

Capítulo 6

The Problem of Power in Ministry: A Narrative-Exegetical Study of John 13:1–20

Thomas Sheperd, PhD.

Abstract

Two temptations face the pastor regarding the use of power in ministry. The first is the more obvious—to abuse power and use it for personal gain or self-aggrandizement. The second is to despise power, resist and reject it as inappropriate in ministry. Both perspectives misunderstand the value and place of power in ministry. This paper is a narrative–exegetical study of John 13:1–20, presenting Jesus’ teaching on power in ministry as illustrated in washing His disciples’ feet. The passage comes in four steps—the cosmic view, the personal kinesthetic view, the confrontational view and the didactic view. Jesus presents a comprehensive view of power in ministry as given for service to others.

Key Words

Power, Footwashing, Cosmic, Kinesthetic, Confrontational, Didactic.

Introduction

Power can be defined as the ability to do something. But on a relational level it can be described as the influence or authority one has in relation to others. Many times this conception of power is seen as negative, linked with coercion, violence or domination.³²² However, power can also be seen in a positive light when conceived of as legitimate or collective authority ascribed to an individual used for the purpose of positive transformation (such as parents and teachers with children) or to further the goals of a large group (such as that exercised by elected officials). Paul Patton suggests a neutral definition of power where it is neither negative nor positive and that only additional concepts added on to it make it either negative or positive.³²³

Ministry involves relational power, the ability to influence others. Two temptations confront the pastor regarding it. The first is the more obvious—to abuse power and use it for personal gain or self-aggrandizement. This use of power has been repeated over and over within human history, including within the church. The second temptation flows from the first. It is to despise power and its use. It manifests itself in resistance to those in power, or denial of the use of power in ministry, sensing that power is evil. Both perspectives misunderstand the value and place of power in ministry. We can ask, along the lines of Patton's argument above, just what “additional concepts” should be added to power in ministry to insure that its use is positive and not negative?

In this paper I will argue that the example of Jesus in washing His disciples' feet in John 13:1–20 and His instruction linked with it provide a paradigm for the proper use of power in ministry and present a “safe haven” for power, avoiding the two temptations referred to above. My procedure will be to place the passage in its literary context and its place in scholarly discussion and then to note the narrative and exegetical characteristics of the passage in four steps—the cosmic view, the personal-kinesthetic view, the confrontational view and the didactic view. Following this I will draw conclusions for the use of power in ministry today.

The Context of John 13

The Gospel of John divides into four unequal sections—the Prologue (John 1:1–18), the Book of Signs (John 1:19–12:50), the Book of Glory (John 13:1–20:31), and the Epilogue (John 21:1–25). The Prologue describes the prehistory and incarnation of the Word (*logos*), the divine Son of God who is on intimate terms with the Father and comes into the world to reveal Him. The Book of Signs deals with the three-and-one-half year ministry of Jesus and presents as markers of His Messiahship the miracles or “signs” that He does. Numerous witnesses also testify to the fact that He is the Christ. Some people come to believe in Him. Others resist Him because, as John 12:43 states, “they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God”.

³²² See Paul Patton, “Power” in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Hugh LaFollette (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), VII: 3972–77.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 3973.

The Book of Glory comprises Jesus' Farewell Discourse (chs. 13–17), the Passion Narrative (chs. 18–19) and the Resurrection (ch. 20). It garners the name Book of Glory based on references to Jesus being glorified and statements about "His hour" that run throughout the Gospel. These refer to His crucifixion (John 2:4; 7:30, 39; 8:20; 12:16, 23, 27–28; 13:1, 31–32; 16:32; 17:1, 4).³²⁴ The Epilogue relates the story of a third post-resurrection meeting of Jesus with His disciples, Peter's restoration to ministry and also tells of the fate of the "beloved disciple".

The opening scene of the Book of Glory is the story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet, John 13:1–20. The meaning of this passage is much disputed in scholarship. Numerous explanations have been suggested.³²⁵ Among the common explanations it is seen as an example of humble service, a symbol for the Eucharist, a symbol of baptism, as forgiveness for sin after baptism, as a sacrament separate from baptism, as a soteriological sign or as a polemic against baptism. Space does not allow discussion of all these positions and the arguments for and against them. But we can sample insights from various authors that help to elucidate the meaning of this passage particularly concerning its relationship to the question of power in ministry.

