

Christianity in the Spirit of the Servant

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments" Volume #19, #38 September 19, 2004GG

Dear Friends,

Our passage this week takes us to the heart of true Christian service. No service will rise above the attitude that drives it. A grudging attitude will foster a grudging service. A joyful attitude will prompt a joyful service. And, as our passage teaches, the heart of a servant will prompt the devoted service of a servant. Jesus specifically taught, "I am among you as he that serveth". {Lu 22:27} When we adopt the heart of a servant, devoted to the Master's interest, not to orchestrating people and events to get our own way, we will implement the actions of service that honor our true Master.

Whatever our role in the church, this lesson urges intense self-examination. Do I fulfill that role because of personal interests or to honor God? Our American culture is intoxicated with the "What's in it for me?" mindset. That sinful attitude often invades churches. It even impacts preachers. May we spend some prayerful time in the days ahead seeking the Lord's enlightenment of our present attitudes toward our Christianity. Are we doing things for self or to honor our Lord? Are we serving or seeking service from others?

God bless,

Joe Holder

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. {1Ti 6:1-5}

Although directed to servants-literally first century slaves-Paul's words cover every believer in every echelon of society. Be he the head of state or homeless, if he has committed to living his faith, he must commit to the role of a servant. Many years ago I heard about a young inexperienced minister who was called to serve a church under the mentoring supervision of an aging pastor who had served them for almost forty years. The church saw potential in the young man, and wanted to give him time and experience under the wise and watchful eye of their old and trusted pastor. When the young man stood to give the church his answer, he proceeded to tell the church that he expected to be supported full-time and that his support should at least equal the average income of the membership. The church promptly revoked their call, sad and disappointed, because they saw how far this young man was in his attitude from the role of a servant. Indeed Scripture teaches the necessity of a full-time ministry. In fact there is nothing wrong with a church setting its goal to support its pastor to the average income of its membership, so the young man's objectives were not in error. The problem was his attitude. Rather than pledging to learn and grow under his senior and to earn his respect and support by loyal service to God and to this church, the young man broke the church's confidence by demanding what he should have earned over time. His attitude destroyed his objective.

Occasionally Bible critics will assault the New Testament for its failure to condemn slavery. They miss the greater issue that the New Testament confronts directly. Had first century Christians openly opposed slavery, they would have been immediately stamped out by the Roman government. However, they did something far more detrimental to slavery's future. They eliminated its justification by

teaching the brotherhood of all believers. As fiercely as Paul imposes responsibility on slaves in our passage, he equally imposes responsibility on masters in other passages. In a personal experience Paul encountered a runaway slave of a master who was his friend and a believer. The slave became convicted of his sin and also became a believer. What did Paul do? He sent the slave back to his former master with a personal letter, pleading with the former master to accept his former rebellious slave, no longer as a runaway, but now as a brother in Christ. He even volunteered to personally pay the man's debts if he owed anything to his master. Where does this all appear in the New Testament? Read the little book of Philemon.

Slaves were commanded to honor their masters, not rebel or become political activists against slavery, "*...that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.*" A slave's faithfulness to his master should become a convincing witness to his master for the merits of the faith. In our contemporary Western secular culture I wonder what would happen to such social institutions as labor unions and social cause organizations if this simple direction were believed and applied. Paul makes the case even stronger when the master is also a believer.

Once Paul has established this demanding concept clearly to Timothy, he adds emphasis with the sentence, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words..." Paul's words for such a believer are strong. "*He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness.*" Pride often appears when our personal status is challenged or put down. How easily the slaves in the church at Ephesus could have adopted similar attitudes and words to the contemporary labor union activists, "How this organization survived with such idiots in management I'll never know..." The same indictment holds to the masters in the church in Ephesus. What if a believing master in the church adopted the same attitude toward his believing slaves that the typical master held? "Slaves, no wonder they are in such a lowly position. They have no intelligence and no ambition to better them selves. The whole lot are lazy no-accounts." Paul would have opposed one attitude as fiercely as the other.

A contemporary question probes this question of Biblical Christian ethics. "If you were accused of being a Christian, would a jury find enough evidence to convict you?" When our three daughters were in high school, they occasionally talked about fellow-students who vacillated between faith and sin. One week these students would be taking and selling drugs on campus. The next week they carried a Bible and were talking about Jesus. Our daughters called them "Jes-oids." Occasionally you will encounter adults who claim to be Christians but whose lifestyle is no more convincing than these high school students. They attend church on Sunday. They call themselves Christians, but in their careers they follow the practices of corrupt relativistic ethics-more accurately, lack of ethics. It is such people who contribute so heavily to the prevailing reputation of Christians in our culture of being hypocritical bigots.

Paul explores the attitude of these corrupt minds, "*...supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*" Turn on some Christian television or radio programs today and you'll hear this message preached as the true gospel. Paul described it as "*Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth...*" One's bank account may well testify of the authenticity of his faith, but it does so by reflecting how he uses the money that he has, how faithfully he serves as a godly steward of the resources that God has allowed him to gain. The size of the balance in the account does not measure one's faith or approval of God. The most faithful believer may struggle for tonight's meal to serve his family. And the weakest believer may have more than heart could desire. Haddon Robinson, a respected contemporary preacher and seminary professor, tells of visiting a church as a guest preacher on one occasion. He arrived early and quietly sat in the auditorium waiting for the service to begin. Soon a young family walked in and sat down near Robinson. He struck up a casual conversation with

this family to pass the time. During the conversation Robinson asked the husband the question, "I'm curious. How does this church go about its giving? What do they expect of each member? How do you determine how much you give to the church each Sunday?" The husband promptly responded, "Oh that is simple. We give the same amount that we'd spend on a night out to see a good movie." Without any thought this man equated his giving to a night of entertainment. Given the fact that Paul makes a powerful point to both Timothy and Titus that the minister of the gospel should be an example to people in all things, I wonder how many preachers could hold up their personal giving to the church as an example. What does it mean to be an example? It means that if everyone in the church did exactly as you do, the church would prosper and be a mature spiritual body. In the matter of giving it means that the church would have adequate resources to provide for its Biblical responsibilities, both to needy members, to other churches in need (as the other churches donated to the Jerusalem church in Acts), and to their pastor. One must ask the question. Do you ever wonder how much the tel-evangelists give from their income? They say a lot about receiving, but little about their personal giving. For that matter, every minister of the gospel should be able to teach giving with the conviction that he has personally practiced what he preaches about giving. No one should boast about his good works. An example speaks through actions, not through a trumpet that praises self.

Whether in giving or in any other matter of our discipleship, we must measure our Christianity against the rule of the servant. Do we serve or seek service from others? Do we view our role as to give or as to gain?

Elder Joe Holder