

*The Good and
Faithful Servant*



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The Good and Faithful Servant

Professor Nathan Schaeffer once made a fascinating comment, one all Christians should consider. He said, “At the close of life,” “the question will not be, how much you have got? But how much have you given? Not how much you have won, but how much have you done? Not how much have you saved, but how much have you sacrificed? In the end, the question will be how much have you loved. How much have you served?”

This profound statement applies to all humanity, but it pertains most importantly to true Christians. God has called those in this era specifically to learn to develop a giving and serving mentality. In fact, the words each one will most desire to hear when finally standing before Christ during their judgment (2Cor. 5:10) will be these:

... 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. (Matthew 25:21).

Imagine standing before Christ’s magnificent, glorious throne, and surrounded by thousands of majestic angels and the twenty-four elders. Picture Christ looking approvingly into your eyes and saying: “Well done! You were truly a good and faithful servant.”

On the other hand, envision the tragedy of many who have been called, but who will not realize this hope. They will not hear the Savior pronounce these words because, while believing in God, they will not have fully known what it means to literally be His servant.

Do you honestly know what it means to be God’s faithful servant? Are you fully committed to seeking this

truth? It may be the single most important question each of us should ask ourselves in this life.

What if we believe we are God's faithful servants, but something unseen in our life may unknowingly be keeping us from this honor? What if we have merely accepted a general misunderstanding and have been wrong? What if our thinking has been affected by the society we live in, or our local church culture, and not the Word of God?

It is highly likely that many professing Christians have been misled because the primary focus in our modern culture is a preoccupation with the self. So often we are told to strive to be all we can be, and to experience our vast personal potential as human beings. This trend is even found in various religious books in which authors continually push this popular philosophy off on believers. For example, one such book is titled *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life*. Another is called *The Total Woman*. A few are labeled with such claims as *You Can Heal Your Life, Act Like a Lady and Live Like a Man*, or *Ways to Learn 48 Laws to Power*.

Such books may include some biblical points of truth, yet few speak about how to be a more humble, serving, faithful servant of Christ and humanity. These books may help a few individuals deal with their specific problems, but ultimately their assertions actually tend to undermine God Almighty's true goal for a Christian.

Society's continual focus on the self exerts an invisible, but profound, effect on us. Obsession with the self turns our focus away from our true calling, which is to prepare ourselves to become the Bride of Christ—His literal help mate (Isa. 62:5).

Only Our Duty

The truth is that in our age, self-centeredness may be the biggest problem Christians face. Because it is a form of self-deception, many have drifted into a belief that since they

tithe, attend church services, and keep God's holy days, they are good and faithful servants.

While these things are good and right, by themselves alone, they can mislead a believer into a conviction that these religious acts are all that is required. However, God's people need to understand that these observances by themselves do not qualify us as His faithful servants. Christ made this point clear when He stated:

And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'
" (Luke 17:7-10).

It is this wrong attitude that defines many in the Churches of God today. Some are performing our basic obligation, yet believing that this alone is sufficient to merit inclusion in the first resurrection.

Of course, doing our basic obligations is right and good, but the question we should ask is, are we really doing enough? Do we even grasp what is our most important duty? We need to question ourselves about whom it is we really serve the most. Is it Christ or is it our own needs, our ego, or our human nature? Hear these words of Christ:

Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up

his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels (Luke 9:23-26).

Baptism a Portrait

In our baptismal ceremony, we symbolically put our old self to death. We renounced our right to be our own master. We publicly declared that we accepted Christ as our Master, Lord, and King. But have we actually done this in our daily living? Is the person we once were really dead? Is the new person who came up out of the watery grave still fully dedicated to serving God rather than the self?

One way to know for certain is honestly answering the following questions: Is Christ in the many other aspects of our life beside our church activities? Are we controlling the direction of our thoughts? What about reigning in our ego and pride? Has our defense mechanism been brought under control? Do we give the best of ourselves in the work we perform on our job? How do we treat our family members? What is our general attitude like? How do we handle persecution? Do we control wrong desires, or do we savor them at times? What about exercising mercy and forgiving others? When it comes to entertainment, do we strive to watch movies Christ would watch? Do we listen to music He would listen to?

