

The Object lesson of John 13: (part four of a four part series)

In our previous studies, we discovered two reasons why our Lord demonstrates the importance of humble service on behalf of others. Prior to His ascension into heaven, Christ seeks to provide a lesson for His disciples which would have a lasting impact. In addition, there is an immediate need for resolving the “I am the greatest” debate among those very same men. However, it is also clear from the larger context of the chapter that Jesus wants to furnish a tangible illustration for what He would teach them in John 13:34-35, where we read this –

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

With the object lesson fresh in their minds, there would be no difficulty in understanding what Jesus meant by a “new commandment.” The challenge would involve applying it consistently, so as to validate their witness for Christ. While some sincerely believe that Jesus was instituting a third ordinance to be practiced throughout the Church Age, the context of that evening would indicate otherwise.

In closing this study, one important clarification is necessary. When we apply the principle of humbly serving others, it can result in a variety of legitimate expressions. However, a survey of the New Testament reveals that the use of spiritual gifts, for the overall benefit of the body of Christ, must be the priority. This helps us to understand why the apostles made a decision in Acts 6:1-6 which has confused so many. In delegating the serving of tables to others, they were not lacking a servant’s heart. Their priority was the ministry of the Word of God on behalf of a large congregation of new converts. In that context, nothing could be more important! No one else was in a position of authority to fulfill that responsibility, other than those men. Peter’s experience in leadership during that crucial and formative time, carries over into the writing of his first epistle. There, he emphasizes the priority of using spiritual gifts, to humbly serve and benefit others within the body of Christ. Notice his encouragement in 1 Peter 4:10-11 –

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”