

Servant Leadership in the Church
Selected Scriptures

Introduction

This morning I want to expand on the foundation I laid last week in speaking about Jesus being the model of servant leadership. Jesus is the second person of the Triune Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As stated in the Nicene Creed, Jesus is *very God of very God* and so is the ultimate leader having all authority and capability to lead and direct His followers perfectly. Yet Jesus is also the perfect servant. He submitted His will completely to the Father and became man, taking on the form of a slave, that He might pay the price of man's sin by dying on the cross of Calvary. His resurrection on the third day proved that all His claims and all His promises are true.

A person becomes a Christian when he humbles himself to repent from his sin and place his faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Having been redeemed from sin by Jesus' shed blood, we are not our own but belong to Him. Therefore, every Christian has also had a change of masters. We were slaves of the devil and sin. Now we are slaves of God and righteousness. We live to serve God however He desires. Every Christian is also by definition a disciple of Christ, so following His example is critical to fulfilling the purpose of our existence. This includes His model of servant leadership because God has placed upon every one of us a responsibility to lead others to one degree or another in using the gifts and abilities He has granted to us. Every Christian is to be a servant leader as was Jesus.

In the secular world, the idea of being a servant and being a leader is a contradiction. Leaders lead and servants serve and never should the two be combined. But the opposite is found within God's kingdom. Jesus' own example is that He was both the greatest leader and the greatest servant of all time at the same time.

Business leaders who have studied Jesus' example and followed it have discovered that it results in a more successful business. The same is true in other fields of human endeavor, but seldom do men desire to examine and follow Jesus' example unless they are Christians. Why? Because it demands that they set something aside that is very important to most people - pride. Humans by nature tend to be proud, and when a proud person gains a position of leadership, there is a tendency for more pride to develop. Eventually that pride will hinder or even block his ability to lead so that he is no longer as successful and may even fail completely.

Simple observation and logic should make all men somewhat fearful of taking on increased leadership responsibility. Why? Because when a man is advanced to a position beyond his capability, he will begin to flounder and fail. Pride fosters the danger of rising to your level of incompetence. The secular world feeds on this because there is always someone in a lower position who is waiting for the opportunity to usurp and replace someone in a higher position. There is always a young buck looking for the opportunity to displace the current bull. It is not to be that way among the followers of Christ. Servant leadership fosters a different mindset and manner of achieving success that is beneficial for everyone involved.

The Command - Matthew 20:20-28

Matthew 20:20-28 begins with the mother of James and John coming with them to Jesus. Though they humbly bow down to Jesus, their actual request is audacious. She wants to ensure that her two sons will occupy the two most important seats of power under Jesus when His kingdom comes (vs. 20-21).

Jesus challenges them with reality by asking if they were able to drink the cup He was about to drink. They answered quickly that they were without realizing the depth of suffering this would mean. Jesus

responded that they would drink of that cup, but that He could not grant their request for that was for the Father to decide (vs. 22-23). Jesus demonstrated again His complete submission to the Father.

As would be expected, when the other disciples heard about their request, they became indignant with them (vs. 24). Like young boys playing king of the hill, they seemed to have a habit of arguing about who was the greatest in the kingdom (Matthew 18:1; Luke 22:23-25). They still valued worldly desires instead of what God values. Jesus used this opportunity to correct and direct them to a proper attitude and behavior.

Matthew 20:25–28, ²⁵ *But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ “It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Christians are not to be like the world including the manner in which our rulers and great men function. The rulers of the Gentiles would lord it over their subjects. "Lord it over" is a strong term that has the idea of ruling down on the people, and at a time when most governments were dictatorial, often tyrannical in nature, this was easily understood. We also understand it to some degree because most people at some time have had to deal with an employer, a coach, a teacher, a politician or a bureaucrat that acts that way.

There are also those who do not have a position of rulership, yet they gain power over others because they have a distinguished place in society or a charismatic personality by which they capture the fascination of people which then becomes a means by which they can exploit them. It is not uncommon for famous people to do this because fame feeds pride and self importance resulting in them viewing others as peons who exist to do their bidding.

Jesus makes it clear that though this is common in the secular world, it is not to be that way among His followers. The tragedy is that too often professing Christians are that way. People gain power by position or personality and then seek to rule instead of serve. There are too many self-seeking leaders in churches that skillfully take advantage of ignorant, gullible believers to build up their own little kingdom. They merchandise the gospel and tickle people's ears by appealing to man's innate selfishness, emotion and worldly appetites. They then fleece the flock for their advantage. You can find them easily on "Christian" television networks.