In the context of our daily lives, we should honestly ask ourselves, "To what degree are we driven by the physical pleasures of this life?" Have we worked to fully submit to Christ in the areas stated above? Are we sincerely seeking

God's will in all we think and do? We must understand! This is actually Christ's ultimate goal for each of us.

Christ is Our Master

Many of God's people have lost their understanding regarding this fact in our modern age of self-fulfillment. The truth is that Christ is our Husband to be, and we are to obey our Husband in everything. He is our Master, and we are His servants. As such, we cannot simply observe some of our Master's commands, ignore others, and continue to think we are pleasing Him.

Consider Christ's words in which He said that we are to call no man master (Mat. 23:10). Do we really understand that it is His desire that we recognize that He alone is to be our Master! For example, Jesus tells us we can't serve God and money (Luke 6:13). Neither can we serve both God and our ego. We can't serve God and the pulls of human nature. Yet, that is exactly what many of us do—and we often do so automatically, without realizing it.

History is rife with such examples. Eve wanted to be like God and decide for herself what was right or wrong. Cain wanted the approval that Abel received without imitating Abel's righteous behavior. Nimrod sought to be king over all civilization. Lot served his desire for the riches that living in the city would provide. Jeroboam changed the time of the feast days and set up calves to worship to prevent the people from going to God's feast in Jerusalem. King Saul served his need for the approval of the people rather than God's approval. Thinking Christ would set up the Kingdom in his time, Judas attempted to put Christ in a position in which he thought Jesus would be forced to fight the Roman armies. The ultimate example is the beast power. He will destroy others to serve his narcissistic need to rule the world.

When man's history is summed up, all these examples should make the right decision clear in our minds.

Who will we serve? Will it be our human nature or will Christ be our real Master?

Who Do We Work For?

As Christians, and students of the Bible, we have Christ's Spirit residing inside us. We have the mind of Christ within our conscience. That spiritual gift makes it possible for us to know right from wrong when it comes to ethical decisions. Therefore, we should understand that the answers to the questions and decisions we must make each day, often go deeper than what we can grasp on a physical level alone. We must use the Spirit of God in the daily decisions we make! If we desire to be God's servants, we are to do His will and not oppose Him by putting our desires first!

A true servant does not discount, or ignore, his or her master. Christ's true servants sincerely seek His will. Whatever the situation may be, whatever our personal needs, the good and faithful servant obeys their master.

Each day we are to be working for Christ, practicing each day toward being His servant. We are to be consistently preparing ourselves for the way we will live in God's Kingdom. A humorous story regarding obeying our employer makes this truth incredibly relevant. In his autobiography, John Galbraith wrote of his housekeeper:

“It had been a wearying day, and I asked my housekeeper, Emily to hold all telephone calls while I had a nap. Shortly thereafter the phone rang. Lyndon Johnson was calling from the White House. "Get me Ken Galbraith. This is Lyndon Johnson" (he said). "He is sleeping, Mr. President" (Emily responded). "He said not to disturb him." "Well, wake him up. I want to talk to him." "No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you." Galbraith said: "When I finally called the President back, he could scarcely control

himself. He said “tell that woman I want her here in the White House.”

Emily was an example of a faithful servant. The president actually wanted to hire her due to this one single trait. She did what she was told. In like manner, God’s faithful angels always do what they are told. They don’t argue. They don’t make justifications. They don’t use the excuse, “Well I’m really trying,” while glossing over any self-centered reasons for their failure, as some of us sometimes do.

What many do not fully grasp is the very purpose for our existence on this earth. It is primarily to provide a training ground for us to learn the importance of being God’s faithful servants. In fact, this world exists for the express purpose of us learning to overcome our self serving nature.

