

Feet Washing

by Farris A. Chick

THE GOSPEL MESSENGER

Devoted to the Primitive Baptist Cause

J. R. Respass, W. M. Mitchell, Editors

Dear Brethren:--At the close of the old year and the dawn of a new year, I feel like sending you, and my brethren and sisters who read the MESSENGER, a greeting of love and good Will. And as a sort of a new year's gift, I send to each and all some reflections upon the subject named above that to me have been, arid still are, pleasant and profitable. I wish to state, in the first place, that I have no wish at this time to discuss the question as to whether the Savior meant this act to be continued as an ordinance in his church or not. I know that good brethren, who seem to me to be equally God-fearing and desirous of knowing and doing his will, differ in regard to this. I have for myself very decided opinions regarding it. But I do not think disputed questions are ever decided by dispute; and especially spiritual things are not to be settled in that way. And so I do not wish to dispute with regard to the question of feet washing as an ordinance. I leave this task to others, all the more readily because in disputing about the form of the thing, we are so apt to forget the substance, the spirit of it. And the spirit that is in the form is of infinitely more importance than the form. If in any thing we have the form, but not the spirit, we shall find it 'a body of death,' but if we have the spirit, though as yet we have not seen the form, we find the spirit to be life--life that has quickening power and that can make the dead live. Let us, one and all, whether we have the outward form of feet washing or not, examine ourselves to see if we have the spirit of it in our hearts and lives. I do not know of any better way than to take the narration as given in John 13:3-17, and present the various expressions that seem to strike me with force, as I read and meditate upon them. John is the only one of the evangelists who has given us an account of the washing of the disciples feet. He seems to have always seen more of the INSIDE of what Jesus did and said than the other disciples. And so he alone records this most interesting and instructive conversation between our Lord and Peter. No one can carefully read the third verse without being struck with the contrast between it and the act which followed. I think verse third, in connection with Jn 13:14>, furnishes the key by which to unlock this good treasury of spiritual riches. 'Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God,' verse 3d. 'If I then, your LORD and MASTER, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet,' Jn 13:14. He is the Lord and Master, yet he took the place of humble, loving service. He knew the full glory and dignity of his position. He knew that to him the Father had committed all power. He knew that he came from God

and went to God. It was not in ignorance of his high and holy place and character, that our blessed Lord thus humbled himself. No, it was in full view of who he was, and what was his, that he performed this act. Yea more, it was because he knew from whence he came and whither he went, that it became possible for him to serve his own servants and humble himself at the feet of his disciples. He who possesses the spirit and temper of a slave cannot really serve another. It is only the joy of freedom that can help us become really servants of one another. Jesus had not the spirit of a slave, but knew that he was Lord of all. And so he could indeed and in truth become a servant. Had there been any doubt in his mind as to who and what he was, had his view of his position been uncertain and wavering, then the Lord could not have served his servants. It is only the 'Master' who can gird himself and make his servants sit down to meat and come forth and serve them. Thus these verses, the third and fourteenth, not only present a glorious contrast in outward appearance with this lowly act of the Savior, but they show forth, when looked at closely, the blessed reason why he could wash his disciples feet. He knew that he came forth from God and went to God. He knew in other words, that he was the Son of God. What he did, he did as a son, with large and heavenly liberty. One lesson seems to me to belong to this truth for us. We ourselves, if we serve at all, must serve as sons, and not as those in bondage. 'Ye have been called unto liberty--by love SERVE one another.' In worship with its liberty, is the very spirit and reason of service. While we were legal we could neither serve God nor man. But when we received the spirit' that enables us to cry Abba, Father, then we could really begin to serve. While legal in belief and disposition we served only ourselves. No matter what we might do to others, it was self-advantage that we thought of. But the position of a son is assured. His heritage is secure. Of himself he needs no longer to think. All that the Father has is his. That store is unlimited. It can never be exhausted. It is as true in his measure of the child of God as it is of the Father, that giving doth not impoverish him, nor withholding enrich him. And so he can serve free]y, and serve truly, not self, but his brother. There is no other true service possible. I hope that what is here said may help others to see in these third and fourteenth verses what I have rejoiced to see and believe. And in this, as in all things else, Jesus, the Master, and his disciples are one. Another thought I have seen in these two verses. Jesus exalted and glorified the idea of service one to another here. This one thing stamps the life of Jesus as being divine, if there were nothing else to do so. The spirit of the world, the fallen, lost world, has never conceived of such a thought. The glory of the world is 'to be served.' He who serves in its view is a menial. He who is served is Lord. But in 'the kingdom,' he who serves most is king. He who serves not is meanest there. The outward act is not the thing judged in God's sight. But the spirit of the act is all. Have we the spirit of service? He who has that spirit to largest degree, and in most vigorous exercise, is a prince, a king unto God in the royal household. We remember that once when the disciples were pitifully disputing among themselves who should be greatest, Jesus spoke to their rebuke and said, 'Whosoever will be great among you let him be your servant, and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your minister, even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.' From the time when the lad Jesus wrought in the carpenter's shop, until the hour when he washed the disciples' feet, he, by word and by act, glorified the idea of service. And in the text just referred to he said that the road to greatness is made up of toil for others. Not service or toil for self, but for others. And this EXCLUDES the very feeling of serving IN ORDER TO BE CHIEF. He