I found this quote from an unknown source that explains well the reason Jesus' commands are so often ignored in so many churches. *“The cross of popular evangelicalism is not the cross of the New Testament. It is, rather, a bright ornament upon the bosom of the self-assured and carnal Christian whose hands are indeed the hands of Abel, but whose voice is the voice of Cain. The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemns; the new cross assures. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it. The old cross brought tears and blood; the new cross brings laughter. The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings songs about the cross, and before that cross it bows and toward that cross it points with carefully staged histrionics, but upon that cross it will not die and the reproach of that cross it stubbornly refuses to bear.”* That is following the world, not Christ.

Jesus states it directly in verse 26-27 that greatness in His kingdom comes from being a servant and a slave. Leaders in the church are to be slaves of Christ and servants of His people. The term here translated servant is δῆκονος / diakonos. A deacon did menial labor such as cleaning up and waiting on tables. Jesus made this a more noble term by using it to describe His most faithful and favored disciples because it marked out the selfless, humble life they were to live. If you want to be great, you have to become a humble, selfless servant. And a true servant will sacrifice for the sake of others in the name of Christ. A sham servant avoids suffering.

If you want to be first, then you have to go another step and become a δούλος / doulos. Though it is often translated as bond-servant, the term means slave. This was a lower position than a servant for a slave was owned by his master and could only go and do what the master wanted. The greatest in the kingdom is the one who is a δούλος / doulos, a slave completely submissive to Christ and subservient to His kingdom. Paul often referred to himself using this term (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:1 etc.). Paul viewed himself as being owned by Jesus since he was bought with the price of Jesus' own precious blood (1 Cor. 6:20). For Paul, to live or die was for the Lord (Rom 14:8). The slave's concern is for his master, not himself. The claim of many that say Jesus is their lord is questionable, for it seems that only a few yield themselves to being His slaves.

Jesus then pointed to Himself as the example of what He wanted them to be. Verse 28, *"just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* Jesus was a complete contrast to the world. He did not come to exercise His power and force man to serve Him, Jesus came to serve man and pay the ransom price to redeem him. He died to break your bondage to sin and allow you to be reconciled to God through faith in Him. If that is the example set by our master, then how should we live?

The Example - John 13:1-20

John 13:1-20 records a practical lesson Jesus gave on being a servant leader. Jesus and the disciples have gathered in the Upper Room to celebrate Passover prior to His arrest and crucifixion. Then we read in verse 4 that Jesus *"rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. 5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."*

This is an incredible service for Jesus to perform. A servant was supposed to wash the feet of the guests when they arrived or soon thereafter, but that had not been done. Possibly that was because foot washing was considered about as low a task as anyone could have done. According to a comment in the *Midrash*, a Hebrew slave could not be required to wash people's feet.

According to Luke 22:24f, the disciples had just been arguing once again about who was the greatest and Jesus had to rebuke them. It was soon after this that Jesus got up while the disciples were still reclining at the table. He set aside His outer garments and girded Himself with a towel around His waist. Jesus then used the water and basin that had been previously prepared for that purpose and began to wash the feet of each disciple and dry them one by one. This included Judas who would soon betray Him. Jesus has taken on the appearance and duties of the most menial slave. Paul accurately described Jesus in Philippians 2:7 as *"taking the form of a slave."*

John 13:6-11 records Peter's attempt to keep Jesus from washing his feet and of Jesus convincing him it was necessary. After Jesus was done, He put back on His garments and again reclined at the table with them and taught them the lesson given by His example. He asks in verse 12, *"Do you know what I have done to you?"* He continues on in verse 13 to make clear His own position in relationship to them, *"You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for [so] I am."*

The sense of "teacher" here is more than just someone who imparted knowledge. In Jewish society a religious teacher was seen as a substitute father and so was often referred to as a "Rabbi," which is derived from "Abba," meaning "father" or "daddy." Jesus was often specifically called "Rabbi" (John 1:38,49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8). At this Passover meal, Jesus had taken the position of a father among His disciples. They also recognized that Jesus was their Lord. He was their master and they were to be His servants. That is why Peter was embarrassed to have Jesus wash his feet.

In verse 14 Jesus explains His actions, *"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither [is] one who is sent greater than the one who sent him."*

Notice that Jesus does not rebuke or scold them for their selfishness. There is an implied rebuke, but Jesus' words are a loving and positive exhortation. They need to deal with each other in humility and not in pride. By His own actions toward them, Jesus is reinforcing a lesson He had taught them previously. If Jesus could perform the slave's role for His disciples, then certainly the disciples could be servants to one another. He then gives them a straightforward command to do so.