God is building an eternal servant family. Imagine such a family of millions of majestic God-like spirit beings, all living by the same code of behavior. Picture them all treating one another with great respect, all pleased to serve God and one another. That is God’s ultimate vision for humanity. And, if we want to be part of His great plan, there is one single thing we need to do. We must diligently practice being a faithful servant now, and by doing so, mold ourselves into what will ultimately be our part in God’s perfect vision.

Me A Servant?

For some today, the idea of being a servant is a turn-off. For many, images arise in their minds portraying the days when serfdom and slavery were abused. Such thinking is usually borne of the terrible mistreatment perpetrated in such cruel systems.

As a result, today few desire being a servant. Those tainted by such thoughts make the mistake of thinking that Christ would not want us to become His literal servants when in fact, the exact opposite is true. For example, the Apostle

Paul described himself as a “servant” of Jesus Christ before ever mentioning that he is was an Apostle (Rom. 1:1).

The word that God’s Apostle used in the verse above is the Greek term *doulos*, meaning literally “in subjection,” “subservient,” or “slave.” Too often we forget that we are to be like Paul. We are to conduct ourselves as servants of God. He is our Master, and we are to serve Him.

We wouldn’t rationally think of telling our boss we’ll do a certain job and then not do it. Yet, this happens more often than we think in our relationship with God. We promise God that we will repent, only to later forget our commitment and repeat the same sin again. While we know God’s will, we will sometimes bend the rules that we may fulfill our own desires.

Consider standing in Christ’s presence. In such a circumstance, we would never think of sinning. In fact, we would likely be trembling—shaking in our boots. But because we do not literally see Him, we don’t grasp how He reacts when we violate His way of life. Thus, we do not always perceive our own selfishness; neither do we take it as deeply serious when we neglect to govern ourselves by His Word.

The truth is that we should take these times far more seriously. If we desire to be in the first resurrection, we need to fully understand the relationship we are required to have with God. That relationship includes our role as His servants. Further, faithful servants do not make their own choices regarding what they will, or will not, do.

But—Doesn’t Scripture State that We Are Not Servants?

Two verses might mislead some when read out of context. At first, they may seem to describe our relationship with Christ in such a way that it appears we are not actually servants. For example, in one place Christ says that He does

not call us servants, but His friends. However, notice the full context of His statement:

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 (John 15:15).

It is an enormous honor to be part of God's intimate circle of those who are called now. However, this honor also carries an enormous requirement. Being the friend of God has one single—vital—unbreakable—condition. As the Savior's words confirm:

You are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you (John 15:14).

Christ makes it clear that we must specifically live by those things He commands us if we are to be His friends. It must start now. We can't put it off by thinking we are ok or that we can overcome later.

There is yet another verse that, at first, seems to say we are not God's servants. There Paul proclaims that we are no less than God's sons and daughters:

Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ (Galatians 4:7).

Our calling is to attain the highest possible level in God's realm. We are no less than His children, but this does not mean we are no longer His servants. As Paul prefaced this statement, He also reminded believers of this enormous and fundamental spiritual truth:

Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, (Galatians. 4:1).

The point is that as the children of God we are still growing—still in the learning stage of development. Therefore, we are no different than a servant. As children, we are growing spiritually—learning to be servants because that is exactly what Christ and the Father are. They are servants, and we are to grow up, ultimately becoming as they are.

Taking Responsibility

For all of us, it must be a matter of what is called our “basin philosophy.” When Pilate he had the opportunity to acquit Christ, he called for a basin in which he washed his hands. By this he signaled that he washed himself of any guilt in this matter. Pilate refused to take personal responsibility when doing wrong. Are there times when we don’t take responsibility for our behavior? Do we push off the guilt by sometimes mentally washing our hands of our accountability? Do we blame others or our circumstances, but never ourselves? If so, we are not acting as God’s servants.

Jesus Christ also had a basin philosophy. He too took a basin, but used it to humble Himself. Removing His robe and kneeling down, He washed the disciple’s feet as if He were their Servant. Later the Apostle John was inspired to record the incident for our benefit, writing:

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you

should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him (John 13:12-16).