The Cosmic View – John 13:1–3³²⁶

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God,

The first three verses of John 13 have affinities with the Prologue in John 1:1–18.³²⁷ Just like the Prologue these verses in John 13 take a wide-angle view on Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus knows that His Hour has come, the time of His Passion. He has loved His followers all the way back to the beginning of His ministry and will love them all the way forward to the end. As the Prologue refers to the Eternal Logos coming to "His own" (His own people), so here Jesus is said to love "His own who were in the world".³²⁸ The devil has placed in Judas' heart the plan to betray Jesus just as the darkness is present in the Prologue (John 1:5).³²⁹ Jesus knows that He has come from the Father and is going to

324 Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 241 who indicates that Jesus being "glorified" is "a Johannine euphemism for the cluster of events centering in the crucifixion."

325 See John C. Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 11–17.

326 All Bible translations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

327 Cf. the words of W. K. Grossouw, "A Note on Joh 13:1–3," *NovT* 8 (1966) 123–31, who considers 13:2 "a minor prologue introducing the second 'book' of the Gospel, . . ." p. 127.

328 Here in the Book of Glory "His own" has shifted from Israel to His disciples, the new covenant community. See Köstenberger, *John*, 402.

329 Grossouw, "A Note," 127. J. van der Watt, "The Meaning of Jesus Washing the Feet of His Disciples (John 13), *Neotestamentica* 51.1 (2017): 25–39, argues that in the first three verses of this passage Jesus' love stands in contrast with the betrayal by Judas, cf. "Two opposites, namely love on the one hand and betrayal on the other, come into focus, highlighting the two attitudes towards Jesus that qualify behaviour as being of God or of the devil." (van der Watt, 28). Daniel B. Stevick, *Jesus and His Own: A Commentary on John 13–17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 41 notes, "The early mention of Judas as already in the devil's control (v. 2) has the effect of placing the foot-washing in the context not only of Jesus' death, but also of the cosmic conflict which is

Him, just as in the Prologue the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us and is the one “in the bosom of the Father” who explains God to humanity (John 1:14, 18). All things are in Jesus’ hands just as in the Prologue Jesus is the creator of all things (John 1:3).

J. L. Staley argues that this opening of the Book of Glory in John 13:1–3 looks back across the first half of the Gospel, touching important highlights in reverse order, starting with that which is more recent.³³⁰ The reference to the arrival of Jesus “hour” for departure to the Father (13:1a) parallels John 12:23 (“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”), love for “His own” (13:1b) parallels 11:3, 5, 36 (“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”), the devil putting in to Judas’ heart to betray Jesus (13:2) parallels 6:71 (“He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray Him”), the Father giving all in the Christ’s hands (13:3a) parallels 3:35 (“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand”), and that Jesus came from God and was going to God (13:3b) parallels the Prologue, 1:1–18, where the Word (*logos*) was with God and became flesh.

R. Alan Culpepper calls this wide-angle perspective on Jesus and His ministry *stereoscopic*.³³¹ He means by this seeing Jesus from the perspective of both where He comes from and where He is going. He comes from the Father and He will return there. The path that takes Him there is the cross. Culpepper argues that this opening scene of the Book of Glory “sets the footwashing and the farewell discourse in the context of Jesus’ awareness of his origin and his destiny.”³³²

Verses 1–4 are actually one long sentence in Greek with verses 1–3 being the preamble or “back story” that prepares for what will come in the following verses. As we have noted above, the first three verses present a wide-angle view, a cosmic view, in reality. They look back to the beginning of the Gospel to Jesus’ incarnation. They look forward to the cross and beyond to Jesus’ return to the Father. They pit good (Jesus) against evil (the devil and his servant Judas). And they present Jesus as all-knowing and in control. He loves “His own,” His disciples, fully from beginning to end.³³³ It is a crucial display in Johannine theology since in the Passion Narrative Jesus will be arrested, tried and crucified, seemingly controlled by others. John signals the reader that such is only the appearance, the real case is that Jesus is powerful and in control.³³⁴ The first three verses prepare the reader for the striking events that will immediately follow.

drawing to its climactic moment.”

330 J. L. Staley, *The Print’s First Kiss* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 108 n62.

331 R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 33–4.

332 Ibid., 33. Many scholars link the footwashing with the cross. See Thomas, *Footwashing*, 16–17.

333 Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 373–4 states of the phrase *eis telos* “to the end,” “Jesus loved them until the end of his life, and he loved them in a way that surpasses all imaginable loving. The marriage of these two meanings of *eis telos* produces one of the major themes for the rest of the story: the death of Jesus makes known his love for his own, and thus makes God known (cf. 3:16–17).” Cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 545n9 “εἰς τέλος [*eis telos* “to the end”] (this noun is found only here in this Gospel) is ambiguous, meaning both ‘unto the end’ (KJV) and ‘to the utmost.’ It is likely that we have here a typical Johannine double meaning, with both meanings intended.”

