both public and private, ever once allude to his act of washing feet either as taught by Jesus or practised by the disciples. Even Luke the beloved physician, who was the companion of Paul in most of his perilous *missionary* career among the heathens, and who professed to have an intimate acquaintance with the acts of Christ and transactions of the apostles, though he had no doubt often seen the disciples washing one another's feet, is entirely silent about the matter, both in his accurate history of the life and ministry of Jesus and in his detailed account of the apostles varied ministerial labors and private christian duties, whether temporal or spiritual; so that if John in his old age, long after the other evangelists wrote their gospels, had not made a supplementary statement of some things which they had omitted and among these things the circumstance, of Christ's

Having washed his disciples feet, that transaction, together with the example and injunction issuing from it to the primitive disciples, would have remained to us unknown. In that event also the requisition of Paul upon pious widows to wash the saints feet, to us would have been clothed in mystery far more inexplicable than his baptism for the dead, alluded to as an argument for the resurrection in the first epistle to the Church at Corinth. Surely then, if any scriptural injunction was by the apostles and primitive Christians deemed a non-essential in the constituent duties of a course of pious obedience, it must have been that on the subject of washing feet, as that has received, perhaps less notice from them than any obligation to religious duty enjoined in the New Testament.

We need not wonder then that many intelligent christians, are for exploding the practice of washing the saints feet as a religious duty, since the apostles themselves treated it with so much indifference. Nor should we feel half so much at a loss for argument in pleading the justification of such as we would, in defending the conduct of those who have gone to the opposite extreme, in attaching to feet washing, that high importance which in principle, places it upon an equal footing with the solemn sacrament of the communion, and in practice makes it supercede almost every good work by which the christian character is developed, and the kingdom of Christ carried forward in its heavenly operations on earth.

But it is time for us to review the ground over which we have passed, in our investigation of this subject. Let us then in the last place

IV Sum up the prominent circumstances ascertained to have been connected with the example of Christ, in washing his disciples feet, and specify some instances in which that example may be imitated by Christians of the present day, in obedience to the Savior's annexed injunction.

Under the preceding propositions of this discussion, we have ascertained that the act of Christ in washing his disciples feet, was performed at a private supper, and on a common occasion; that it was needed as being preparatory to reclining at table and for comfortable rest, after active employment in the Lord's vineyard, during the day; and lastly, that the scriptural notices of feet washing, rank it among the least important christain duties. But the chief circumstance which we think gave rise to the act of Christ in washing his disciples feet, and which constituted the grand source of his injunction to them on the subject, was the fact, that their feet needed cleansing.

Hence our reason for supposing the path way of duty in this matter to be between those who had entirely exploded the practice of washing the saints feet, and those who make it a gospel ordinance. For the rules of decency as well as the laws of health, require all persons rich and poor, to have the feet occasionally cleansed. We therefore conclude, that although christians in the present day, and in most sections of christendom do not so generally travel on foot or wear sandals, or recline on couches at meals, which circumstances rendered washing the feet so necessary, and required it to be so frequently repeated among ancient christians, that still there are times when the feet need to be washed, and when without its performance it would be impracticable to rest comfortably.

And as the act which Jesus performed for the disciples, and enjoined on them to perform for one another, was *needed*, so under some of the most prominent of similar circumstances in connexion with the same act being needed, let christians in the present day

perform it for one another. As when ministers of the gospel are travelling together on their great Master's business, and especially in the diligent discharge of *Missionary* duties, whenever it may become necessary to their cleanliness and comfort to have their feet bathed, let them on retiring to rest, instead of each washing his own, wash one another's feet; and when brethren meet together for the purpose of transacting business for the promotion of the Lord's cause, particularly at the sessions of *missionary and benevolent associations*, after having gotten thro' the fatigues of the day, and retired to some friend's house to spend the night, as Jesus and his disciples did, after supper, let as many as wish their feet washed, mutually join and wash one another's feet. This we think would be coming as nearly within the precincts of Christ's example, and injunction, as the circumstances under which we live, could admit.