Christ's words should seem self-evident. Of course, a servant is not greater than his lord. Yet our thoughts and actions sometimes make it appear as if we actually consider ourselves more important than God. Consider times when, although we know Christ does not approve of some of our behaviors, we find ourselves doing them anyway. At such times we should realize that we are not humbling ourselves before Him, and not behaving as His servants. In effect, we have become servants of the self.

What Do We Seek?

We are now the children of God. As children, we are in a training period, learning to live holy lives (1 Pet. 1:16). Once born into the kingdom, we will become like God. Many think this means they will become magnificent, glorious, and powerful. While true, when the Scriptures speak of being like God, they refer less to His power and glory and more to who, and what, He is. Only then will we finally and fully understand what it is to be a servant. As Paul explained, we will grasp what motivated Christ, and later, His apostles:

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to...death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:4-8).

No one naturally desires to be a servant. Our human nature prefers that others serve us. It motivates us to desire to become more important in the eyes of others.

For example, either wanting this for her sons, or they using her to attain their own desires, the mother of James and John asked that they be second in command under Christ's authority in the Kingdom. As Matthew recorded:

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared by My Father (Matthew 20:20-23).

At this point, the attitude of the other disciples was not much different. They also cared about their position in God's Kingdom, and when they heard of this, they were deeply offended:

And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren (Matthew 20:24).

Why would these other disciples take offense? Why would they be moved with indignation against anyone unless they also had hopes of receiving such a position themselves? Hearing this conflict, Christ promptly corrected the disciple's attitude with these words:

But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"(Matthew 20:25-28).

The mother of James and John was simply following the old worn out pattern of humanity. The goal in this world has, and still is, gaining position, wealth and prestige for the self. But those who pursue this as their goal become subject to its consequences, ultimately either causing or suffering, conflict, misery, and pain.

We should remember that, in their own way, almost everyone is, seeking the same thing. As a result, many others would be happy to use us to get ahead because they are looking out for their own welfare, not ours.

Tragically, this is what we have come to in the last days and final era of God's Church. He tells us "woe to the shepherds that do feed themselves" (Ezek. 34:2). Unfortunately, through the ages, and even in our time, those calling themselves "God's servants" have often been motivated to primarily look out for their own interests. Christ prophesied that this would happen, saying:

Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the unbelievers (Luke 12:43-46).

Considerable time has passed without Christ's return, and some have fallen back into these very self-centered habits. As a result, we now have some ministers who serve the church they are paid to work for, counsel brethren when they can, but no longer wholeheartedly put serving God first and foremost above all else.

As an aside, the individuals in the verse above are not necessarily physically beating others. The word can mean to attack or offend one another. Some are ruling harshly over their congregation and putting out members who might disagree with them on a point. Some do eat and drink to the point of dulling their conscience. Such servants of God have become influenced by the world, and without realizing it, they too have become servants of the self.

To sincerely be faithful servants of God, we can't be primarily seeking to serve ourselves. Yet, we sometimes develop wrong habits without even thinking about it. The tendency of the defense mechanism that resides in every human is to believe that those things we do wrong are not really all that bad. Of course it's our tendency to think this way because it's "we" who do them.

As we continue to work toward knowing God and His way, we can see this truth more clearly. We are called

to leave such self oriented behavior behind, to no longer be servants of sin.

However, if we don't correct those wrongs that we have allowed in the past, we will find ourselves repeating them. They will ultimately become habitual, and we will no longer be shocked or alarmed when they occur.

Servants of Sin

Without a daily effort to manage our behavior, wrong habits can grow like weeds taking over a garden. In time, they can eventually become permanent habits, and without realizing it, we become the servants of sin. As Jesus said:

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* You say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin (John 8:31-34).

This truth is absolutely vital to our Christian calling. Paul also reiterates this vital reality in his writings, in which he states:

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? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18).