who becomes great in Jesus' kingdom is not the man who seeks for greatness, but he who seeks for service, willing service out of a loving heart. Another truth we learn, it seems to me, from these third and fourteenth verses, viz: That this spirit of free service can come from God only, and that he who possesses it is born of God and tends toward God. Out of the flesh no such spirit can be begotten. Under the old covenant Moses served in God's house, a servant, but the Son serves in his own house. And we are this house of freedom--of worship--if we hold fast, the CONFIDENCE, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. All efforts of human power, or eloquence, or reason, can, at best, bring forth only Ishmaels. The spirit of worship is from God alone. Jesus came forth from God. And so he went to God. If we have such a spirit of service in us, and our desire is to serve, not self, but God and one another, then we too tend to God and go to God. Like Jesus, he who possesses the spirit of Jesus, by that spirit IS IN HEAVEN. Another lesson taught in these two verses is that in the service of Jesus we have an example of humility. The humble can serve. The proud man never can be of use to anybody in any real sense of the word. The proud man cannot come near to the broken and contrite spirit of another. There is nothing in him that can help him comprehend the heart of the lowly when it is broken with grief. Miserable failures will all his efforts to comfort others prove. This is true of natural men in the natural relations of life. It is much more true of the spiritual things of the kingdom. Peter must be converted from his self-confidence and pride, ere he can strengthen his brethren. The widows who served the saints, washing their feet and caring for all their wants, were held in high esteem, not so much for the act, as for the spirit that appeared in their service, of humility and meekness, and love. Brethren, does it not become us to examine our own selves to see if we have the spirit of Jesus and are following his example? I reserve for a future letter some reflections that grow out of the form of the act itself and the Savior's conversation with Peter. May our minds be led more and more into the spirit of service, is my prayer for Jesus sake. As ever, your brother in hope. F.A. Chick.

FEET WASHING. Dear Brethren.--I had thought when I began writing these reflections upon this subject to have embraced it all in one letter. The theme has grown very wonderfully in my mind as I have written, and I trust the Spirit has opened my mind to see a divine beauty in this scripture more than ever before. In my last letter I closed with some reflections upon the words in Jn 13:7--'What I do thou knowest not now but thou shalt know hereafter.' In the next verse Peter is recorded as saying, 'Thou shalt never wash my feet.' Dull and slow to learn (as are we all), he had not yet risen to a full understanding of this divine act. Still fleshly in comprehension, he COULD NOT understand how his Master and Lord could be to him a servant. The true Master and King is he who serves, but this he could not yet see. He would not hear; hesitated to wash the feet of his Lord. This to him would have seemed fitting. But for the Master to wash his servant's feet--this must not be. Yet herein lies the difference between the kingdom of heaven and all the kingdoms of a fallen world. Jesus, Lord of all, is among us as one who serves, and we recognize him not in such lowly, humble garb. We look for royal robes and power and rank and glory, and lo! we see an humble dress, and weakness, and humbleness, and shame. This is the kingdom of Christ. This is God manifest in the flesh. Peter had not learned this yet; but his spiritual gaze was clearer

