

Introduction:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (**Luke 6:40**, ESV). In context, Jesus is pointing out if we pick a bad teacher, we won't be able to rise above it. When we follow the blind, we fall into the ditch with them. However, this principle also applies if we pick a good teacher. In fact, if we pick the Good Teacher, when we are fully trained, we will be just like Him. That is what discipleship is all about: being like Jesus. In fact, the term "Christian," got started because it means "little Christ." The third fundamental character trait we see in being little Christs is loving like God. Obviously, we read passages like **John 3:16** and learn of God's love for us and Christ's love for us through His sacrifice on the cross. The problem is that sacrifice is so intense and awe-inspiring, it's hard to wrap our heads around it enough to really apply it to our daily love for one another. I'd like to back up and consider another scenario in Jesus's life. **John 13:1** says, "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" (ESV). Then it records a solid, practical expression of Jesus's love. He washed the disciples' feet.

Discussion:

I. Disciples love by serving others.

- A. Jesus served His disciples. In fact, Jesus completely turned the social order upside down. The Master performed the task of the slave for His own disciples. Though He knew God had given Him all things (**John 13:3**), He did not simply command the disciples to wash one another's feet. He served them Himself, leading by example. According to **Luke 22:27**, Jesus, who should have been reclining at the table being served by His disciples, sat among His own disciples as their servant.
- B. Imagine what was going through the disciples' minds as Jesus sat down and began teaching. "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash ..." What did they expect to come next? Perhaps, "Do unto me as I have done unto you." "You also ought to wash My feet." But Jesus did not say that. He did not use this illustration to teach the apostles to serve Him. He said, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (**John 13:14**, ESV). Can you see it now? The uproar in the minds of the disciples. Imagine Matthew thinking, "Me, wash their feet? I work for the government. Most of these guys are just fisherman. I don't have to put up with this humiliation."
- C. Jesus loved by serving the disciples, even to the point of playing the slave and washing their feet. Could you gird yourself with the towel and wash their feet? I know, I know, this passage does not mean we must literally wash someone else's feet. But perhaps the mere fact that we bristle at the thought of washing feet demonstrates we have room to grow our love. If washing feet is too archaic, perhaps you could take some time this week to go to someone's house and clean their toilets. What was that? "How dare you expect me to get on my hands and knees and scrub anyone's toilet!" If Jesus, the Lord and Teacher, performed the lowest of all acts of service for His servants, then we also ought to serve one another. Disciples love by serving one another.

II. Disciples love by humbling themselves before one another.

- A. How easy it is to look at ourselves through rose-colored glasses. Or perhaps how easy it is just to look at ourselves. There are two kinds of navel gazing. The kind wherein we constantly look at ourselves as something special. (The subject of the Carly Simon song, "You're so vain" fits here.) The other is the one who would never think he is vain and arrogant, because his thoughts are so negative about himself. The problem is most of his thoughts are about himself. Both people are caught up in forms of arrogance. Because both, whether they admit it or not, think the world revolves around and is focused on them. We are not to live this way.
- B. Rather, we are to humble ourselves. If Jesus were just demonstrating what James said in **1 Peter 5:6**, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God" (ESV), there would be no struggle. After all, how can we help but be humble in the sight of the almighty God. But He didn't say that. The love of **John 13** is to humble yourself in the sight of your brethren, your equals. As **1 Peter 5:5** says, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another" (ESV). Jesus is our example, who, though equal with the Father, did not

struggle to hang on and demand to be treated as equal, but rather came to this earth as a servant. He was a servant not only to His equal but to many who were lesser and humbled Himself even to the point of death (**Philippians 2:5-8**).

- C. The challenge is that in our own minds we are the important ones. Our strengths are the greatest. Our accomplishments the biggest. Our minds the wisest. Our position the most important. Our problems the hardest. Our concerns the most worrisome. Our fears the most valid. But humility, as expressed in **Philippians 2:3-4**, means sincerely viewing the person next to you as more important. That takes humility. That takes love. And disciples love by humbling themselves before one another.