Purchased by Christ

We were all once servants of sin—prisoners of our own making. Christ paid the ultimate price to purchase our freedom from the penalty of that sin. A story illustrates what it was that the Savior did for us:

In the days before the Civil War in a city in the south, a crowd gathered to watch the proceeding of a public auction. In the crowd was the meanest, cruelest, most hateful man around. In the crowd there was also another man who stood out for his dignity, genteel mannerisms and soft-spoken tone. Both men, along with the crowd wait for the auction to begin. The auctioneer stepped to the podium and began rattling his words as the first item to be sold was brought to the auction block. On the block was a beautiful young black girl, about 20 years of age. Her dress was old and torn, but remarkably clean. She was obviously filled with anxiety and fear as the bidding began. From the outset the more obnoxious man had his lecherous eyes set on this lovely, innocent, young lady. She cringed in fear as he opened the bidding. When the kind gentleman saw her fear, he too placed a bid. Soon only these two men were involved in the bidding as the price of the girl rose higher and higher. Finally, the evil man bowed out of the bidding when the price was too high. The gentleman then paid the price, was handed the Bill-of-Sale, and turned to leave. The young girl followed her new master. He turned and asked, “Where are you going?” “Why, I’m going with you,” she responded; “You bought me and I belong to you.” “Oh! You misunderstood,” the man said, “I didn’t buy you to make you my slave, I bought you to set you free.” He took the Bill-of-Sale and wrote across it—FREE!—signed his name, and gave it to the girl. He said you are free and can go wherever

you like. To which she answered Sir, I don't know who you are, but if I am free to do as I please, nothing would please me more than to go with you and serve you till the day I die." And that day she went home with him, not as his slave but as his willing servant.

This scenario applies to every one of us. We were the servants (the slaves) of sin and owed God a debt of eternal death as a result. Christ paid that debt for us, purchasing us with His blood. We can now freely choose to forever be Christ's servant instead.

Therefore, the following question demands our sincere answer. Do we fully understand what it means to be Christ's servant? Do we understand that we are to do as He commands under any, and all, conditions? It really is that simple—the servant does what his master orders, and we became both a Christian and His servant by accepting Christ as our Lord and Master.

When we were baptized, we agreed to the following profound commitment. We recognized it as a blood covenant. Christ forever became "our Lord, our Master, and our soon coming King."

This statement means that He owns us and everything we possess. We simply become custodians of all that is His. It also means that all our decisions are to be based on His will and His law. We are to look to Him and His way of life for every decision we make, and to keep doing that until His return—and forever after! A psalm describes the mindset we are to have and cherish:

A Song of Ascents. Unto You I lift up my eyes,
O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the
eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their
masters, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of
her mistress, So our eyes *look* to the LORD our

God, Until He has mercy on us. Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled With the scorn of those who are at ease, With the contempt of the proud (Psalm 123:1-4).

Now is the time to sincerely ask ourselves, whose servant are we—God’s or ourselves? It is time to ask what Christ’s will is regarding how we live in all aspects of our life. It is time to stare this life-changing truth right in the eye!

The Other God

Being a faithful servant of Christ means we must disallow the authority of the other god—the self! At the center of every sin, there exists this one single ingredient. It is our human pride, our ego, our desire to feel important. It is this that leads us to put ourselves and our desires first.

Because of this penchant for serving self, some will not hear Christ say, “Thou good and faithful servant.” Such individuals will likely be those who have not questioned whether their decisions and actions are aligned with God’s Spirit and His Word. Christ abhors this kind of “hit and miss” part-time charade, and therefore, He provides us with the following admonition, saying:

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your

nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent..."He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:15-19, 22).

This warning is individual, not organizational. Those afflicted with this Laodicean attitude do not fully understand that true humility actually lifts us up. It makes us strive to be better people. On the other hand, thinking we don't need any change is simply foolish. Such thoughts might feel good to the ego, but eventually they will resist or ultimately even put an end to our Christian growth.

A proud heart often leads us to do what we carnally wish—those things that may seem right in our own eyes. It does not seek to humble itself before God. It can motivate us to hold back from seeing flaws in ourselves, and thus preventing us from the realization that what we desire, or what we are doing, is disobedience. It can leave us feeling self-justified and satisfied as we go about our daily business.