And if the pious sisters, who are generally most prompt in the discharge of religious duties would desire to have some privilege in the imitation of their blessed Master on this subject, let them whenever they meet together to transact business for their Redeemer, under circumstances which make it necessary for their feet to be washed, cordially unite in washing each other's feet. And especially if there be any venerable mothers in the church, whose hospitality has made their houses the retreats for the weary ministers, while travelling to bear the glad-tidings of salvation to lost sinners; We would say to such, that whenever it may seem necessary to the comfort of their guests to have the feet washed, and these venerable matrons out of reverence for the example of their Lord, and in religious respect for his humble minister bring forward the basin and towel and wash and wipe the feet of the Lord's servants, such will seem to comply with the apostles directions concerning the pious widows of old.

These we think are the occasions, when feet washing as a religious duty, may in this day, possibly be performed by Christians within the scope of scriptural injunctions. Nor do we conceive that the performance of that particular act under any other than the above, or similar circumstances can be considered a scriptural imitation of Christ, or a rational compliance with his injunction or the apostles' requisition on the subject of washing the Saints feet.

Then for the members of any particular church, or religious society, to assemble in their house of worship in a public manner, with their feet carefully cleansed, for the purpose of washing one another's feet, cannot be an imitation of Christ's washing his disciples feet.— And more especially when either all or part of such Church members, which is usually the fact with the leaders of that practice, stand in the most pointed opposition to all *missionary & benevolent operations for the support and spread of the gospel*, and even decry the idea of affording *pious young ministers the means of instruction, to qualify them for the responsible work of expounding the oracles of salvation*.

For all of those things are precisely the reverse of the circumstances under which Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, or students in divine things, as that title of his followers originally imported.

Perhaps those who have been designated as placing an undue estimate upon the injunction and example expressed in the language of Christ, which has been under discussion, are ready to charge us with partiality of feeling towards those of the opposite extreme who consider that the practice of washing feet as a religious duty, has become obsolete. And it may be that they will further charge us

and thus consigning at those who are guilty of the enormous crime of diminishing from the book of God! We would here remark that the adding to and taking from the sacred volume are equally criminal, so that it must be a more heinous offence to add a public ordinance than to take away a private duty, by as much as the one is of more importance than the other. Then since we think the matter of washing feet as enjoined by Christ was never intended to be observed in any other light than a private duty, therefore the error of those who make it a gospel ordinance must be fraught with consequences far the most serious. We must then beg our friends of that side of the subject to bear with our blunt mode of reasoning while we exhibit a few of the many evils resulting from that erroneous construction of our text, which connects the case of feet washing with the sacramental supper, and thus attaches to it the sacredness of a public ordinance.

1. Perhaps the most dangerous evil arising from this erroneous view of feet washing, is, that it leads to the abuse of the sacramental institutions of Christ.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper being emblems of spiritual graces imparted to the soul, and memorials of perpetual allegiance to the great author of such graces, are the only institutions of the gospel received by orthodox protestants as sacraments. But since this term by which those positive institutions are distinguished from the moral injunctions of the gospel, is of Roman Catholic origin, the Baptists have generally preferred to style them, "*ordinances*." To prove washing the saints feet to be a gospel ordinance of equal importance with those solemn sacraments, the advocates of the ultra system under review, make the term, "*ordinance*" synonymous with appointment, as it is derived from "*ordain*," which means, to appoint. Now brethren we may soon see to what extremes of corruption, this rule would conduct. By this rule of definition, all injunctions of the New Testament, are constituted divine ordinances of equal importance. Of course all enjoined to perform them, are authorised administrators of gospel sacraments, so that lay members in general, the sisters not excepted, may legally proceed to preach the gospel and administer Baptism and the communion, the instructions of Paul, to the contrary notwithstanding. Further, the same rule which equalizes feet washing, with those received gospel sacraments, would also give equal authority to some of those obsolete apostolic injunctions which were peculiar to the customs of that age, but which would be rather ridiculous amongst us. Take for instance, their mode of salutation. The apostles Paul, and Peter, both in their epistles, laid their brethren under the injunction to "salute one another with an holy kiss."—See Rom. xvi, 16—i, Cor. xvi, 20—i, Thessa, v, 26—i, Peter, v, 14—Acts, xx, 37.—Now the divine authority of this injunction would have to be admitted equal to that given by Christ, to wash one another's feet, as these inspired penmen spoke under the direction of the holy spirit the third person of the divine trinity, of acknowledged equality with the Son, the second person. So that the same rule which makes washing the saints feet a gospel ordinance, will also require the "holy kiss" to be re-established; for it seems to be enjoined with equal positiveness; is more frequently mentioned in the scriptures, and when our feet washers spiritualize it, they would probably find it of more important worth, than feet washing; particularly as a test of humility, upon which point they lay special stress. For we may readily conceive numerous instances which shall be numerous, in

