

ESV STUDY BIBLE NOTES

John 13:1-17

13:1–20:31 *The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative.* The second half of John's Gospel consists of Jesus' Farewell Discourse (chs. 13–17) and the passion narrative (chs. 18–20). Now that Jesus has been rejected by the Jews, he turns his attention to his new messianic community. After the community is cleansed and instructed, Jesus prays, is arrested, and is subjected to Jewish and Roman trials, crucified, and buried. This is followed by the resurrection, resurrection appearances, and Jesus' commissioning of his disciples. The section concludes with a purpose statement (20:30–31).

13:1–17:26 The Cleansing and Instruction of the New Messianic Community and Jesus' Final Prayer. In the second major section of John's Gospel, Jesus prepares his new messianic community, represented by the Twelve (minus Judas), for the time subsequent to his exaltation to the Father. The community is first cleansed both literally and symbolically through the footwashing (13:1–17), and then figuratively through the removal of the betrayer (13:18–30). The Farewell Discourse proper extends from 13:31 to 16:33 and contains Jesus' final instructions to his followers before his arrest and crucifixion. The discourse (unique to John's Gospel) concludes with Jesus' final prayer (ch. 17).

13:1–17 With his crucifixion imminent, Jesus washes his disciples' feet as a final proof of his love for them, setting an example of humility and servanthood and signifying the washing away of sins through his death. In a striking demonstration of love for his enemies, Jesus washes *all* of his disciples' feet, including those of Judas. Jesus' act is all the more remarkable, as washing people's feet was considered to be a task reserved for non-Jewish slaves. In a culture where people walked long distances on dusty roads in sandals, it was customary for the host to arrange for water to be available for the washing of feet. Normally, this was done upon arrival, not during the meal.

13:1 Jesus' **own** are now the Twelve, the representatives of his new messianic community (cf. 1:11). Though Jesus was about to die an agonizing death, he continued to love his disciples. **to depart out of this world.** In several places John says that Jesus is leaving the world and going to the Father (see 13:3; also 7:33; 16:28; 17:11). Yet in other places Jesus can say that he will always be present with his disciples, even after his ascension into

heaven (see 14:23; Matt. 18:20; 28:20; Rev. 3:20). Both are true: Jesus in his human nature is no longer here on earth but has returned to heaven and will come again one day, but in his divine nature Jesus is omnipresent and is with believers “always” (Matt. 28:20).

13:7 Another instance of misunderstanding (cf. notes on 6:52; 12:16).

13:8 To have **no share** with Jesus means that one does not belong to him. Here the footwashing symbolizes the washing necessary for the forgiveness of sins, in anticipation of Jesus’ death for his people, by which sins are washed away.

13:9–11 Jesus applies the footwashing in another way. Those who have been washed through Jesus’ once-for-all death also need daily cleansing of their sins (symbolized by their frequent need to wash their feet). It is apparent that Jesus applies the footwashing figuratively since he says not all are clean, referring to Judas, but clearly he cleaned Judas’s feet as well. Because Judas is not spiritually cleansed, unlike Peter, he does not have a “share” (v. 8) with Jesus.

13:12–17 The disciples will understand fully only after the cross, though they do grasp in part Jesus’ amazing humility, which serves as a model for all of his disciples.

13:14 Footwashing continues as a regular ceremony in a number of modern denominations, which literally obey Jesus’ command, **you also ought to wash one another’s feet**. Others believe the language is figurative for the importance of serving one another, and that the act itself is not required.

13:16 messenger (Gk. *apostolos*). This is one of a few places in the NT where this Greek word does not refer to the office of “apostle of Jesus Christ” but simply to a “messenger” in general (it is also used this way in 2 Cor. 8:23 and Phil. 2:25).¹

¹ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2050–2051.