This may well be the chief malady among many in the end-time Church. When we neglect our obligation to be God's servant, we tend to worship the other god, the self, and without realizing this it can, and will, certainly end in catastrophe. Those going along with the Laodicean church era's attitude may tragically be forced to learn how to be God's servant during the great tribulation.

On the other hand, to be accepted as a part of those who will be in God's Kingdom, we absolutely must become God's servant. The Lord must be able to have complete trust in us. He must be able to say as He did of Abraham, "Now I know." He must be able to trust us to do His will.

The Most Necessary Trait

A servant reflects those who are not at their own disposal. We must realize that we are our Master's property. Only this way, can we live to serve our Master. This trait does not just involve our outward behavior alone. Even our thoughts are to be subject to His will. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2Corinthians 10:3-5).

Submitting ourselves to God, and His will in our life, is the means to achieve true freedom (Rom. 6:18). Andrew Murray's well-stated words eloquently mirror Paul's concept of the freedom one can enjoy as God's servant. He writes:

“The humble man feels no jealousy or envy. He can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before him. He can bear to hear others praised while he is forgotten because . . . he has received the spirit of Jesus, who pleased not Himself, and who sought not His own honor. Therefore, in putting on the Lord "Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about our self one way or the other at all.”

For anyone who desires to be God's servant, it starts right here. True humility is the basic and vital key to becoming a good and faithful servant. We must refuse to put

ourselves first. It must be a major factor in our character if we want to become like Christ. In God's eyes, humility must come first (Prov. 18:12). Remember that it was pride that ultimately became the spiritual cancer that destroyed one of God's great created beings—Lucifer. As the prophet Isaiah wrote of his pride:

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12-14).

What was it that triggered Lucifer to desire, and ultimately attempt, to take-over God's throne? Simply stated, he did not desire the heart of God. Instead, he craved God's power and control. Under inspiration, the prophet Ezekiel wrote a profound and revealing verse about this angel's mind set, saying:

"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you" (Ezekiel 28:17).

God resists the proud, but He promises to lift up the humble. The Almighty will ultimately give the humble beauty, honor, and enormous power in the first resurrection. (James 4:6). However, we must understand the following vital truth. As Christians, we must first acquire the trait of

humility before God will fulfill His promise of glory to us. As the Apostle Peter had written:

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1Peter 5:6-7).

Servants Do the Master’s Work

In this life, there is always a work to be done for Christ. Do we clearly see the work that our Master has given us? A story told by Arulselvam Rayappan illustrates the point, stating:

“One day the great philosopher Diogenes was noticed as he stood on a street corner, laughing like a mad man. Why are you laughing a passer-by asked? Diogenes stopped his laughter to answer and said: “do you see that stone in the middle of the street he asked? More than ten persons have already stumbled on it. In every case they looked at the stone and cursed it, but not a single soul thought to remove it in order to prevent someone else’s stumbling.”

Some keep blindly stumbling over the work Christ gave us. His statement reveals that He works and His Father works (Joh. 5:17). As far back as the Scriptures take us—we see Christ working. He designed and made awesome creations before He ever began His earthly ministry. The Apostle Paul wrote of this, saying:

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16).

Jesus the Christ created the vast universe and sent it spiraling millions of miles an hour into space. He created the beautiful oceans, mountains, and fields. Finally, He created mankind. Even now He is working to create a place in New Jerusalem for His saints (John 14:2).

Christ did a work through Enoch's preaching. Noah served Him, spending one hundred and twenty years of his life building an ark to save humanity from extinction. From his time to our present day, God has called men and women to do His work on earth. Abraham, Moses, and the various judges, prophets, and priests all had their time in which they worked for the Almighty God.

Finally, our creator came to our planet with a specific work to do. His entire life was motivated by this enormous responsibility. He divested Himself of His supernatural power and lived a perfect life as an example for mankind. He then gave His life for the humans He had created and whom He loved.

Having completed this work, which He had planned before the creation of the world, Jesus said the following to His Father in heaven:

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do (John 17:4).

