

Talking Point Notes

Keeping His Commandments

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This is an interesting verse because some manuscripts have **πλύ-
νοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν** (“the ones washing their robes”) instead of **ποιοῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ** (“the ones doing his commandments”).

We need to ask if this was a scribal error or a deliberate alteration. We can answer this by (1) examining the nature of the change; and (2) identifying possible motivations for a deliberate alteration.

1 The Nature of the Change

We first note that three out of four words needed to be changed: **ποιοῦντες** had to be changed to **πλύνοντες** (or vice versa), **ἐντο-
λὰς** needed to be changed to **στολὰς** (or vice versa), and **αὐτοῦ** had to be altered to **αὐτῶν** (or vice versa).

First word: **ποιοῦντες** ↔ **πλύνοντες**. The first letter and the last four letters are the same in both words. Four letters in a row are different: **ο** ↔ **λ**, **ι** ↔ **ύ**, **ο** ↔ **ν**, **ῶ** ↔ **ο**. In other words, **οιοῦ** was changed to **λύνο** (or vice versa). And the change in meaning is from ‘those doing’ to ‘those washing’ (or vice versa).

Second word: **ἐντολὰς** ↔ **στολὰς**. The last four letters are the same in both words, but the start of the word is: **ἐν** ↔ **σ**. In other words, **ἐν** was changed to **σ** (or vice versa). And the change in meaning is from ‘commandments’ to ‘robes’ (or vice versa).

Third word: **αὐτοῦ** ↔ **αὐτῶν**. The first three letters are the same in both words, but the end of the word is: **οῦ** ↔ **ῶν**. In other words, **οῦ** was changed to **ῶν** (or vice versa). And the change in meaning is from ‘of him’ to ‘of them’ (or vice versa).

Three coordinated word changes where the changed portions of each word do not resemble each other, and where the grammar is altered to match the required change (**αὐτοῦ** ↔ **αὐτῶν**, singular to plural), is something that could not happen by chance. Neither is the dramatic change in meaning possible by mere scribal error. Therefore, the change was both intentional and intentionally deceptive, and it is only the motivation that we require.

2 Identifying Motivations

If the original text were, “the ones washing their robes,” then it is difficult to see a sufficient motivation to remove the clever allusion to a previous chapter to instead insert a requirement to keep commandments which the Church claims to have been abolished because they supposedly no longer need to be kept.

On the other hand, the motivation for the reverse is obvious: the clever removal of an embarrassing reference to the necessity of the faithful to observe Torah, even so late in the first century.