

Commitment 011: A Commitment to Serve

The Meaning of Serving

Many years ago, I (Dr. Bob) was new in the Lord and had just begun to answer the call of God to serve in the church. Our church had a series of classes going and on one particular night we would be having a lesson on being servants in God's kingdom. There were to be about twenty-five people there. My pastor was unable to be there to teach that night, so he arranged for Pastor Bob Dailey, a distinguished, seasoned and highly respected minister to fill in for him. I was asked to facilitate the class that evening. All I had to do was open and close in prayer and introduce Pastor Dailey. The night came and everyone was seated waiting for the lesson to begin. I opened in prayer and then told the class that Pastor Dailey would be teaching that night.

A few minutes passed and Pastor Dailey had not yet appeared in the classroom. I was getting a bit concerned, but finally, there he was, striding into the room with a towel and basin of water in hand. I thought to myself, "Well, that's cool. He's going to demonstrate foot washing as an act of service. This should be enjoyable to watch." Suddenly, I no longer felt that it would be enjoyable. In fact, it suddenly became so uncomfortable to consider what was about to happen that I could hardly sit there. You see, he told me to sit in a chair and take off my shoes and socks. Well, as soon as he finished washing my feet, he packed up his basin and towel and walked out the door. His lesson was complete. He had taught with his actions, not his words. It only took about five minutes. I now understood what it means to be served by a true servant. It changed me forever.

D.L. Moody said, "The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves."¹

¹ Discipleship Journal, #42, Article Author: Wheeler, Mark S., P.17, 11/1/87.

Successful service to God and His people requires many things. Most important among these is an unshakeable personal commitment to humility in action. I learned this well when Pastor Dailey was on his knees, washing my feet. For any of us who serve, Pastor Dailey's actions ought to be mirrored in our attitudes toward those we serve and to the idea of serving. Otherwise, any prolonged effort to achieve success in serving God and others will lack the strength necessary to sustain it. In this chapter, we will look at the ingredients necessary for serving. We will seek them in how the Apostle Paul speaks of himself in his epistles. First, however, let's look at the meaning of commitment.

The Meaning of Commitment

The dictionary defines "commitment" in these ways: It's "a promise to do or give something; a promise to be loyal to someone or something: an agreement or pledge to do something in the future; or, the state or an instance of being obligated or emotionally."²

There are many examples of commitment throughout the Bible. I have chosen two for us to look into. One is a narrative from the Old Testament. The other gives us New Testament confirmation of the nature of true, undying commitment. These examples go beyond the dictionary meaning, leaving no doubt as to the intended clarity of the term, "commitment." I have taken an Old Testament example from the Book of Daniel. It's a record of Daniel's three friends refusing to bow down to a huge idol that had been erected in the image of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. On his command, all present were to bow to the idol. This, of course, would have been against the beliefs and corresponding commitment of Daniel's three friends. Below is the Scriptural account of their refusal to abandon their commitment:

Daniel 3:15b-18 (NLT)

"I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the

² The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary.

sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?”{16} Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. {17} If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. {18} But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

Verse 18 makes it clear that their commitment to serving God transcended their fear or any other reason for denying Him as their only God. In the face of the impending death threat from Nebuchadnezzar, their response was clear. Even if God didn’t preserve their lives, they would only serve Him. Their commitment to serving God would never be shared with serving idols. They were completely and unconditionally committed, without reservation or regret. David confirmed this principle in Psalm 24:

Psalm 24:3-4 (NKJV)

*“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?
Or who may stand in His holy place?
{4} He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
Nor sworn deceitfully.”*

Now, let’s look at a New Testament example of commitment. I have chosen it from Acts, Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 contains the record of Peter and John encountering a man who had never walked. He was carried daily to beg at an entrance to the temple. With the boldness of his newfound commitment to Christ, Peter commanded the man to walk and snatched him off the ground. The man did more than walk. He leapt and praised God! His joy was a response to God’s faithfulness. The narrative did not end there. The religious officials were worried about what this healing would lead to. Their enmity against Jesus caused them to do whatever it took to suppress His followers. They had Peter and

John seized and brought before them. They commanded Peter and John to stop. Here is how the two men responded:

Acts 4:19-20 (NLT)

“But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? {20} We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.”

A commitment to serve God will be faced with intimidation and pressures.



A “Bondservant” - Permanently Bound

The dictionary defines a “bondservant” as “a person bound in service without wages;” or “a slave or serf.”³ The Apostle Paul referred to himself as a “*bondservant*” in Romans 1:1 (below). Strong’s Greek Dictionary (G1210 - “*doulos*”) defines this word as, “a *slave* (literally or figuratively, involuntarily or voluntarily; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of *subjection* or *subserviency*”. Throughout the Bible, we see examples of people who held this attitude (though not always gladly). The Old Testament prophets’ deeds and writings show them to be perhaps the best and most frequent examples of serving God and His people. Our most prominent New Testament example is arguably the Apostle Paul. He considered himself permanently bound to Christ and His will. Like Peter and John, he took the Gospel that God had put into him and broadcast it to anyone who would be within the sound of his voice.

