

THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Introduction 1 Cor. 11 : 25: "This do in remembrance of Me."

From the dawn of time God has employed the principle of active participation in teaching His people spiritual truths. He knows that we learn best by doing. The impact of the lesson is deeper and more lasting if we are permitted to touch and taste and handle as well as to hear and see and think.

Old Testament examples: Man's continuous need to eat the fruit of the tree of life, even in Eden. The sacrificial offerings, appointed immediately after the entrance of sin. Noah's building of the ark. God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The Passover ceremonies. The gathering of the manna. The building of the tabernacle, and the whole Sanctuary service.

So it is in the New Testament. Whilst the emphasis upon external ceremonies is greatly reduced and the ordinances are much simplified, the principle of education by active participation remains.

The three divinely-appointed ordinances of the Christian Church are:

- Baptism by Immersion
- The Ordinance of Foot-Washing
- The Lord's Supper

Inasmuch as the ordinance of Baptism is dealt with in Lesson 36, we will concentrate in this lesson upon the other two.

Discussion 1.—THE ORDINANCE OF FOOT-WASHING — John 13 : 1-17

Two questions will help us to see more deeply into the Master's purpose in washing His disciples' feet:

Was Jesus really instituting a new ordinance for the Christian Church?

Some Christians maintain that Jesus never intended His words or actions on this occasion to be taken literally. They insist that He was merely giving an unusually forceful illustration—a dramatisation—of humility and service, in the general sense.

This matter can be settled conclusively only by a direct appeal to Scripture, and inasmuch as all Christian believers are not agreed at this point, the Bible evidence should be considered with especial care. There are two main lines of evidence:

- (a) Three verses indicate clearly that Jesus had something more in mind than merely a general lesson of humility.

- v 7: "What I do thou knowest not now."
- v 8: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."
- v 12: "Know ye that I have done to you?"

These verses show that the true significance of Jesus' action was not immediately apparent to the disciples; also, that this washing was a unique condition of partnership with Christ. Furthermore, if Jesus had merely been giving an example of humility in the general sense, He would not have needed to probe His disciples with the question: "Do you understand the meaning of My action?" His meaning would have been obvious to all!

- (b) Three other verses prove conclusively that Jesus did wish His disciples to engage in the literal repetition of His action.

- v 14: "Ye ought also to wash one another's feet."
- v 15: "Ye should do as I have done."
- v 17: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."