### III. Disciples love by preferring one another in honor.

- A. In all honesty, this aspect of Jesus's example of love is perhaps the most difficult for me. Maybe you know the struggle of wanting to receive honor. Perhaps you know what it is like to cringe with jealousy when someone else is complimented. Naturally, we thrive on honor. We seek it and want it. Men often perform great deeds, not because of concern, compassion, or care but because they will be honored by men. These are the hypocrites about whom Jesus spoke in **Matthew 6:1-5** who performed their good deeds and acts of righteousness so they might be seen of men.
- B. Jesus, God in the flesh, the one who was most deserving of honor (**Revelation 5:12**), gave up that glory and came in the form of man, becoming a bond-servant, not just for God, but for you and me, the least deserving of honor (**Philippians 2:7**). And on this night, nearly 2000 years ago, He went even beyond that and treated these twelve ignorant, rash, arrogant, sometimes rebellious, sinful men as masters. He honored them by washing their feet.
- C. **Romans 12:10** instructs us to prefer one another in honor. Don't seek others to honor you. Don't brag about your work. Don't wait to work until others can see you. Do your work quietly and make lots of noise about the work everyone else is doing. But some are not worthy of honor are they? Can you imagine Peter, James, and John, the inner circle, looking at the others and thinking, "They are not as close to the Master as we are. They do not deserve as much honor as we do." Or perhaps Simon the Zealot thinking, "I don't mind honoring Peter, but Matthew is a tax-collector, a Roman sympathizer. He is not worthy of honor." Paul addressed this in **I Corinthians 12:23**. We are to bestow the most honor on those who seem to deserve it least. They are the ones that need the encouragement. We must catch them doing things right and praise and honor them for it. The one you simply can't imagine honoring, find something about him or her and sincerely honor them for it. This is the kind of love Jesus offered. Disciples love by preferring one another in honor.

### IV. Disciples love by cooperating with one another.

- A. Can you imagine how small the disciples felt? These men who had just been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest (**Luke 22:24**) sat there and watched the slow process of Jesus, their Master, washing their dirty and disgusting feet. Can you imagine each one as he watched Jesus drawing closer, then cleaning their feet and then wiping them dry? Do you think they were remembering the arrogant and possibly hateful things they had said as they argued about how great they were just moments before.
- B. The apostles were in competition. The goal was not to be the best servant of God they could be. Rather, it was to be a better servant than the one sitting next to them. Don't we all have that little part of us that wants to be better than everyone else? Maybe it's just me. When we stand before God in judgment, we do not want to hear just, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (**Matthew 25:21**, ESV). We hope to hear, "Well done My best and most faithful servant." We want others to see we add more to the church. We are smarter. We are the better teachers. Our ideas are the best.
- C. What amazes me the most is the example of Jesus in this text. As the disciples competed with one another for the prize of greatness, I half expect Jesus to stand at the head of the table and say, "Don't you guys get it? You are all equals in the scheme of things. I am the one who is God in the flesh. I am the one who is being given all authority. I am the one who is going to be sacrificed so your sins can be forgiven. I am the one who is greatest and the sooner you recognize that the better off you will be." But He didn't. He got down on His knees, kneeling before these mere men, these petty men and washed their feet. And He said, "I am the Lord and Teacher. But I am not here to brag about the great part I play in the scheme of things. I am here to serve. When you understand that and follow my example, you will be better off."
- D. Like the apostles, we are not competitors. We are on the same team. Therefore, we cooperate with one another, we work with one another. We only win when we win together. We do not all run the same leg of the race or perform the same function (**Romans 12:4**), but we all work together. Look at how Jesus worked with the disciples here. Disciples love by cooperating with one another.

V. Disciples love unconditionally.

- A. Despite their claims of allegiance, not one of these men were going to stand by the one they called Lord and Teacher later that evening. In fact, despite all the preparation and teaching, not one of these men would believe it when they were first told of the resurrection (**Mark 16:14**). Jesus knew all of that. And loved them up to the end anyway.
- B. Jesus not only demonstrated this love for the apostles who would flee Him in general. He even specifically washed the feet of Peter. This apostle, in spite of being warned, would deny Jesus verbally and voluntarily three times in that very night. And, most amazing of all, he washed the feet of Judas, who was going to leave in just a moment, despite this great act of service and love in order to sell Jesus out to His enemies. He was going to prepare the way for Jesus' death. The very heel that was about to be lifted up against Him (**John 13:18**), Jesus washed, just as He did the others.
- C. Unconditional love means even knowing that you will not return my love but I will bestow love on you anyway. It means looking at the one who hit me and turning the other cheek. It means submitting to the one who has been oppressive and pressed me into service and going the extra mile. It means protecting the one who has hurt me. It means caring for the one who has abused me. For Jesus, unconditional love went further than just washing the feet of the one who would betray Him. It went so far as asking the Father, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do" (**Luke 23:34**, ESV) for the very people who shouted, "Crucify Him!" ... for the men who tied up the crown of thorns and pushed it onto His head. ... for the men who drove the nails through His hands. ... for those who stood watching and mocking, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us" (**Luke 23:39**, ESV)! He prayed that as He was being sacrificed to provide that very forgiveness. There is unconditional love. And disciples love unconditionally.

Conclusion:

At this point, I'm sure we wished this sermon would have simply said, "Disciples love by washing feet." In fact, this may be why some today actually try to make this example literally about washing feet. That would be so much easier. But really, this is about love. This is about a Jesus-kind of love. Jesus loves like God. We are to love like Jesus. That's what a disciple does. How are you doing at that?