334 Cf. John 10:17–18, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

The Personal-Kinesthetic View – John 13:4–5

⁴ [He] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

The picture of the powerful Jesus displayed in cosmic wide-angle views stretching back to eternity and forward to the ascension in verses 1–3, suddenly shifts in verses 4–5. Here the view is very up close and personal, dealing with seemingly small, even menial, tasks. He rises from the Last Supper, lays aside His garments, takes a towel and girds Himself with it, pours water in a basin and begins to wash His disciples' feet.³³⁵ It is told in slow motion detail. The terms for Jesus *removing* or *laying down* (*tithēmi*) His garments and *taking* (*lambanō*) the towel are reminiscent of the Shepherd discourse in John 10 where Jesus uses the same terms saying in verse 17, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I *lay down* my life that I may *take* it up again." These actions in 13:4, therefore, point forward to Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection with return to the Father.³³⁶

The contrast with the depiction in verses 1–3 is striking. The first verses of the chapter set up the scene for this striking contrast, but also indicate that this is not some simple action Jesus undertakes in verses 4–5.³³⁷ Why would the cosmic Christ step down and wash the feet of His disciples, obviously those who are not His equals? It was the custom in the ancient world that servants or slaves would wash the feet of guests as they came to a meal.³³⁸ Jesus takes on the role of a servant (cf. Phil 2:6–8) and highlights the action by doing it during the meal instead of at its commencement as would be the usual practice.³³⁹

335 Morris notes, "Though the word is plural, τὰ ἱμάτια [*ta himatia* "garments"], it is possible that a single garment is meant. But it seems more likely that we should take the plural seriously. Elsewhere John uses the singular for one outer garment in 19:2, 5 and the plural for all the garments in 19:23, 24. If ἱμάτια [*himatia* "garments"] here has the same meaning as in the latter passages, then Jesus stripped to a loin cloth, just like a slave." Morris, *John*, 547n16. The word for basin *niptēr* may refer to a basin or a jug for pouring water. Here it likely refers to the basin. See Morris, *John*, 547n19.

336 J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 724–725.

337 Michaels, *John*, 724 notes, "The effect [of the "world encompassing authority" of Jesus] is to put the act of girding himself with a towel and washing the disciples' feet (vv. 4–5) into a cosmic perspective by reminding us who it is who undertakes this simple act of service."

338 Thomas, *Footwashing*, 50 states, "Without doubt, this task was generally the duty of slaves or servants." See Homer, *Odyssey* 19.308, 344–348, 356–358, 376–377, 386–389, 503–507; Plato, *Symp.* 213B; Petronius, *Satyricon* 31; Plutarch, *Pompeius* 73.6–7; *Theseus* 11; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 9.408–411. Even a Jewish slave was not required to wash his master's feet, though a Gentile slave could be required to do so. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, ABC 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 564. Cf. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 233, see Midrash Mekilta on Exod 21.2.82a, based on Lev 25:39.

339 Morris, *John*, 544, "... it takes place during the meal (v. 2), not on arrival when the feet would normally be washed. This shows that it was an action undertaken deliberately, and not simply the usual act of courtesy. It is a parable in action, setting out that great principle of lowly service which brings cleansing and which finds its supreme embodiment in the cross, setting out also the necessity for the disciple to take the Lord's way, not his own." See van der Watt, "Washing the Feet," 25–39. On p. 30 he states, "This deviation from the normal practice of washing feet before the start of a meal might rather indicate special or symbolic significance over

Jesus carries out a kinesthetic action that proved to be unforgettable, an acted parable.³⁴⁰ It was not simply words of instruction, but rather this striking action followed by instruction. The disciples have been with Jesus for three-and-a-half years and call Him Teacher and Lord. They are well aware of their role in relation to Him. That He reverses the typical pattern by serving them would strike them not only as unusual but also would make the event memorable, particularly because He washes the feet of each person.³⁴¹ He took their feet in His hands, dipped them in the basin and wiped them with the towel with which He was girded.³⁴² He even washed the feet of His betrayer, Judas. One could speculate about the meaning of this action in contrast to the cosmic view presented in verses 1–3. However, the Evangelist presents a conversation in the following section between Peter and Jesus, followed by Jesus teaching His disciples the meaning of His actions. These two sections clarify what we may already have begun to sense.³⁴³

The Confrontational View – John 13:6–11

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?”⁷ Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”⁸ Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”⁹ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