This is a broad command for them to follow His example in being humble servants of one another. Notice the plurals in the blessing in verse 17, "*If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*" "Things" and "them" are plural, so this is much broader than a command to wash each others feet. The blessings come from knowing and putting into practice the lesson of Jesus' example of humble service to them.

The world does not understand the behavior of Christians because they do not understand our identity as servants. When a true Christian follows the practices of the world, then they lose that identity and are headed for trouble. At minimum, they will lose the blessing they could have had, and at worse, they could end up under the chastening of the Lord for their sinfulness (Hebrews 12:4-11). When it happens in a church, it is a lot worse.

I grew up seeing churches split apart because people were in a quest for power instead of a quest to minister. This results first in ineffectiveness because true ministry is diminishing. Contention builds next as various factions compete for power. Divisions start taking place next as various factions either quit or are pushed out by the stronger groups. If there is no repentance, the church will eventually implode because the quest for power is never ending.

I experienced my first church split in third grade at the hands of a pastor my parents referred to as *The Great Dictator*. That church crashed going from over 300 to a handful of people. It limped along for about fifteen years before finally dying completely. In High School, a mega-church we had been at for years split into three major factions over the power vacuum left when the pastor left for a new ministry. One group formed a new church. Many went to other churches, and the third group kept the buildings - for a while. It later sold the buildings and tried to replant itself in another location, but was eventually absorbed by another church. The church I attended while in college went from over 300 to 26 in four years and they were still fighting. It died soon after.

Since I have been a pastor, I have experienced much contention from men who want power and authority. In 1998 after several Elders had moved away, three of the remaining elders thought they could take over to rule as a majority. Thankfully, God was merciful and this church survived, but the lies and contention hindered the ministry for years before and after. There have also been people that have come to Grace Bible greatly hurt by the power struggles in their home church. Some of them become useful in ministry again quickly while for others it takes years to recover.

The Christian life is about being God's slave and bringing glory to Him through your service. Every position of authority within the church is about increased responsibility for ministry, not power. When it becomes about power, then the lesson Jesus taught His disciples is lost and that local church will be heading for its own destruction.

The Words - Ministry / Service

Consider the words used to describe Christian ministry and those in positions of authority. We have already seen that Jesus took on the form of a δούλος / doulos, a slave, in becoming a man (Phil. 2:7). He demonstrated His nature as a slave by His complete submission to God the Father. Paul calls himself a δούλος / doulos, a slave of God multiple times. James, Peter and Jude all refer to themselves in a similar manner. Do you consider yourself a slave of Christ?

We have already seen in Matthew 20:26 that Jesus calls His followers to be a διάκονος / diakonos, a servant. This word is used in a similar way in many other passages as a general reference to serving the

Lord (Mt. 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 12:26; 2 Cor. 11:23). Though an apostle, Paul also referred to himself as a διάκονος / diakonos in Colossians 1:23 & 25. He also used it in reference to Phebe (Rom. 16:1), Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), Ephaphras (Col. 1:7) and Timothy (1Thess 3:2). In Romans 13:3-4, Paul even said that governmental authorities were διάκονος / diakonos of God. Paul often used a related form of this word to describe his work for the Lord as “ministry” or “service.”

In Philippians 1:1 and in 1 Timothy 3, Paul uses διάκονος / diakonos with reference to a church office we usually refer to as deacons. In many churches, this is a position of power designed to offset the power of the pastor, but that is contrary to the meaning of the word. The root meaning of both the noun and verb forms is to serve or be a servant and is consistently translated that way or as minister. Every Christian should desire to be a deacon or deaconess because those are offices of service and every Christian should be doing some kind of ministry. The specific qualifications for the office of deacon and deaconess listed in 1 Timothy 3 are only marks of spiritual maturity. It does not take that many years for someone who is serious about becoming spiritually mature to qualify. The problem is that few people want to be that serious. People want to avoid eternity in Hell, but fleeing from sin and walking in righteousness in service to the Lord is not as appealing. Those who are serious about living a holy life and serving the Lord should easily become qualified to be a deacon or deaconess within 5 - 10 years. How serious are you about walking with the Lord and serving Him.

The office within the church that does have authority, that of a pastor / elder / bishop, is also a position of service, not power. Paul’s introduction to the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1 puts it in the proper perspective. *“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”* The emphasis is upon the work of ministry that is to be done, not on the office that is attained. Church leaders do have a great responsibility for they are to keep watch over your souls and will have to give an account for them, so it is to the benefit of those being shepherded to obey the shepherd (Hebrews 13:17). But again, the emphasis must be on the service rendered and not the authority with which it is wielded. As already mentioned, when the quest becomes about power, then it is contrary to Jesus’ example and it will take the church in the wrong direction. The New Testament model of having a plurality of church leaders is a safety check to keep pride from prodding a church leader into a quest for power. A plurality of godly men helps to keep each man accountable and the focus on ministry.

