Foot Washing

Intro: There are some religious groups that practice foot washing as a religious right or ordinance. It is also known as pedilavium and mandatum. We hope to answer the question as to whether or not Jesus instituted this as a religious ordinance for us to practice today. While the basis for maintaining such is found in John 13:1-17, there are some background things I believe are necessary for understanding it.

I. Foot Washing Was A Form Of Hospitality
   A. In Oriental lands people wore open sandals and walked on dusty paths.
      1. Their feet were easily soiled.
      2. It was customary to remove the sandals as one entered the house and wash the feet.
   B. The host would provide:
      1. Sometimes just a basin of water for one to wash his own feet
      2. Sometimes a slave performed the service for the guests
      3. It was considered the most menial task a slave could perform.

II. Consider Bible Instances
   A. Gen. 18:1-5 "And the L ORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; 2And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, 3And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: 4Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: 5And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.”
      1. Three angels appear to Abraham.
      2. He has water fetched to wash their feet.
      3. We do not know if Abraham washed their feet, a servant did, or whether water was just provided for them to do it.
   B. Gen. 19:1-3 “And there came two angels to Sod om at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; 2And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. 3And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.”
      1. Two angels come to Sodom.
      2. Lot greets them and invites them to stay with him.
      3. In that show of hospitality, he suggests they wash their feet.
   C. Gen. 24:31-33 “And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the L ORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. 32And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. 33And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on.”
      1. Abraham has sent a servant to his kindred to obtain a wife for Isaac.
      2. The servant was invited into the home.
      3. Immediately water was provided to wash his feet along with the men that were with him.
D. Gen. 43:24-25 “And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender. 25 And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon: for they heard that they should eat bread there.”
1. Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt to buy food.
2. They were escorted to Joseph’s house and given water to wash their feet.

E. 1 Sam. 25:40-41 “And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee, to take thee to him to wife. 41 And she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.”
1. David’s servants visit Abigail to invite her to become David’s wife.
2. She volunteered to be a servant and wash their feet.

F. Luke 7:37-38, 44-46 “And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, 38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.... 44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.”
1. Here a woman washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair.
2. Jesus praised her actions.

G. 1 Tim. 5:9-10 “Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.”
1. This deals with the requirements of a widow being put in the church’s budget (taken into the number).
2. One requirement is that she has washed the saints’ feet.
3. None of the requirements deal with worship but service within the home.

H. We thus see:
1. It was a customary practice in meeting a need for cleanliness.
2. Water was provided for one to do it themselves or done as a service for others.

III. A Form Of Religious Rites
A. Exo. 30:19-21 “For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: 19 When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: 20 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations.”
B. Exo. 40:30-32 “And he set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and put water there, to wash withal. 31 And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet thereat: 32 When they went into the tent of the congregation, and when they came near unto the altar, they washed; as the LORD commanded Moses.”

IV. Jesus’ Washing The Disciples Feet
A. John 13:1-17 “Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him; 3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; 4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel
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wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

B. Background:

1. The apostles had argued which would be the greatest among them.
2. Mark 9:33-35 “And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”
3. Mat. 20:20-28 “Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshiping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Yea know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Yea know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but he that is greatest among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”
4. Luke 22:23-26 “And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.”
5. With this background let's notice the text.

C. The Passover feast:

1. They acquire an upper room to eat the Passover meal.
2. Apparently when coming in, none of them washed their feet.
3. After the feast, Judas determines to betray Jesus, but is still there when Jesus washes their feet.

D. The washing of their feet:

1. Jesus made ready and began to wash their feet; John 13:4-5 “He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.”
2. Peter felt his unworthiness for the Lord to wash his feet and protested; John 13:6-11 “Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”
washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. 11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.”

3. Jesus makes application of what He had done.
   a. John 13:12-17 “So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? 13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so am I. 14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. 16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. 17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

b. From the earliest of Christianity, some have believed this was a Christian rite.
   (1) “In the early church, Tertullian indicates a knowledge of foot washing, noting that it was a part of Christian worship (*De corona* 8). Chrysostom encourages Christians to imitate the action of Jesus in John 13 (*In Job. [Ioannem] homiliae* 70–71), as does Augustine (*In Evangelium Iohannis Tractatus* 55–57). Origen also advocates foot washing (*In Genesim homiliae* 4.2). The Synod of Toledo (694) declared that foot washing should be observed on Maundy Thursday. Throughout the Middle Ages the Roman churches observed the practice on that day of Holy Week. The Greek church recognized foot washing as a sacrament but seldom practiced it. In the 11th and 12th centuries the Albigenses and Waldenses observed foot washing as a religious rite. The Bohemian Brethren also practiced it in the 16th century. Martin Luther opposed foot washing, but it was practiced by the Anabaptists and some Pietists” (*Encyclopedia of Christianity* 2:322).

   (2) “Presently the five Brethren groups (Brethren Church, Church of the Brethren, Dunkard Brethren Church, Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, and Old Order German Baptist; Brethren Churches), several of the Mennonite groups, Primitive Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Brethren in Christ, and the Church of God (Anderson, Ind.) practice foot washing as an ordinance (i.e., a practice established by the example and command of Jesus). Some Mennonites practice foot washing as a preparatory service the day before receiving Communion, although most Mennonite groups that practice foot washing do so immediately following the Communion. The Brethren groups conduct a threefold service: Agape (love feast), Pedalavium (foot washing), and Eucharist (bread and cup). Foot washing is also provided for within the Maundy Thursday liturgy of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church” (*Encyclopedia of Christianity* 2:322).

c. Various interpretations:
   (1) An act of common courtesy and hospitality.
   (2) An expression of humility.
   (3) A call to ethical action.
   (4) A cleansing from partial defilement.
   (5) An encapsulation of the entire servant ministry of Jesus.
   (6) A symbol of the Lord’s Supper.
   (7) A symbol of baptism.
   (8) A symbol of Jesus’ death.
d. I believe it is an example of service not an act we are to perform (washing feet).

(1) John 13:15 “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”
   (a) Was the act itself under consideration, or the example He provided for them?
   (b) Honesty with the text the example could be the act itself (washing feet) or example of service.

(2) Notice: John 13:12 “So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?”
   (a) How could they not know what He had done?
   (b) The act itself (washing feet) must not be under consideration.
   (c) If the act of washing feet were under consideration, this question is nonsensical.

(3) Totality of Biblical teaching:
   (a) The historical aspect (as seen previously):
   (b) There is no instance within the New Testament placing it within the religious realm.
   (c) Let us the lesson of humility and service to others.
     (i) 1 Pet. 5:5-6 “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:"
     (ii) Mat. 20:28 “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Conclusion: Those who practice such today as a religious rite do so without Bible authority. They abuse Jesus’ example of service. Those who add to God’s Word do so to their own peril. We must do only what God authorizes and never add to or take away from it.