When Jesus comes to Peter there is a pause in the forward movement of the action. Up to this point it seems everyone reclined in shocked silence at Jesus’ actions.³⁴⁴ Peter objects, confronting Jesus regarding His unusual actions. The pattern of Peter’s question in verse 6 emphasizes the pronouns “you” and “me,” thereby stressing his incredulity that Jesus would wash his feet.³⁴⁵ The disciple initiates his objection by calling Jesus

and above the customary practice. . . . Performing the act at an unexpected time might serve to emphasise [sic] the act itself.” Note Ellen White’s words in *Desire of Ages*, 644, “The disciples made no move toward serving one another. Jesus waited for a time to see what they would do. Then He, the divine Teacher, rose from the table. Laying aside the outer garment that would have impeded His movements, He took a towel, and girded Himself. With surprised interest the disciples looked on, and in silence waited to see what was to follow.”

³⁴⁰ Again, *Desire of Ages*, 644–5, “So Christ expressed His love for His disciples [by washing their feet]. Their selfish spirit filled Him with sorrow, but He entered into no controversy with them regarding their difficulty. Instead He gave them an example they would never forget.”

³⁴¹ In verse 10 when Jesus says “you are clean” the “you” is plural. Verse 12 reports “When he had washed *their* feet . . .” also thereby indicating the plural.

³⁴² Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 551, states, “The disciples seem to have been on couches, reclining on their left sides. Each would use his left arm to support his head and his right arm to reach the dishes that were on a table which was placed in the center of the couches . . . Jesus would have come around the outside of the couches to wash the disciples’ feet which were stretched out behind them. Reclining was not the normal position at meals in a home but was customary at Passover . . .”

³⁴³ Note Brown’s words, “The key to the symbolism of the footwashing lies in the conversation between Jesus and Peter.” Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 565.

³⁴⁴ Morris, *John*, 548, “There is no mention of any comment until Jesus came to Peter; apparently there was dead silence.” *Desire of Ages*, 644, “With surprised interest the disciples looked on, and in silence waited to see what was to follow.”

³⁴⁵ As Michaels notes, a literal translation of Peter’s question would be, “Lord, *you*? Of *me*? Washing the feet?”

“Lord”. This title of honor stands in sharp contrast with the menial task of a servant Jesus is doing in washing the disciples’ feet. Jesus responds using a similar pattern of emphasis on the pronouns, “What *I* am doing *you* do not understand now”.³⁴⁶ Jesus states that Peter is ignorant of the significance of the action but that he will understand “afterward” (verse 7).³⁴⁷ When would this “afterward” be? Earlier references in the Gospel to understanding coming later help to clarify.³⁴⁸ In John 2:22 the narrator gives an aside regarding the cleansing of the temple, “When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken”. At the time of the temple cleansing they did not understand the significance of His words. But after His resurrection they did. Again in John 12:16, regarding the triumphal entry, the disciples remembered and understood what was written about Jesus in the Scriptures after He was glorified. All of this suggests that the “afterward” in John 13:7 is after Jesus’ resurrection.³⁴⁹

Peter refuses to relent, however, and insists that Jesus will never wash his feet. The statement continues the pattern of emphatic exchange. Peter says, “You will certainly not wash my feet forever”.³⁵⁰ Why does Peter say these words? We have noted above that it was the custom for servants or slaves to perform this function. But it was too low for a Jewish slave, something only for Gentile ones.³⁵¹ Thus, Jesus goes below what any Jew of even such a low status as a slave would do. Peter rejects this in no uncertain terms because of who he believes Jesus to be.

Peter’s terminology of “never forever” in verse 8 parallels Jesus’ emphasis on eternal life in the Gospel of John.³⁵² In John 4:14 Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well that whoever drinks of the water He will give “will certainly never thirst forever”. In John 8:51 Jesus affirms that the one who keeps His word “will certainly not see death forever”. In John 10:28 Jesus says of His “sheep” that He will give them eternal life and “they will not perish forever”. In John 11:26 Jesus says to Martha that “everyone who lives and believes in me will certainly not die forever”. Peter’s terminology in 13:8 is parallel to that of Jesus, but with a totally opposite intent. He separates himself from the ministry of Jesus’ service because of his sense of the indignity it involves for the one he considers the Messiah.³⁵³ As Thomas notes, “In a twist as ironic as Caiaphas’s prophecy, Peter uses the very formula Jesus has used to offer life *to refuse* Jesus’ offer (of continued life and

Michaels, *John*, 726.

346 Ibid., 727.

347 “Afterward” literally “after these things” (*meta tauta*).