Let me quickly add, that the character qualifications for an elder are nearly the same as for a deacon. The main difference in qualification is that an elder must be apt to teach, exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. For that reason, an elder must know the scriptures and how to apply them and have at least the spiritual gift of teaching. If the spiritual gift is present and the character qualifications are met, the amount of time it would take for a man to qualify for this office will be directly related to the diligence he will give to learning the word of God. It could be a few years or many decades depending on the strength of his desire to do the work of an overseer / elder / pastor. I became an elder at 28 which was before I finished seminary. That should not be unusual for those that grow up in Christian homes. I have seen men come to Christ and become fully qualified to be elders in just 10-15 years simply because they loved Christ, loved His word and loved to serve Him. They did this while raising their families. Bible college or seminary can accelerate becoming qualified, but as in the case of deacons, it is a matter of how serious you are about becoming mature in walking with the Lord and serving Him.

The Body of Christ - Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 12

We will conclude by quickly looking at Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. These passages describe the practical way in which leadership in the church is exercised through service.

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul lists out the offices within the church and their purpose. ¹¹ *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,* ¹²

for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

The apostles and prophets laid the foundation of Scripture down for the church. At present, the offices of evangelist and pastor / teacher exist to train the saints, Christians, to carry out the work of service, to fulfill the various ministries to which God has called them. The purpose of these various ministries is so that the whole church will be built up and become mature. The primary purpose of church leadership then is to train people for ministry so that the whole body can become mature. That means their primary function is one of service, not power. They are to follow Jesus' example of being a servant leader. Their own example should point people to Christ.

Lectures can help teach people the word of God so they understand God and what He wants, but training people for ministry requires going and showing them how to apply those truths to life. That is leadership through service, not power. The evangelist and the Pastor / teacher have the responsibility to show the way and facilitate the equipping of the saints, but the beauty of the body of Christ is that every single gift functions together to bring about the needed maturity. Ephesians 4:16 states, *"the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."* This maturity fosters further increasing maturity and protects from the dangers of false teachers (vs. 14-15).

Paul gives a more detailed description of the function of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. It is God that gives as He desires the spiritual gift, the ministry that gift is used in and the power of that ministry, and all of that is for the common good of the whole body (vs. 4-11). Paul then explains in verses 12-31 that it is one body with many members and that every member is important. He emphasizes the point that those parts that do not get much attention are often the most needed.

Your face gets a lot of attention and your liver does not, but you can live without your hair, many of you do, but you cannot live without your liver. The same is true in the body of Christ. The folks up front on a Sunday morning are not as important to the health of the body as those ministering behind the scenes throughout the week. Because every part is needed, there is no room for either pride or envy. Because every part is needed, every Christian must serve and every Christian is a leader at some point because they need to train others according to their spiritual gift.

You equip someone to witness by ensuring they understand the gospel and then going out to witness. They watch you, and then you watch them to encourage and correct. You enable men and women to be godly husbands, wives and parents by teaching them their Biblical responsibilities and modeling it in front of them. You must also be involved in their lives so that you can see them action and be able to encourage or correct as needed. You teach compassion by explaining the Scriptures concerning it and then someone with the gift of mercy takes them to places where compassion can be modeled and practiced - a hospital, nursing home, homeless shelter. The responsibility is also on those that want to mature. You learn to help by being with someone who has that gift. You learn to teach from someone who has the gift of teaching. You learn administration, giving, exhortation and everything else you need to become mature through those whom God has gifted in those areas. I think you get the idea, and this truth applies to every area.

Conclusions

Every man, woman, boy and girl here is to be a slave of Christ. Every person here is to lead in something to one degree or another. Everyone Christian is to be a servant leader. The church cannot function properly without that. It is the example Jesus gave to us. It is the example He has commanded us to follow. This church exists to help you in all those areas. Only two questions remain. Will you humble yourself enough to serve Jesus and other people? Are you committed enough to follow Christ and lead others in walking with Him?