after awhile. Thou shalt never wash my feet! Another may, or I will wash my own feet, but THOU, NEVER! And yet, none but Jesus ever could really wash his feet. Only Jesus can really serve us. We can serve one another only as we have the free Spirit of Jesus formed in us. Then the Lord answered, 'If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me.' Jesus said not 'if I wash not THY FEET,' but 'if I wash not THEE.' Why does the Lord change the mode of address ? It seems to me in order that he may call up to our minds that service which is more than all other service, that service which lies at the root of all, and without which there could be no other service rendered. WE MUST BE washed from head to foot, since from head to foot we are filthy and sick and diseased. Peter did not then see, but our minds are carried irresistibly to the cross and to the blood, and to the robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. There was here an expression of that for which Jesus came, and which was before him in all his human life. 'Except I cleanse thee thou hast no part with me.' What poor, mean falsehood then, is that theory which would hold up the pride and religion and good works of men as being sufficient for their salvation! Except I WASH THEE thou hast no part in me. And it is so still. What we have of Jesus is what he is to us and what he does to us. Serving us he imparts himself to us, and so we become partakers of the divine nature. With ourselves, it is only as we serve men that they have any part in us. As brethren serving each other, we mutually have part in each other. Now Peter, still quick and impulsive, with one bound, leaps over to the other side, and still errs in feeling and in judgment, and in language, and says, 'Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.' But Peter did not need this. Only his feet needed cleansing. It seems to me that, symbolically, great and glorious truths of vital godliness are presented here. I think there is a reference to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ by which the whole man is washed from the only thing which can really defile--sin against God. This is the work of Jesus. And this he accomplished by being made in form as a servant, and by becoming obedient unto death. This being done once for all, needs not to be done again. By faith we personally and experimentally enter into possession of this infinite blessing once for all. However devious and dark our path may be afterwards, we never pass beyond the strength and comfort of this hope. Having entered into it once, we never need enter it again, but must abide there forever. As Israel was sheltered by the blood of the paschal lamb, so does the blood of the Lamb of God shelter us forever. Peter had not yet come into the spiritual apprehension of this truth, and so on the one hand he says, 'Thou shalt never wash my feet,' and then on the other, 'Not my feet only, but my hands and my head.' Not only has Jesus wrought the atonement out for us forever, but by the same having word which has entered our hearts we have been purged from our former sins, and having come up out of this Egypt we shall see it no more. This work also Jesus has wrought within us. This also, Peter did not understand then. And we are also slow to learn. We occupy a new relation to God, and never can renew the old relation. Henceforth we are to be dealt with as with sons. And so in Jn 13:10, Jesus said, 'He that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.' This work of redemption and this work of regeneration have both been wrought out. And as has been said, need not to be done again. A new heart has been formed within the disciples. This work is compared to a washing. Every Jew was familiar with the symbolical meaning of their frequent ceremonial washings. The disciples would well know that they represented a cleansing from sin and guilt. This, as has been said, could never need be done but once. But what then ? We have our walk in the world, and the world is filthy, and our feet are not

always well shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and in our walk defilement occurs. Only the clean in lips, hands, heart, and feet can enter into the joys of the heavenly sanctuary. Isaiah, finding his lips defiled, cried, 'I am undone; woe is me!' And we, finding our feet defiled, also must cry, 'I am undone!' Our defiled feet shut us out from God. How shall we enter there? how shall we eat and drink at his table again? We must have clean feet. And so Jesus provides for this also; he takes water and washes our feet. The same word of life that cleansed us first must cleanse our feet. If the bodies are washed with pure water so must the feet be also. The cleansing done in the atonement is done forever, but this needs to be done again and again. And Jesus condescends to do this also. Day by day he applies the word of cleansing and saves us from the world--defilement--which we encounter every day. Oh, how good it is that the Master continues to do us this service! How different his Spirit from ours. We pass by our erring, defiled brother, on the other side; Jesus only comes still nearer. Sometimes we think that we desire to wash our brother's feet; but when once only, he says that we shall not wash his feet, we go away. Jesus did not so. How slow we are to learn of this meek and lowly one! 'And ye are clean, but not all, for he knew who should betray him, therefore he said, Ye are not all clean.' Surely this awful language shows that Judas had no part in him--had never been washed at all. At another time he said, 'One of you is a devil.' At another time he said, 'It had been good for that man had he never been born.' All the rest were included in his redemption. All the rest had begun to drink in of his Spirit. One had not so near as to lie on his breast, but this man had no part in him. 'He was a thief.' Yet other thieves had been saved, and are still saved, but this man had absolutely no spark of the life and Spirit of Jesus in him. He became the very incarnation of diabolic evil, in that he, unlike Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, and the rabble, had lived with Jesus and yet could betray him. In him was exhibited, as never before, how dead man is. In him was the truth clearly set forth, that only a miracle can put truth in the inward parts and cause a man to love God: men are just as bad as Judas. He was chosen in order that in him we might read how evil we all are and tremble. Surely, if outward religious associations and teaching could change the heart and make Christians of men, then Judas had long before been a true disciple. Here we learn the extent of all human depravity, and the necessity of the miraculous grace of God to save. Left to ourselves, we all had betrayed our Lord. Let us humbly adore that grace that has kept us! One closing thought remains for me to say a word about Jesus said, 'I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done unto you.' And just before he said, 'If I have washed your feet, ye ought to wash one another's feet.' 'The servant is not greater than his Lord,' etc. Into this part of his blessed work he permits us to enter. We may also serve one another. Are we doing so? I cannot give a ransom for my brother; I cannot wash him as Jesus does in the new birth, but I may wash his feet. Am I doing so? Am I among my brethren as one that serveth? The first thing is to have the Spirit of service. If we have this lowly Spirit we have Jesus. By this we may know the man in Christ. He is not a lord, but a servant. And yet by service he is great in the kingdom. Just as baptism avails nothing unless we are first dead to sin and alive to God, or as the supper avails nothing unless we see in it not ourselves, but Jesus, so the outward form of service avails nothing unless the Spirit has learned of the meek and lowly one. And to him that possesses this Spirit, there is always opportunity for service. If we cannot wash the face or hands, we may the feet. If the notable thing is not ours to do, the little thing will be at hand. May God give us all the joyful free Spirit of willing service! I feel sorry to close these