348 See Michaels, *John*, 727.

349 Jesus also refers to the Holy Spirit bringing understanding (John 14:26; 16:13) and there is a link to Jesus’ words (2:22; 12:16; 20:9). But the coming of the Spirit follows Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:21–23) and His words are understood after that event. See Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 286, who notes, “‘After these things’ must refer to the time after Jesus’ death and after sufficient time has passed for its significance to register.”

350 My translation. Peter uses a double negative in combination with “forever.” A double negative is acceptable Greek grammar and makes the negation emphatic.

351 Köstenberger, *John*, 403–405. Köstenberger notes, “. . . although there are occasional exceptions featuring people other than non-Jewish slaves washing the feet of others, the washing of the feet of an inferior by a superior is not attested elsewhere in Jewish or Greco-Roman sources.” Page 405.

352 See Thomas, *Footwashing*, 92. The following translations of John 4:14; 8:51; 10:28 and 11:26 are my own, highlighting the emphatic expression and the use of the word “forever” in all these verses.

353 It is not too strong a point to say that Peter’s understanding of Christology stood in the way of him receiving service from Christ.

belief)³⁵⁴

In response to Peter in verse 8 Jesus begins to pull the curtain aside to explain what the disciples had to see as bizarre, even irrational behavior. He notes that unless He washes his feet, Peter will have no share or portion with Jesus, no relationship and fellowship with Him. The final result would be no place for Peter in Christ's kingdom.³⁵⁵ Raymond Brown notes the Old Testament background of this term *meros* "part, share."³⁵⁶ It was used to translate the Hebrew *hēleq* "portion". This term referred to the part of the land of Canaan allotted to each tribe (except Levi), a portion given by God (Num 18:20; Deut 12:12; 14:27). When this concept was considered in terms of the afterlife it took on heavenly characteristics, similar to what we see in Revelation 20:6; 21:8 and 22:19, where the portion is either the first resurrection and the tree of life (for the righteous), or the lake of fire (for the wicked). So in the context in the Gospel of John, Jesus is telling Peter that he will lose connection with Jesus and all that entails including the coming kingdom (cf. John 14:1–3).

Peter could not bear separation from his Lord. Impulsively, he requests washing from head to toe (verse 9). Jesus responds in verse 10 that one who has bathed (*louō* "to wash, bathe" typically referring to the whole body) does not need further cleansing except to wash (*niptō* "to wash" cleansing with water) his feet.

Verses 9 and 10 (particularly v. 10) are deeply disputed in scholarship. The conflict revolves around a textual variant in verse 10. Some manuscripts do not have the words "except for his feet" with the text then saying "The one who has bathed does not have need to wash, but is clean altogether."³⁵⁷ Those scholars who feel these words were not originally in the text maintain that Jesus refers to the footwashing as the bath that cleanses. They take this to mean that the footwashing is not subordinate to an initial cleansing by baptism but rather points to the same reality—the death of Christ on the cross that brings salvation. Footwashing then becomes the Johannine equivalent of baptism.³⁵⁸

But the manuscript evidence is quite overwhelming in favor of the inclusion of the words "except for his feet," and the inclusion of these words makes good sense of the passage as J. Ramsey Michaels points out.³⁵⁹ Jesus says to Peter in verse 10 that the one who has bathed does not need to wash except his feet, but is altogether clean. If, in fact, the "except his feet" is excluded and the "bathed" refers to the footwashing that makes one clean, the problem is that Peter's feet have not yet been washed. As Michaels notes,

354 Thomas, *Footwashing*, 92.

355 Ibid., 94. "Simply put, it appears that μέρος [*meros* "share, part"] here denotes continued fellowship with Jesus, and a place in his community which ultimately results in uninterrupted residence in the Father's house (14:1–14)."

356 Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 565–6.

357 The manuscripts that have "does not have need except to wash his feet" or similar words to this effect include a host of weighty witnesses including P66 P75 B C D L W Δ Ψ 0141 0233vid f 1 f 13 28 157 180 205 597 700 892 1006 1010supp 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1505 Byz {E F G H} and a host of early versions. The manuscripts that have simply "does not have need to wash" are 579 8 and the Vulgate. As is fairly obvious, the overwhelming manuscript evidence is in favor of including the words "except to wash his feet." See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 204.

358 See Michaels, *John*, 729–30. The scholars who take this type of position include Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1971), 469–70; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to John* (London: SPCK, 1962), 368; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 229; Moloney, *John*, 378–9.