which the collision of lips in the act of kissing, would be far more humiliating, than the contact of feet and hands in the other ordinance.

Indeed, brethren, the adoption of washing the saints feet as a gospel ordinance, in the received acceptation of the term, would be a leap into the mazes of religious superstition, even beyond the errors of Roman Catholics. For although that old "Mother of harlots" has in her indulgence in anti-christian absurdities, "perverted the right ways of the Lord," by changing Baptism into *Rantism*, and the Lord's supper into *transubstantiation*, and adding five other sacraments of her own invention, yet the Roman Catholics have not dreamed as we have learned of adopting washing the saints feet among their superstitious innovations.

If we then, as a religious denomination, at this late period of the christian dispensation, embrace the sentiment that all gospel injunctions are divine *ordinances*, and thus at one fearful step of innovation, over stride the Catholics, in making feet washing a gospel sacrament, we should soon have to reconsider matters, and be compelled by our rule to take up some, if not all the Catholic sacraments, over which we had leaped. For instance, "Extreme unction" is a Romish sacrament, founded on the injunction of saint James—see James, v, 14; which we also should have to adopt upon the additional authority of apostolic practice; see Mark, vi, 13—Moreover, as the leaders among our Georgia feet washers, earnestly condemn all human learning among the ministry, were they to be successful in the propagation of these ultra sentiments, we, as a denomination, in less than a century, would be more ignorant than the Irish Catholics. We might begin to tremble, therefore, under the apprehension of being soon merged into the depths of superstition, more gloomy than the errors of Catholicism. And as it is only a few of the Baptists in Georgia, and several other Southern States which have of late, begun to admit this fearful innovation; we trust they will take the alarm and turn from the sad error.

2. The next evil which we shall mention, is, that this error creates in its advocates that sort of prejudice against those who differ with them in sentiment which is injurious to Christian fellowship.

Many humble and sincere Christians of our denomination, for the lack of education, either altogether, or in part, cannot read at all or are barely able to read the English Testament without the means of knowing the usages of the age, when, or the circumstances of the history under which that sacred book was written. All such are taught by the zealous advocates who hold feet washing to be an ordinance that Jesus rose from the sacramental supper when he washed his disciples feet. They thus imbibe the impression that the scriptures are full of authority for feet washing as a gospel ordinance, and from the simple fact that it seems thus plain to them from reading or hearing the case described in the thirteenth chapter of John's gospel, they conclude that those who differ in opinion are not under conscientious scruples on this subject, but that they are too much inflated with pride to obey one of the Lord's most sacred and plain commands. The result is, that thousands of pious, well meaning christians who are without education, contract a coolness of affection toward their more intelligent but equally pious brethren. It often happens that the prejudice thus acquired, so bars up the avenues of the heart that many close the ears against the preaching of some of the most pious and worthy ministers of Jesus, by whose instruction

they might otherwise be greatly comforted and built up in the most holy faith of the gospel.

Moreover, it is common for those who connect feet washing with the communion, on visiting at sacramental occasions where this error is not adopted—if they discover not a vessel of water and the apparatus for washing feet under the same table, upon which, they see displayed the emblems for administering the Lords' Supper—to refuse the invitation to commune and either leave the house or set at a distance, saying, "we cannot eat bread with those who are too proud to wash feet." Such, by making this matter touch fellowship, most plainly prove the dangerous tendency of the error.