reflections. May God make them a blessing to all. Let those of us who practice this as an ordinance show that we do not think that when this is done all is done, and let those of us who do not practice it as an ordinance show that we do have the Spirit of service. Your remarks, Brother Respass, at the close of my last letter, fully express the feeling with which I trust I have written. May we all love each other with pure hearts fervently. As ever, your brother in hope, F.A. Chick.

Reisterstown, Md., January 4th, 1886.

Eld. F.A. Chick's Letter to the The Gospel Messenger -- January 1887

by Farris A. Chick

The Gospel Messenger -- January 1887

And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.-- Gal 6:9. Some reflections are in my mind concerning the above words, that have seemed pleasant and profitable to me, and I feel a desire to pen them down for the readers of the MESSENGER. We are all desirous of seeing some fruits of our labor, whatever the work may be in which we are engaged. And if no fruit appears we are apt to become discouraged. It is so with those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord. Whatever place we may fill whatever service we may be rendering--we all like to see some result. If no result appears we soon begin to question and feel anxious, and to doubt our usefulness, and the utility of what we are doing. This is true of every servant of the Lord, but I think it is specially true of those who are called to give their whole life to the work of the ministry; to reprove and exhort and rebuke, and to feed the flock of God. We want to see fruit. And we have a right to expect fruit. But we may expect it too soon, or in ways that would not glorify God, or be good for us, and so we are disappointed. Then comes seasons of depression, when we are ready to faint and give up all, and conclude that our ministry is of no use; that we have mistaken our field of labor; or that we were never called to this work. Now, to us all, ministers and members, the language of the verse quoted at the head of this letter, comes as a word of kindly promise of warning and admonition, all in one. It says: ' Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due time we shall reap if we faint not.' What a striking figure the apostle uses in the word 'reap' in the text! Suppose one who knew nothing of the process of the germination and growth of plants from the seed, should be told that a certain seed would produce, if cast into the ground, bread for the use of man. He casts the seed into the ground, but days pass and he reaps no fruit. He becomes discouraged and faint in his mind. He ceases to expect fruit; he ceases to watch for it; and when the fruit appears, it does not gladden his heart and he does not reap it, because he has quit expecting fruit, and does not know there is any. This is the thought of the text. On the other hand, here is one who has long patience; he expects fruit; he ceases not to watch for it, though it be long delayed; he is not weary in well doing; he does not become faint, he sows the seed

