

Encyclopedia Entry On Footwashing

Written by Ben Winslett

Wednesday, 06 October 2010 21:51 - Last Updated Thursday, 07 October 2010 08:26

I was researching our practice of "foot washing," or "washing of the saints' feet." This is from Wikipedia. Keep in mind that this is Wikipedia, not a credible Baptist history book. Nevertheless, I believe you will find the historicity of this practice interesting.

From the article:

"The rite of foot washing finds its roots in scripture. After the death of the apostles, the practice was gradually lost.

Nevertheless, it appears to have been practiced in the early centuries of post-apostolic Christianity, though the evidence is scant. For example, Tertullian (145-220) mentions the practice in his *De Corona*, but gives no details as to who practiced it or how it was practiced. It was practiced by the church at Milan (ca. A.D. 380), is mentioned by the Council of Elvira (A.D. 300), and is even referenced by Augustine (ca. A.D. 400). Observance of foot washing at the time of baptism was maintained in Africa, Gaul, Germany, Milan, northern Italy, and Ireland. According to the *Menonite Encyclopedia* "St. Benedict's Rule (A.D. 529) for the Benedictine Order prescribed hospitality footwashing in addition to a communal footwashing for humility"; a statement confirmed by the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.^[1] It apparently was established in the Roman church, though not in connection with baptism, by the 8th century. The Albigenses observed footwashing in connection with communion, and the Waldenses' custom was to wash the feet of visiting ministers. There is some evidence that it was observed by the early Hussites. The practice was a meaningful part of the 16th century radical reformation. Foot washing was often "rediscovered" or "restored" in revivals of religion in which the participants tried to recreate the faith and practice of the apostolic era."

By the way, the Albigenses and Waldenses are in our Baptist family history. While this practice seems strange today, especially in our proud American society, it has been a custom among God's church since the time of the Apostles. It is even a requirement for a widow to be taken under the financial care of the church (1 Tim 5).

Here is one more excerpt concerning other Baptist groups who practice this:

"Baptist practice

Many Baptists observe the literal washing of feet as a third ordinance. The communion and foot washing service is practiced regularly by members of the Separate Baptists in Christ, General Association of Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Primitive Baptists, Union Baptists, Old Regular Baptist, Christian Baptist Church of God, Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Brethren in Christ,^[4]. Feet washing is also practiced as a third ordinance by many United Baptists, General

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Baptists, and Independent Baptists."

The whole article is here. I was surprised to see that it is as widely practiced in our day as it is.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foot_washing