

## Christian Identity: Who You Are in Christ

### Message 7: Servant

We live in an unusual time and place in history. Had we lived even 150 years ago in almost any place in the world, the population would have been full of servants or slaves. Legal slavery came to an end in America just over a century ago. It's hard to believe that fellow Americans owned other people or forced them to work for them. America fought a civil war, in part, over the issue of slavery. But America is not the only country that allowed slavery. Slavery has been common in human history for thousands of years. The oldest historical accounts talk about slavery. Slavery was common here from the very beginnings of the colonies all the way up to the end of the civil war. In many parts of the world, slavery still exists; many people of many different ethnicities are currently enslaved.

The Bible mentions slavery or servanthood quite a bit. In the ancient world, slavery and indentured servitude were common. The Bible even gives regulations and guidelines regarding dealing with slaves and servants.

Perhaps you think that slavery or servanthood is a thing of the past. You might be surprised to know that, if you are a Christian, you are a servant, even a slave. That's your role; it's your identity; it's who you are. But it's likely that we don't understand what that means.

As we continue our Summer Sermon Series on Christian identity, today our focus is on our identity as servants. Christians are servants in several different ways, and that's what we'll consider today.

We should identify ourselves as servants in the following ways.

I. I am a servant of Christ.

A. Texts:

The Bible often describes believers as servants.

Romans 1:1 *PAUL, a servant of Jesus Christ, ...*

1 Cor 7:22 *... he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.*

Colossians 4:12 <sup>12</sup> *Epaphras, [is] ... a servant of Christ, ...*

Colossians 3:24 <sup>24</sup> *... you serve the Lord Christ.*

2 Timothy 2:24 <sup>24</sup> *And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, ...*

James 1:1 <sup>1</sup> *JAMES, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, ...*

Jude 1 <sup>1</sup> *JUDE, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, ...*

All of these passages use the same word—servant (δοῦλος)—to describe followers of Jesus. What is a servant? He is a slave, a bondman, one who gives himself up to another's will. A servant is devoted to the best interests of the one he serves.

Christians recognize someone else as our master and Lord. That's exactly what a Christian is—one who has acknowledged Jesus as Lord (cf. Rom 10:9, 17).

These and other texts show us that if you are a Christian, then you should consider yourself to be a servant of Christ. What does that mean?

## B. Implications

1. It implies submission to authority. Servants of Christ recognize him as their ultimate authority. No one else commands the loyalty and respect that Christ holds over His servants.

As a servant, I do not have the right to set my own agenda. I submit all my hopes, aspirations, and plans to the sovereign will of God (cf. James 4:14-15). My highest goal is to please my Master and hear him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:21; cf. Luke 12:42-43).

We believe in the Lordship of Christ.

2. It implies service. As a servant, I must render service. My intent is to be of service, to contribute to the mission, to be an effective force in fulfilling Christ's goals in the world.

I am a worker in the Lord's vineyard. I'm a child of God, but I'm also a servant, a worker, even a slave. I should be engaged in service of some kind. There is a place for me in the vineyard, in the harvest field. I have work to do. I want to be of service; I want to be a profitable servant.

3. It implies Christ as the object of service. Whatever service I might render to others ultimately is done for Christ. I serve God by serving people. Whether others recognize or appreciate my service is immaterial. God rewards my service even if no one else does.

Hebrews 6:10 *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered (διακονέω) to the saints, and do minister.*

Have you done any labor toward his name? Have you ministered to the saints? That's how we serve Christ—by serving his people.

4. It implies that *all* Christians ought to be involved in service. Service for Christ is not reserved only for those in vocational ministry. All Christians should be serving Christ no matter what their place in the church. No one is exempt from serving Christ and his church.
5. It implies a certain quality of service.
  - a) All work should be done “as unto the Lord” (Col 3:23) and in the name of Jesus (Col 3:17). When you are serving God, you would want to strive for the best possible service you could provide. We should be striving for excellence in our service. We want to exert our best possible effort. We should want to produce a high-quality result.
  - b) As a servant of Christ, I must avoid the possibility of poor service. Jesus told various parables in which he mentioned “wicked,” “slothful,” and “unprofitable servant” (cf. Mt 25:30).
  - c) Jesus told a parable about a servant who knew the master's will and yet did not do it (Luke 12:45-46). He also warned about burying your talent instead of using it for Christ (Mt 25:24-25).