359 Michaels, *John*, 730–31.

“This suggests that Jesus’ disciples were ‘clean’ *not* by virtue of the footwashing, but already before it began — in short, that a distinction *is* intended between ‘bathing’ or taking a bath and ‘washing’”.³⁶⁰ That former cleansing, most logically, refers to baptism.³⁶¹

What then would be the role of footwashing? Jesus is making use of a common practice of the times where a person would bathe at home, but when they walked to another home for a meal their sandaled feet would become dusty from the journey. It was customary for a host to provide water for the guest to wash the dust off their feet.³⁶² This practice suggests the meaning of Jesus’ action. Baptism would be the initial cleansing of a believer’s life coming into communion with Jesus Christ. But that is only the beginning of the Christian’s journey and slips and falls, “dirty feet”, are bound to occur, given human nature and the immaturity of the experience at the beginning of the Christian life. Thus as Thomas notes,

Just as a banquet guest would bathe at home and only wash the feet at the house of the host or hostess to remove the dust accumulated on the road, so Peter (the believer) who experiences baptism (which signifies a complete cleansing from sin) does not need to be rebaptized, but undergoes footwashing, which signifies the removal of sin that might accumulate as a result of life in this sinful world. In a sense, footwashing is an extension of baptism, for it signifies the washing away of post-baptismal sins in Peter’s (the believer’s) life.³⁶³

At the end of verse 10 Jesus notes that not all of those whom He has washed are clean. As the narrator aside in verse 11 makes clear, Jesus is talking about Judas. Consequently, a further nuance is added to the meaning of footwashing. The physical act itself does not effect spiritual cleansing. The heart of the individual must be open to receive the spiritual cleansing Christ offers. This reality is illustrated in the contrast between Peter and Judas. The one, though initially resisting the humble action of Jesus, received the spiritual cleansing and continued connection with Jesus. The other, silently receiving the footwashing, did not open his heart to the Master.³⁶⁴

This section of the story (verses 6–11) helps to verify that Jesus’ action is not bizarre, that He has a definite plan and purpose in His action. It further starts to explain that purpose in the cleansing work to which Jesus’ refers. Peter’s objection allows Jesus to make plain that a further cleansing action beyond baptism is needed from time to time. Furthermore, Jesus’ action is not all that is needed, since the disciple must willingly

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 731.

³⁶¹ See Thomas, *Footwashing*, 100, “The initial question is, to what is Jesus alluding when he speaks of a complete bath that makes someone clean? For the disciples in the narrative there is one option that seems most likely: *baptism*. Not only do the first disciples come from the Baptist’s circle (which would imply an acquaintance with and appreciation of baptism), but Jesus himself (3.22) and his disciples (4.2) are said to have baptized others and to have been more successful than John. . . . It is extremely likely that the disciples, who baptize others, would have experienced baptism themselves, either at the hand of Jesus or John.”

³⁶² See van der Watt, “Washing the Feet,” 29–30.

³⁶³ Thomas, *Footwashing*, 105–6.

³⁶⁴ Note Ellen White’s telling words, “When the Saviour’s hands were bathing those soiled feet, and wiping them with the towel, the heart of Judas thrilled through and through with the impulse then and there to confess his sin. But he would not humble himself. He hardened his heart against repentance; and the old impulses, for the moment put aside, again controlled him. Judas was now offended at Christ’s act in washing the feet of His disciples. If Jesus could so humble Himself, he thought, He could not be Israel’s king.” *Desire of Ages*, 645.

accept His action. Besides this, it is apparent that Jesus can wash a disciple's feet, but if the disciple plans to betray his Master, the washing has no effect. Jesus' action is a striking use of His power as Savior to bring renewed cleansing to His disciples who accept His service.

The Didactic View – John 13:12–20

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?"¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me'.¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me".

Some scholars argue that behind the story of the footwashing in John 13:1–20 are actually two or more sources.³⁶⁵ In this scenario, verses 4–5 present the core brief story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet and verses 12–20 provide the teaching explaining it. Or a moralistic account in verses 1–2, 4–5, 12–15, and 17–19 is supplemented with a sacramental account in verses 3, 4–5, 6–10, and 21–30. More simply, verses 4–11 are seen as prior and verses 12–20 are an added later interpretation by an editor of the Gospel. All of these supposed editions or editorial actions find no support in the history of the transmission of the text of John in ancient manuscripts of the Gospel. As Kurt and Barbara Aland clearly note,

... for purposes of textual criticism the gospel [of John] comprises twenty-one chapters in their present sequence of 1 through 21. It is only in this form, with the final chapter appended and in the present order of chapters, that the book is found throughout the manuscript tradition. Any editing, rearrangement, revision, and so forth it may have undergone must have occurred earlier, if at all. . . . it should be observed that the way in which chapter 21 has been attached to the gospel of John argues against any such complex theories as Rudolph Bultmann's, for example. A redactor needed only to delete 20:30–31, and the sequence would have been quite smooth — but this is precisely what was *not* done.³⁶⁶

Thus, any editorial changes to chapter 13 as are proposed by various scholars are simply speculation without manuscript evidence in support. Other scholars note that the parts of John 13:1–20 fit together quite well and that positing redaction is unnecessary. Moloney notes, "A theory of a later moralizing interpretation of the footwashing

³⁶⁵ See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 230–31 for a helpful summary.