Servant Leadership in the Church - *November 24, 2013*
Selected Scriptures

Introduction

Jesus is very God of very God, yet He also took on the form of a man, and became the model _____
A person becomes a _____ by repenting from sin and placing their faith in the person and work of Jesus
A Christian is a _____ of God & righteousness, a disciple of Jesus and is to be a servant leader
Though servant leadership works in many human endeavors, _____ keeps most people from practicing it
Pride fosters the danger of rising to your level of _____ - that is not to be the way of Christians

The Command - Matthew 20:20-28

The actions of James & John prompt the disciples to argue again about who was the _____ in the kingdom
Jesus corrects them - Matthew 20:25-28

"*Lord it over*" = rule down on, be _____

Some people gain _____ by societal position or charismatic personality - then treat others as peons

Christians are _____ to be like the world - yet many professing Christian leaders are so

Modern Christians are like the world because they follow a _____, not the old one that slays man's pride

To be great in God's kingdom you must be a διάκονος / diakonos (_____) to Christ and others

To be first in God's kingdom you must be a δοῦλος / doulos (_____) to Christ and others

The apostle Paul often called himself a δοῦλος / doulos (_____) of Christ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:1 etc.)

Jesus pointed to Himself as the _____ of what He wanted them to be - Matthew 20:28

The Example - John 13:1-20

A servant was supposed to _____ their feet, but no one had performed the task

They had been arguing about who was the greatest among them; Jesus got up to serve them like a _____

John 13:6-11 - Peter was embarrassed and tried to prevent Jesus from washing his feet but relented

John 13:6-112-13 - Jesus was a "_____" in the sense of a substitute father - a rabbi, and He is Lord

John 13:14-16 - Jesus explains His actions

If Jesus could perform the slave's role, they could certainly _____ one another

John 13:17 - a general command to humbly serve - notice the blessings are _____

When a Christian follows the world and loses his identity as a servant, he is headed for _____

The Christian life is about being God's slave and bringing _____ to Him through your service

The Words for Ministry / Service

A slave: δοῦλος / _____ - used of Jesus, Paul, James, Peter and Jude

A servant: διάκονος / _____ - used of Jesus, the apostles, Phebe, Apollos, Tychicus, Epaphrus, Timothy

Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3 - διάκονος / diakonos used as the _____ for a church office of ministry

_____ Christian is to serve, and so should desire to become a deacon or deaconess
Those serious about living for the Lord will _____ and become qualified to be a deacon or deaconess
The position of pastor / elder / bishop is one of _____ & leadership, not power - 1 Timothy 3:1
Deacons and Elders have nearly the same character qualifications, but elders must also be gifted to _____
Those desiring to do the work of an Elder must also be _____ to learn the Scriptures

The Body of Christ - Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12

The offices of evangelist and pastor / teacher exist to _____ the saints to carry out the work of service
The pastor / teacher's primary purpose is to train people for _____ so the whole body will mature
Lectures help impart knowledge of the Bible, but training requires going and _____ its truths
Ephesians 4:16 - _____ member of the body is needed to work together in order for it to grow properly
1 Corinthians 12 - God gives gifts, ministries and power to disciples as He desires for the good of the _____
Because every part is needed, there is no room for _____ or envy in the body and all need to serve
People learn the Bible and are then trained by those that have the particular spiritual _____ in that area

Conclusions

Every Christian is a slave of Christ and a leader in something - and so must be a _____

KIDS CORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up. 2) How many different words for "servant" are used - Count how many times each is said. Talk with your parents about how you can serve God within the church.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. Why is Jesus the ultimate example of servant leadership? How does a person become a Christian? Why must a Christian learn to be a servant leader? Why does the secular world resist the concept of servant leadership? Why be cautious when taking on additional leadership responsibilities? In Matthew 20:20-28, why did the other disciples become upset with James and John? What are some of the characteristics of worldly leadership and why is that dangerous? How has worldliness infected the church? How do you become great in God's kingdom? How do you become first in God's kingdom? According to Mark 10:45, why did Jesus come? In John 13:1-20 - who was supposed to wash the feet of the guests? Why wasn't that done? How did Jesus prepare Himself to wash their feet? Why did Peter resist Jesus washing his feet? What lesson did Jesus teach from His example? Are Christians commanded to wash one another's feet? Why or why not? What dangers exist when a Christian forgets his identity as a slave? What is the purpose of the Christian life? What Biblical writers refer to themselves as slaves? What New Testament characters are referred to as servants? What is the purpose of the office of deacon and deaconess? What are the qualifications? What is the purpose of the office of pastor / elder / bishop? What are his qualifications? What is required and how long do you think it should take for someone to become qualified to be a deacon or deaconess? An elder? What task is given to evangelists and pastor / teachers? Why must every part of the body work together in order for it to mature? How is a believer trained for ministry? Why can't that be learned in a classroom by lecture? Are you humble and committed enough to be servant leader like Jesus?