**App:** Many who identify as Christians do little or nothing to serve God. There is no “labor of love” shown toward his name. They contribute little to the work of the Lord. They enjoy the benefits of salvation but contribute almost nothing to the work and duties of God's program in the world.

I picture such people as sponges—they soak up a lot of time and energy, but produce/give back almost nothing. They sit, soak up, and often sour, but they don't serve.

They are more like “consumers of religious services” than bond slaves of Christ. Their ultimate goal is to get something for themselves rather than give something to the Lord or to God's people. Their primary concern is what they get out of the deal, how it benefits them.

Good and faithful servants don't act like consumers; they act like servants. They are producing more than they are consuming. Their focus is on Christ, not on themselves.

6. It implies friendship. Servants of Christ are also his friends.

*John 15:15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

As disciples of Christ, our relationship to him is not a typical master/servant relationship. Jesus' servants are also his friends. We love him because he first loved us. We serve out of love, not merely out of a sense of duty or to get something out of it.

In the OT, a bond servant could voluntarily commit himself to be a servant for life.

*Exodus 21:2–6 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 ... if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' 6 then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.*

Servants of Christ should be like that Hebrew servant who wants to serve Christ for life. He loves his master and wants to continue serving.

**Trans:** Who am I? I am a servant of Christ. He is my primary authority. My main duty is to obey him and serve him. But I serve Jesus because I am his friend. I serve out of a sense of love and commitment. He served me, and now I want to serve him.

Because I'm a servant of Christ, ...

- II. I am a servant of the church.

Jesus said, "I will build my church." Paul tells us that the church is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Anyone who values Jesus will also value his church. If we want to serve Jesus, we will serve his church.

- A. Texts:

Romans 16:1 *I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,*

1 Peter 4:10 *As each one has received a gift, minister (διακονέω) it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Mark 10:44 *And whoever of you desires to be first shall be servant (διάκονος) of all.*

## B. Implications

1. Everyone has something to contribute to the life and ministry of the church. God has equipped every believer with at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7, 11). Spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the body, i.e., the local church. All Christians should seek to serve God and God's people with the gifting they have received.
2. Most of those who serve in the church are volunteers, not vocational workers. They serve God by serving God's people. They serve as ushers, musicians, janitors, teachers, children's workers, etc. Everything done for the benefit of God's people is an expression of service to Christ.

Christ and his church are very closely identified. He is the head of the body. What you do for the church, you do for Christ.

3. Those serving in vocational ministry (e.g., pastors, missionaries) serve God by serving God's people. Their primary responsibilities are to feed, lead, and protect the flock. The pastor is the main *authority* in the church, but he's also the chief *servant* of the church (Mt 20:25-28). Humble service is required of all those who would lead the church (John 13:13-15).

Those serving vocationally must not be "hirelings," those working merely for "filthy lucre" (cf. John 10:12-13; 1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7, 11; 1 Pet 5:2).

4. Deacons also serve the church. In fact, the word "deacon" literally means "servant." According to Acts 6:2, the first deacons were selected to care for the physical/material needs of church members, thus freeing the apostles to focus on "prayer, and the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). Deacons also function as general helpers and counselors, aiding in various aspects of church life.

**App:** It's unfortunate today that some people have a consumeristic attitude about church. That is, they see the church in terms of a service they are paying for, just like other services they buy. The church serves them, not vice versa. They come to church to be served, not to serve.

Matthew 20:25–28 *Jesus ... said, "... whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him 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."*

Our attitude in church should be that we are here to serve, not to be served. My focus in coming to church is on serving God and serving God's people. I trust that your attitude as you enter the assembly is that you are a servant of the church. Don't be a sponge; be a servant.