This statement gives us enormous insight into the mind of Christ, and what was uppermost in His thoughts. It was the work that had always motivated Him. An example of this occurred when His disciples asked if there was food to eat. John recorded the incident, stating:

Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him *anything* to eat?" Jesus said

to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work (John 4:33-34).

The need to eat was less important to Christ than doing the work God the Father had commissioned Him to do. Later, Christ demonstrated the importance He placed on His work as He hung on the stake.

With His life fading away and experiencing the searing pain and agony that He endured, Christ uttered His last words: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Christ had completed his earthly work, leaving us an example of what weighed on His mind throughout all He had suffered. He had devoted His entire life to preparing for, and preaching, the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The First Work—Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom

An insightful instance of human ego occurred earlier, on a day when Christ found the disciples arguing over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Hearing this, He spoke to them about the importance of faithfully doing God's work. Luke recorded the incident, writing:

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so *among* you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who *is* greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? *Is* it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves (Luke 22:24-27).

After Christ's death and resurrection, that new work began, and it has continued down through the ages to this very day. The church was commanded to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. If we want to be approved in God's eyes, we need to serve Him by continuing to do that same work. Christ returned to heaven and to the Father, but He left His followers with this assignment. As Mark wrote:

It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch (Mark 13:34).

These instructions were given to every era and every age. We were all to reflect His example of humility and preach the gospel message:

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Resistance and persecution came, but Christ's faithful servants continued to do the work they were given. As Luke recorded one such event:

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:21-23).

The vital work Christ's disciples were given to do, throughout the ages, was two-fold. First, His ministers were to preach the good news of the coming Kingdom of God to the world. This work was so important that the Kingdom will not be set up until the job is complete. Christ made this clear, stating:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

The larger groups in God's church are doing just that through television, radio, the internet, and printed media. But what about those who do not attend with those groups because they are uncomfortable with their politics or some of their doctrines? What about the small home churches that lack funds or equipment? Does Christ expect them to preach the gospel?

The answer is yes! All of us should energetically be doing so. Many spend time on Facebook. Have we considered putting our bible studies or other church resources on that medium? There we can write about God's law and His coming Kingdom. We can learn as we teach one another. Some small groups have a website where they put Bible studies, sermons, and booklets.

It is also possible to preach to the public in local areas for little or no cost through public access television. Many small groups use this medium. For those who do not feel qualified to preach, pre-recorded programs can be sent to you or directly to the station. In these ways, many are doing everything they can to spread the Gospel, as Christ commanded, saying:

You will not have gone through [all] the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:23).

Christ is our master and we are His servants. As such, will we carry out His command? Will we preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the best of our ability, or has God's Church simply degenerated to that of becoming a social club?

A Second Work

Humans are weak—even as converted Christians. We need encouragement in our walk with God. We need to be taught the ways of God repeatedly. So, God has sent individuals with qualities to do this work. As Paul wrote:

For "WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:13-17).

The second part of Christ's commission is given to the elders of His Church. It is to feed His sheep. They are to teach the value of our calling, the importance of it, and the true doctrines to the members. Their job is to encourage God's people to continue in this enormous hope, to produce

evidence of their faith by living by it—rejecting human nature, its ego, vanity, and pulls of the flesh.

Christ made this clear in a unique meeting with Peter. Thinking that the work of preaching the Gospel was over, the disciples had returned to fishing. This particular day, they had fished all night but caught nothing. Suddenly, Jesus appeared on the shore as a stranger and told the disciples to cast their net on the other side of the boat. Following His advice, they caught so many fish they could barely pull the net in.

As the disciples clamored to get the fish to shore, Jesus cooked breakfast for them. But, Christ had come for a much greater reason than just fellowship and food. He had come to talk to one of the leading disciples.

The Scriptures make it clear that Christ came to speak specifically to Peter who had denied Him three times. He came to make certain Peter would not abandon Him a fourth time. The Apostle John recorded this occasion, writing:

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep (John 21:15-17).

