

**Call to Obedience #242**  
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Peter: weak and impetuous? Think again!

## **A Portrait of Peter**

**By Reimar Schultze**

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. —John 13:6–9

There are many places in the New Testament from which we can begin to draw a portrait of Peter—after all, his name is mentioned over 200 times in the Gospels alone.

But this passage of the foot washing as part of the Last Supper before the crucifixion perhaps serves us best to bring out three of the strongest virtues of Peter: forthrightness, humility, and purity. Whenever you have this combination, you have a great man of God. And it is likely that this mix of virtues caused Jesus to give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

### **Forthrightness**

At supper, Jesus rose up, laid aside his garments, girded himself with a towel, poured water into a basin, and commenced to wash the disciples' feet. We do not know the sequence of the foot washing: who got the first wash, who got the second, and who the last. If we would follow the order in which Matthew lists the disciples (Matt. 10:2), Peter would have been the first one and Judas Iscariot would have been the last one. But that this order was not followed at the foot washing as recorded in John 13 is obvious from the text. It is more likely that Jesus reversed the order of the washing, beginning with Judas Iscariot, who is mentioned in the passage, to strengthen John's point that Jesus loved his disciples to the end. Yes, Jesus also loved Judas, the betrayer, to the end even though this was his last night of fellowship with him before Judas would leave him altogether. It is after this comment on Judas that Jesus rose up from supper to wash the disciples' feet. Further, the "So, after he had washed their feet..." (v. 12) follows Christ's last conversation with Peter. I believe that Jesus reversed the Matthew list: Judas first, Peter last.

I say this to suggest that Peter, here, disproves the impression given that he was an impetuous man, strongly lacking in self-control. Considering who he was, what he knew, and what he had experienced, Peter showed tremendous restraint. What amazes me is not that Peter protested the Lord's washing the disciples' feet, but that he did not do it earlier. I am amazed that Peter did not rise up and stop Jesus from putting on the towel, or from pouring water into the basin, or that he did not stop Jesus from washing the first, the second, and the third disciples' feet. With the revelation Peter had of Jesus, only inner self-control could have prevented him from intervening when recognition of such a humble act performed by the Creator and sustainer of the universe reached him. Again, I marvel not that Peter blurted out, when it was his turn to get his feet washed, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?", but that the protest did not come earlier.

I marvel, too, at the other eleven disciples' willingness to let Jesus wash their feet as if it were his duty to serve them, rather than theirs to serve him!

How much soul do you have when things are done for you, when things are done around you that don't look right, smell right or sound right, and you just sit there and do nothing. How spiritually alive are you when you stay in a quiet slumber while something going on around you appears to be wrong? Are you quiet when your friends tell an off-color joke? Do you hide in a cocoon of misplaced meekness when evolution or sex education is taught to your child in school, or when you are with "brethren" and an ungodly scene is flashed on the television screen? Are you passive when your pastor is chopped to pieces by hypocrites who have not darkened a prayer service for years?

Oh, my friend, I like Peter. Jesus liked Peter, too. Peter was a "breakout" man. He broke away from the dull consensus of the half-alive, even as his master did over and over. Nothing that had the slightest appearance of wrong, or the unusual, escaped his attention. "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?"

That John is the only Gospel writer recording this, is an indication that he admired Peter for this forthrightness. Is it any wonder that John was the only one who went along with this bold disciple even unto the house of Caiaphas while the rest had already fled? Yes, there were several times when Peter's responses were ill-fitted. But Jesus saw beyond Pentecost where ill-fitted straight-forwardness would be replaced by a sanctified boldness that would inspire men and women to the end of the age.

### **Humility**

Only Peter found himself unworthy to have his master wash his feet. In fact, his protest could not have been stronger than, "Thou shalt never wash my feet."

Yes, Peter knew so clearly who Jesus was. When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, it was Peter who gave that famous confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). And Peter saw Jesus in his pre-incarnate glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, and only Peter knew firsthand that only the son of God could make a fish hold a coin in his mouth for the payment of customs of a band of strange believers. And so it was Peter who, when many disciples left Jesus, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Yes, "Thou shalt never wash my feet" ! The other disciples may let you do it, but not me—never! It was with this spirit that as a seasoned pastor, he later on admonished his quarreling flock to put on the apron of humility and to serve one another (1 Pet. 5:5). It is with this spirit Peter died on his own cross. Before they nailed him on the wood, he said that he was not worthy to be crucified like his Lord, so his request to be crucified upside-down was granted.

Jesus, by washing the disciples' feet, demonstrated to all of us that God's kings (Rev. 16:6) do not wear crowns but aprons, and the only way we shall get our crown on Judgment Day is to have an apron to give in exchange for it. No apron—no crown. Divinity glories in the apron of humility!

### **Purity**

It has been said by some that Christians today hate holiness more than sin. But it was not so with Peter. When Jesus said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," Peter responded, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." In other words, if your washing me is what it takes for me to stay with you, I am all for it. Throw me into a clear stream! Whatever you are offering, Lord, I want all of it!

Then Jesus said to Peter, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all" (John 13:10). This is now not just a matter of being a part of Jesus, but also of being clean. Peter had the mentality to be sanctified wholly in spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23), or sanctified through and through, as Martin Luther puts it. And, my friend, if you also want to be sanctified that desperately, so it shall be (v. 24)!

Remember Peter's first personal experience with Jesus? After the initial call, Jesus sent Peter out fishing after a night of fishing failure. When the nets were full and drawn in, Peter fell on his knees and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Peter's sense of sin and cleanness was so much more profound than that of the other apostles. No wonder Peter's response to the foot washing was: Yes, Lord, if this is about cleanness, and since cleanness has to do with being a partner with you, I am 110% for it!

Can you name ten, or five, or just one other apostle, or person, in all of the Gospels who ever fell on his knees with such words? Can you name several men who had such a deep understanding that sin separates men from God? Can you tell me of another apostle in the Gospels who said that he was not worthy to be in Jesus' company? Most everyone wanted to touch Jesus, eat with him, and fellowship with him, thinking they were worthy to be in his presence. But Peter said, "Depart from me, for sin and holiness cannot go together!"

If the Lord Jesus would physically walk around with you, walk into your home some off-church night, would he find cleanness in the television program you are watching? Would he find cleanness in your video tapes? In your magazines and books? In your thoughts, action, and language? Do you know what Peter knew? That sin and Jesus do not mix, and that because gray has black in it, gray is the same as black in the eyes of God?

### **The Keys of the Kingdom**

Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:19, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Sanctified forthrightness, deep humility, and purity were three of the characteristics that contributed to Jesus choosing Peter above others to receive the keys to the kingdom, to open the Pentecostal age, the kingdom age, by preaching the first sermon of Christendom under the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. That key, my friend, has been given away. It is no longer to be had. But Jesus has other keys. Some will lead to the salvation of souls, some to their sanctification, some to lift the weak, others will be for the comforting of the grieving, and yet others will lead to prayers that will break down strongholds that have defied Christendom for a thousand years!

God has keys for you, my friend, that will get you out of fruitlessness, moral fumbling, and religious boredom. But to get them, you, too, must become forthright, humble, and pure. Go for it! Be a "breakout" man or woman of God!