³⁶⁶ Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 292, emphases original.

added to the original vv. 1–11 is not needed. There is a unity of place, characters, and theme across vv. 1–17.”³⁶⁷

When Jesus resumes His place at the table in verse 12, He explains the meaning of His paradoxical action. He begins by asking the disciples if they understand what He has done. Quite likely they do not, and the question primes their minds to receive His elucidation which follows.³⁶⁸ In verse 13 He affirms the titles by which the disciples address Him, “Teacher” and “Lord”. These titles of honor stand in contrast with the typical understanding of a servant’s action in washing feet.

Jesus does not so much explain His action as He describes its purpose. He has given His disciples an example for them to follow (v. 15). He washed their feet, so they should wash one another’s feet. If the greater can serve the lesser, then certainly equals can serve one another.³⁶⁹ But Jesus comes back to speak of titles to drive home His point (v. 16). A servant or slave is not above His master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. That is, if the master can do service for the servant or slave, then certainly the servant or slave can do the same for his fellow slave? And if a sender can carry the message, the messenger cannot object to doing the same.

This instruction alludes back to the first section of the passage, verses 1–3. There the Father gave all things into the hands of Jesus. That is, the Father was serving the Son, using His power to place all in Jesus’ hands. Jesus follows suit in serving the disciples by washing their feet and calls on them to do the same for one another.³⁷⁰ It is a chain of power used for serving others. But some sort of groveling inferiority is not in view as Walter Brueggemann notes,

He [Jesus] had identity questions, destiny issues, settled in his life. He knew that he was totally empowered by God; all things were given into his hand. And because that issue was settled, he was able to remove the garments, the outward signs of respect and control that the world acknowledges.

367 Moloney, *John*, 375. Cf. James Dunn’s comment, “In short, Boismard and Richter are mistaken in thinking that the soteriological-Christological significance of the first part cannot be harmonised [sic] with the moral-ethical interpretation of the second part. On the contrary, the union of the two interpretations in the complete presentation is neither artificial nor unexpected, but is entirely of a piece with one particular strand of imitatio Christi which appears both elsewhere in John’s writings and in other New Testament books.” James D. G. Dunn, “The Washing of the Disciples’ Feet in John 13:1–20,” *ZNTW* 61.3/4 (1970), 247–252. The quotation is from p. 249.

368 Michaels, *John*, 734. “. . . he asks the disciples, ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ (v. 12b). He already knows the answer. They do *not* understand, any more than Peter did (see v. 7, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand’). Therefore he will not wait for their reply, but will instead go on to explain, in the simplest terms possible, just ‘what I have done for you.’”

369 Cf. Bultmann, *John*, 474. “V. 13 stresses firstly the paradoxical nature of what has taken place: it is actually their teacher and lord, who has washed the disciples’ feet. If he, so v. 14 continues a *maiores ad minus*, has done this for them, they are bound to perform the same service for each other.” In note 7 on the same page he notes, “The typical Jewish conclusion לך וחומר [laq waḥomer] (Str.-B. III 223226) is characteristic of the received source.” Michaels, *John*, 737 notes, “. . . if the one greater is not ashamed to be a servant (even a ‘slave’) to his subordinates, why should they be ashamed to be servants to each other?”

370 Thompson, *John*, 290–291, “Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus has regularly made the point that the Father sent him, that the Father tells him what to do and say, and therefore that to respond to him is to respond to the Father (5:37; 6:44; 7:28; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 12:49; 14:24; cf. 9:4). But now, anticipating the time when he will send out his disciples, Jesus makes the same point about the relationship of the disciples to him; he will send them and tell them what to do and say; therefore a response to them will actually be a response to Jesus, and hence to the Father who sent him.”