### III. I am a servant of my employer.

#### A. Texts:

Ephesians 6:5–7 <sup>5</sup> *Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; <sup>6</sup> not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup> with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,*

Col 3:22 *Servants, obey in all things [your] masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:*

#### B. Implications

1. These passages deal specifically with a slave's responsibility to his owner/master in the ANE. Today, those principles apply more broadly to the employer/employee relationship. Employees serve the Lord by serving their employers and their customers.
2. Unlike slaves, employees have certain rights and privileges. They are (usually) free to go home and do other things at the end of the day. They can quit a job and find other employment if they so choose. The employer is not really a master/owner of the employee (although it might seem so in some cases). So the parallel between slaves and employees is not perfect, but the same principles apply.

3. Employees ought to see themselves primarily as servants of Christ and secondarily as workers or professionals. Our work/vocation is one of the ways that we serve Christ and our neighbors.

4. Should Christians see their work as a calling? Yes.

*Col 3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

If God has given you a job, it must in some respect be God's providential will for your life, at least at the present time. You should consider your job to be the means by which you serve God and love your neighbor.

**Quote:** God has ordained some to be auto mechanics, some to be teachers, and some to be missionaries, and he will so arrange the circumstances and events of our lives that we will end up in the vocation to which he has called us.<sup>1</sup>

We must admit that some kinds of work dishonors God, and Christians should not be involved in that kind of work. If you are required to violate the clear commands of Scripture in doing your job, that would be considered illegitimate.

E.g., selling illegal drugs, involvement in abortions, dealing cards at a casino, tending bar, prostitution, any kind of fraud or abuse. If the job requires immoral actions, then it's not appropriate for Christians to have. It's a shame that many careers these days require workers to compromise their moral standards.

What about the military? The Bible is not anti-military. The NT does not require soldiers to quit serving the Roman Empire. Christians can serve honorably in the military. However, the military is becoming more anti-Christian all the time.

5. How do we serve our employers?

- a) "with fear and trembling" – with proper respect
- b) "in singleness of heart" – with sincerity (i.e., honestly)
- c) "as unto Christ" – we serve Christ by being a good employee, a good worker

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Who Am I? Identity In Christ* (Kindle Locations 1078-1079). Cruciform Press. Kindle Edition.

- d) “not with eye-service” – not only when the boss is looking
- e) not “as men-pleasers” – not ultimately for the approval of the boss

**Trans.:** I hope you see your vocation as a means of serving Christ and serving people.

**Illus.:** An automobile salesman had sold cars most of his adult life. At some point in that career he had trusted Christ as Savior. He said, “Before I became a Christian, I sold cars. After I became a Christian, I helped people buy cars.” His primary interest now was to help the potential customer find the best car for his needs and his budget. His motivation changed from serving himself to serving his customer. He had learned to serve Christ by serving people.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. I am a servant of righteousness.

##### A. Texts:

Romans 6:16 *Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*

Romans 6:18–19 *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ... present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*

##### B. Implications

1. People are servants either of sin or of righteousness. Our master is either God or sin. Whom we yield to demonstrates whose servant we are. Many people are slaves to sin.
2. Prior to salvation, we all served “sin unto death.” We yielded ourselves to uncleanness and iniquity.
3. After salvation, we become “servants of righteousness.” We now yield ourselves to righteousness and holiness (cf. Rom 6:13). We are now obligated to live obediently and righteously.
4. Who do you suppose is the better master—God or sin? If you look at the alternatives, being a servant of God is always going to be better than being the servant of sin.

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<sup>2</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Who Am I? Identity In Christ* (Kindle Locations 1019-1020). Cruciform Press. Kindle Edition.

Who am I? I am a servant. I serve Christ, his church, my employer, and righteousness. These truths help me identify who I am and what I should be doing.

Servants are naturally limited in what they can do. Servants of Christ should be doing only those things that are in keeping with their position as a servant. Their responsibility is to know the Master's will and do it (cf. Luke 12:45-46). Anything outside of God's moral will is off limits for God's servants.

As servants of God, our highest aim is to please God. We want to hear those words Matthew 25:23 ... *'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*