The Attitude of a Bondservant

Romans 1:1 (NKJV)

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God”

³ Software: Dictionary from Macbook Pro 2.2.3.

Paul described himself in many ways, often as an “*apostle*” of the Lord, but also as God’s “*bondservant*.” The literal context of his writings shows us that he considered these two titles to be one and the same. His activities as an apostle were the manifestation of his bond service. In his writings, Paul gave instructions, encouragement or correction, always finding ways to define himself and validate his authority to speak for someone greater. He did this to bring Christ to the lives of those he encountered. He was no longer his own. He belonged to Christ. His ministry brought people the only message that could make an eternal difference in their lives. We could call this the manifestation of success on the outside. Paul took the high rank of an apostle down to its lowest position, that of a bondservant. It’s clear that his authority came from the very highest position, which the Lord Jesus Christ occupies, at the right hand of the Father.

Paul was aware that his salvation was bought with a price he could never repay. This brought him to the place in which he was obligated to the point of being completely committed to serve his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a commitment of such loving gratitude that it had no boundaries or limitations. The foundation and strength of his decision for submission came from his first-hand encounter with Jesus. Though your salvation experience was certainly different than Paul’s, it’s no less powerful for you. It always presents you with the choice of submission to bond service or self-serving rebellion. I encourage you to search your heart and become a “no choice” Christian. There is nothing more fulfilling. You will find it your source of security, even when life presents you with the worst of natural insecurity.

In Romans 1:1, Paul wrote that he had been called to his purpose and separated from his past. His purpose had become to act as a servant-apostle. He became a father-like one to the church. Paul had been separated by grace from the evil that was his previous master into the joy of his salvation and all that comes with it. When God calls you out of the darkness of sin, His same grace is at work to give you purpose, joy and more.

Your Attitude Toward Serving Others

It's one thing to have the humility and gratitude necessary to embrace Paul's attitude toward serving Christ. That's easily explained. It's another to have the humility and gratitude necessary to provide the same kind of service to others. At times, this is unquestionably difficult. In many instances, you will experience ingratitude, rejection and even animosity from people you try to serve. You may experience persecution and sorrow. Commitment refuses to allow those we serve to influence if or how we serve them. Here is how Paul described what he experienced in service toward others:

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 (NKJV)

"We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. {4} But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, {5} in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; {6} by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, {7} by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, {8} by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; {9} as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; {10} as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

It's unlikely that you will experience the extent of what Paul went through in his service to God. However, it's very likely there will be times you will wish you could have avoided someone the Lord calls you to serve. What brings God's servants encouragement is that these unavoidable times will be balanced by the gratefulness and appreciation others will show you. In both cases, your commitment to serve people must stand upon the foundation of your service to Christ. You will need that "no choice" attitude. Look exclusively to Jesus for the strength and humility necessary

for the task at hand. If you depend on looking elsewhere, you may find only disappointment and discouragement. People will let you down. Christ will lift you up. He will never let you down.

Your Attitude Toward the Idea of Serving

It's normal to want to be appreciated. It's also commonly inherent in our prideful human nature to want to be elevated onto our own thrones of importance or eminence. We like to be the "top dog." This flies in the face of humility. Paul's instructions concerning this issue of humbly serving shows up clearly in Philippians, Chapter 2. I have provided two translations to emphasize the point:

Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)

"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. {6} Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. {7} Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, {8} he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."

Philippians 2:5-8 (MSG)

"Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death-and the worst kind of death at that-a crucifixion."

The Rewards of a Commitment to Serve

The rewards of living a life committed to serving Christ and His people may be classified as both earthly and heavenly. The earthly rewards are a result of doing the right thing and experiencing some form of gratification because you did so. It's never wrong to do what's right and always a joy to partake of your earthly rewards. Commitment displays our covenant with God to serve Him, however He requires. His response may often be a corresponding display of grace in some form of related reward. However, we cannot tie our expectations of reward to our willingness to commit to serving. We are, after all, obliged and given the opportunity to serve because we were bought with a price and unable to pay the debt we owe for our salvation. This monumental thought leads us to the best of our rewards, those we will have in heaven. In Psalm 34, David wrote of our heavenly rewards for this commitment. His psalm ties exclusive service to God to the rewards only He can give.

Psalm 34:1-6 (NKJV)

“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? {4} He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. {5} He shall receive blessing from the Lord, And righteousness from the God of his salvation. {6} This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face. Selah”

Have you made an unqualified commitment to serve, or has it been characterized by a “Plan B,” which would be some alternative, limited or rescindable commitment? Will you take yourself a little higher to that place where you can honestly say you are a fully committed, “no choice” servant of the Lord - His “bondservant”?

Our commitment to serve God and others, too, should be seen as a no-choice obligation.