He was able to take all of that off precisely because the real issues were elsewhere and were settled.³⁷¹

Stevik adds to this insight,

This feature of Jesus' action suggest that, in the economy of service, one who would give oneself truly and wholeheartedly to others must first possess oneself. . . . insofar as one's self is securely held, it can be freely shared, and in the sharing of it one comes into the fuller possession of it. The Jesus of this johannine text is model of self-giving service, but at the same time he models inner poise and self-affirmation.³⁷²

Jesus caps the instruction by pronouncing a blessing on those who practice footwashing. Many scholars do not interpret Jesus' blessing here as the establishment of a rite for Christians to practice.³⁷³ Instead, they emphasize such concepts as the exemplary aspect of following Jesus' example of service to others, the footwashing as a substitute for baptism or the footwashing pointing to baptism, or as a possible additional sacrament.³⁷⁴ But we argue that Jesus is indeed setting up a rite to accompany the Lord's Supper and that the two remind us of His great sacrifice on the cross. The Adventist Church has practiced this rite for more than 150 years and found great blessing in it. It is a striking remembrance of Jesus' actions, and emulating His example points toward doing the same in all of life's experiences.

The pericope of the footwashing ends on a solemn note in verses 18–20 alluding to the betrayal by Judas soon to take place. Jesus cites Psalm 41:10 concerning betrayal by a close friend. It is a betrayal of power, the power inherent in close friendship. Jesus heightens the consequence of this treachery by returning to the cosmic perspective of verses 1–3. The one who receives the one Jesus sends receives Him, and the one who receives Him receives the Father who sent Him. Judas' disloyalty is a rejection of that cosmic link to the Father.

Power in Ministry Today

We return to our original queries about power in ministry. How shall a pastor relate to power in ministry? What "additional concepts" should be added to power in ministry to insure that its use is positive and not negative? Is there a "safe haven" for power in ministry?

What Jesus has done in washing His disciples' feet is to illustrate how the powerful can use their power to unite those who serve under them. None of the disciples stepped forward to wash their neighbors' feet because to do so, in their minds, would be to lose honor, renounce power and take on a permanent role of subservience. This they were

371 Walter Brueggemann, *Living toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (New York: United Church Press, 1982), 135.

372 Stevik, *Jesus and His Own*, 41.

373 Köstenberger, *John*, 400; See also Thomas' summary of views, Thomas, *Footwashing*, 11–17. Stevik raises the question if footwashing was something the Johannine community did alongside of the Lord's Supper or in place of it, Stevik, *Jesus and His Own*, 45. Michaels, *John*, 735, "Quite possibly the Gospel writer is urging the practice of footwashing, not as an independent third sacrament alongside baptism and the Lord's Supper, but simply as an aspect of the eucharistic meal."

374 Thomas summarizes the views, Thomas, *Footwashing*, 11–17.

unwilling to do and hence they remained paralyzed in a state of separation from one another characterized by fear of loss—loss of honor, loss of power, loss of status. Jesus broke through this barrier by seemingly removing the accoutrements of power. He laid aside His garments and Himself took on the role of a servant (cf. Phil 2:5–11). This had to humiliate, even offend the disciples, and Peter voices their concern over their Master's seeming loss of status and expresses their rejection of His service. But Jesus unveils the results of such rejection—the removal of linkage with Him. To be His disciple one must accept His use of power and His view of power. Inherent in His depiction of the high cost of rejecting the footwashing is the concept that power is meant for service and that to serve is not actually menial. The disciple who will not serve (Judas) is out of step with his Master. Faced with this conundrum of either rejecting service or rejecting Jesus, Peter makes the heartfelt decision that communion with Jesus is more precious than pride of status and he submits to the Master's touch.

But Jesus also created by this action and discourse the continuation of such service within His disciples. Doubtless, they could never forget the experience of Him washing their own feet. Service became emulation of Jesus, a privilege to bear and a duty to fulfill. And in such service the disciples were united with one another in a bond of fellowship engraved upon their characters by the very same personal-kinesthetic approach to ministry their Master displayed. In all these details we see the “additional concepts” that can make power positive in ministry.

The same temptations that faced the twelve disciples of Jesus 2,000 years ago face us today. Human nature infects our relation to power and draws us toward self-serving use of position and authority to further our own reputation, enhance our climb up the organizational ladder, while at the same time holding down or thrusting aside those who get in the way. Or we succumb to resentment of those who happen to somehow get ahead of us to gain positions above us.

The solution is not the rejection of power and authority as antithetical to Christian ministry. Instead it is to catch a glimpse of Jesus' status of honor and accept His unique use of power to serve rather than be served. This approach creates a bond with those under our authority and frees them from resentment of power. It enhances an atmosphere of equality among workers and encourages them to emulate our example. It is the “safe haven” for power in ministry. Such an experience of power is refreshing and freeing, much needed in the church today.