3. Another serious evil resulting from this erroneous view of feet washing is, that it makes feeling the test of religious truth.

It is quite common to hear the advocates of this practice as performed among us appeal to the extatic excitement produced by it during its performance as being indisputable evidence of its divine authority and important usefulness. Many even boast that the effect generally seen amongst the brethren in the act of washing one another's feet, is greater than is produced by the performance of any religious ordinance.

But here let me say that we are often presented with a disgusting fact, which of itself should be taken as testimony sufficient to condemn such pious extacy—It is, that in general those who have never lifted the voice in prayer around the family altar—those who have never contributed for the support and spread of the gospel, yea, even those whose red faces tell their daily habit, are the very individuals who partake most copiously of the extatic joys felt on those public occasions of washing feet.

But if we admit that many whose course is characterized by exemplary piety are much excited in washing feet, in which act they are conscious to themselves of following the example of the Savior, still to make such feeling the proof of correctness in the act would be to make the awakenings of human sympathy become the test of religious truth and Christian duty. Whereas, the testimony of God's word must always be the criterion by which religious duty is to be decided and not the effervescence of human feeling which is most certain to be wrong. Take a plain instance; the blood thirsty Turks and untutored savages, while in the act of sanguinary vengeance, dance around their mangled Christian captives in the effervescence of joyful exultation. Now if feeling be made the rule of decision, the bloody heathen and humble christian would be equally correct? For both feel conscious to themselves of the sacredness of the act in which they are engaged, and of the rectitude of the extatic joy arising from its performance. But an appeal to God's word will at once detect the bloody error of that savage fanaticism, and unhallowed joy which results from human butchery; and it is to be hoped that those ultra feet washing brethren, from this fact, may begin to suspect, that all their pious feeling may be the result of human sympathy awakened by the exercise of erroneous belief in an unscriptural practice.

4. The last source of evil to which this error subjects its votaries, upon which we shall take the liberty to animadvert at present, is, that it has the appearance, to say the least, more of Pharisaical pride than of christian humility.

The Pharises performed all their religious duties more for the sake of external show than of internal piety.—In other words they in-

variously did their acts of devotion to be seen of men. But fitly Jesus performed his devotions with that retiring modesty which disdains the pomp of outward display, and which seeks the approval of God rather than the praise of men.

Hence when Jesus would set his disciples an example of humility, and teach them not to be above performing the lowest act of brotherly kindness, one for another; he did it by washing their feet at a private supper, when the feet needed cleansing before eating and retiring to sleep.

But *modern* feet washers, who profess to perform that act in obedience to the command of Christ, and in imitation of his example, choose not a private house and an evening hour to wash feet, when the act is needed, but they select the house of worship, and the most public occasions to wash feet which have previously been well cleansed. We are willing to risk the decision on this point with the candid part of the advocates for this practice, to say whether it does or does not greatly resemble that leaven of the scribes and of Pharisees, against which the Saviour particularly cautioned his disciples to be carefully guarded.

Now, if the practice of washing feet, in the character of a gospel ordinance, be fraught with so much evil tendency, can it be innocently performed by those who differ from the opinion of its advocates, but who unite with them on public occasions, simply to escape the charge of being thought haughty? Should not such seriously consider, whether they may not, in fact, be committing two-fold sin! 1. By engaging in an act bearing the appearance of devotion, but in which they have not faith: they certainly fall under the condemnation of the Apostle Paul, who expressly says, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin"—Romans, xiv, 23. 2. They must incur additional guilt, by giving the sanction of their personal example to a religious error, which in several points of evil tendency, is beginning to assume the attitude of a dangerous heresy.

On the other hand, to those pious brethren who practice this error, under the belief of its rectitude, we, in conclusion, will only say, let us cease to resemble those whom the Saviour rebuked for tithing herbs and neglecting the weightier matters of the law. Let us with the apostles, view the matter of washing feet as an unimportant private duty, and like them become engrossed with the all absorbing business of *saving the souls of lost sinners, by sending the Bible and the glorious gospel to every creature, in obedience to the Redeemer's last and great command*