and trusts the Lord to give the harvest when the proper season shall come. He reaps the fruit, for he has continued to sow; he is in the field where the fruit ripens and when it ripens. The words are encouraging and true, and have been fulfilled again and again. How many times has our doubting and our unbelief been rebuked when we were beginning to be weary in well doing, and were getting ready, as it were, to fall out of the ranks. How often, at such times, our God has shown us a little fruit of our labor, and we have been strengthened and helped to still hold on our way. This, I think, is the general meaning of the text. And it is thus seen to be in full harmony with such expressions as these: 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand,' etc., and 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and after many days thou shall find it again.' I feel like standing as a witness to the truth of these promises, and I had it in mind to narrate an incident in my own life, in order to show how our Father above fulfills his own words and does not let them return to him void. And when he gives us to see his promises fulfilled, how it rejoices our hearts! How good it is to think that all his word is fulfilled; both that which he gives us to see, and that which we cannot trace. By now and then showing us a promise fulfilled, he would lead us to believe that all are or shall be fulfilled. If he permits us to reap once where we have sown the seed, he means us to understand the harvest shall never fail, whether our eyes behold it or not. Thus was my mind led to believe by the instance, which I will now narrate. I had been in the habit of visiting, once or twice a year, and preaching in Frederick county, Md., at a place about twenty-five miles from my home, where a few Old School Baptist friends live. I had gone from time to time, hoping that there were some who loved the truth, and who took pleasure in hearing it. I also hoped that I might, at some future time, see some good results from these visits. One year ago, in November, I visited and preached two evenings in this place. But everything seemed discouraging to me. Even those, for whom I had a good hope, seemed very cold and farther away than I ever knew them to be. I could not feel that the spirit of the Lord was with us. I came home with the question in my mind, of what use have all my visits there been? I felt as though they had been of no use. I was heartsick and discouraged. I thought that I had been sowing in vain. The Lord had not given me one soul for my hire; I had better cease going there. I was greatly troubled. But now for the result: About this time I received a letter from a lady in that county whose name was not familiar to me; so unfamiliar was it that it required considerable thought before I could locate the writer in my mind. She said that she had fallen into deep trouble of mind a few days before; that she felt herself to be such a sinner, and knew not where to turn nor what to do. She said that while she had always respected religion, and had been accustomed to saying her prayers, she had never known her sins until a few days previous. Those around her (she was at the time teaching, and was boarding in the family of a Methodist minister) did not understand her, though they seemed anxious to do her good. 'And now,' she said, 'I heard you preach some years ago, and my mind is led to you. Can you tell me anything to comfort me? Is there any hope that God will forgive such a sinner as I?' To this letter, so full of bitterness and sorrow, I could only reply by presenting Jesus as the Saviour of the very chief of sinners. In a few days another letter came, thanking me for my kindness, but still expressing the utmost despair. While I knew that it was not in me to give her peace where the Lord had given her trouble, yet I felt to reply at once and tell her a portion of my own experience. About three days later I received a reply asking me to join her in praising God for his great work in her behalf. The God of Salvation had appeared to her

gloriously one night upon her bed, and she knew him for her Saviour. I did rejoice over her with great gladness of heart. After this she began in her letters to inquire about doctrine, and what Primitive Baptists believed, honestly telling me when things were clear to her mind, and when they did not so appear. My confidence in and fellowship for her grew continually. At last I wrote to her that it was so, and asked her to come and visit me, and go with me to Black Rock and get acquainted with the brethren there. She came on the first of February under circumstances of peculiar trial. Her faith and love were tested more than is usual. She herself is very frail and weak--hardly ever seeing a well day; the snow lay drifted all over the country, in places from six to ten feet in depth. She had five miles to go to reach the cars and forty miles on them to my place, and then eight miles to drive with me to Black Rock, with the snow so deep that we were three hours going eight miles. She was a total stranger to the whole church, and had seen me but twice, and could hardly call herself acquainted with me. Yet she came, spite of all these discouragements; and in the midst of the cold, and ice, and snow, went down into the watery grave and arose to newness of life. After she returned to her home she wrote: 'I have made the journey that seemed so hard; I have done what I felt was my duty to do; I have returned to my home, and not a hair of my head is hurt.' 'I will glory in the Lord who has strengthened me.' Again she wrote: 'How I love that people that received me so kindly and loved me so freely.' I have not tried to tell of the precious conversations, of the contents of her many letters, because time and space would fail. She is still rejoicing in the Lord and praising his name. And did not I feel rebuked at the Lord's goodness to me for all my unbelief and fainting by the way? Here was fruit where I had said, 'there is no fruit.' I felt to say let me not be weary in well doing again, for the reaping time will come, if not to me personally, then to some one else. I felt humbled and yet exalted. I saw more clearly than ever that I was nothing, but Jesus was all and is all. I was abased in myself, but I was exalted in Jesus. I have told this instance of the Lord's power and goodness, hoping to encourage some dear brother who is disheartened and weary. It is true 'we shall reap in due season.' Oh, for more of a spirit of humble reliance upon God, so that we may toil with the patience of the ox and the boldness of a lion! I remain, as ever, your brother in hope of life eternal. FARRIS A. CHICK.