Christ repeated Peter's need to love Him three times. In each case, He exhorted Peter to feed His sheep. The first

two times, Christ used the Greek term *agapaō*, meaning, “Do you love me deeply, as you would a brother?” Apparently not wanting to go that far at this point, Peter responded, “You know that I (*phileō*) You” [that is to have affection as a dear friend].

The Savior continued to make His mission clear, asking Peter a third time if he loved Him. This time, however, Peter admitted that he did *agapaō* Christ. Once more, Jesus said to feed His adult sheep.

Peter was emotionally rattled when Christ asked him if he loved Him as a brother. He was deeply saddened, but the message was clear. He knew Christ was making reference to his three denials of Him. It shook him emotionally, but he answered “yes.” Peter did, in fact, love Christ that much.

Yet this was just the first part of Jesus' purpose. The second was manifest in His answer back to Peter each time to feed His sheep. This commission to Peter extends to us today. The church is to teach, serve, and help those the Father called.

Teaching the Truth to God's People

Tragically, as time went on the Apostle Paul was forced to deal with false teaching infiltrating the church. His reaction was to defend the truth against Gnostic teachers instigating heresy among God's people and taking advantage of them. As the Apostle writes to the Christians in Rome:

For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:18).

Shocking as it may sound, this occurs in many of God's Churches today. Some preach false doctrines for their

own, or a corporate church's benefit. Most obvious is the example of teaching that it would be wrong to work at a restaurant on the Sabbath, yet advocating that Christians celebrate God's holy day by dining at a restaurant. Without realizing it, these organizations mislead their members into violating God's Sabbaths. They do this by ignoring or dismissing the God-breathed words recorded by His prophets that we are not to cook, buy, sell, or cause others to work on God's holy Sabbath day (Neh. 10:31; 13:15-22; Deut. 5:14).

Many organizations also mistakenly teach that members are to give Holy Day offerings seven times a year. Yet, Deuteronomy 16:16 clearly states that we are only to give offerings of our second tithe three specific times a year, and never—on the Day of Atonement!

Such false teachings are obviously incompatible with being a true and faithful servant of God. They are poor or faulty judgments by men who allow their position in a corporation to infect, and ultimately dictate, their doctrinal position. The truth is that the ministry should be willing to make personal sacrifices to teach the truth to God's people. They are to follow the Apostle Paul's example:

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may

present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily (Colossians 1:24-29).

A Third Work

Preaching the gospel to the world is a vital commission. Continuing to teach and encourage the true way to attain God's Kingdom to His people is also an absolute requirement for us to be accounted as faithful servants.

However, these are not the only requirements. To be Christ's good and faithful servants, we are to help, and unselfishly, serve others any way we can. The truth is that historically, every society has risen, and ultimately fallen because of this one single failure. They have not served others, but leaders and citizens alike, became corrupt by serving themselves. Now, in our unstable modern world, it has literally become fashionable and even expected that people should primarily serve themselves.

However, being a good and faithful servant also requires that we serve and help other people for their benefit—not our own. It requires an entire change in our thoughts and the way we practice our lives.

For example, humanly, we tend to pride ourselves in the good works we might do. As growing Christians, however, our attitude becomes far more important than the act itself. We should be grateful when we can help others.

We are all naturally self-centered beings. We look at the world from our own perspective, and make judgments based on past experience in which we consider how decisions worked out for our best interests. Looking to the needs of others is simply not natural to us, however it is something a good and faithful servant is expected to do.

God's servants also focus on their own responsibilities toward God. They are not concerned about

the abilities or accomplishments of others. Luke recorded a time in which Christ felt it necessary to correct His disciples for this, stating:

Now John answered and said, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us. But Jesus said to him, Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is on our side (Luke 9:49-50).

Following Christ's resurrection and ascension, Luke wrote that Paul and Barnabas never attempted to discourage others from preaching the Gospel:

Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also (Acts 15:35).

True servants of God do not compare themselves with others. We are not to be in competition with others. Such competition did occur among members in the Corinthian church, however, and Paul used their example as a teaching tool for us. In his letter, he explained that they should not worry about what others were doing. As Paul wrote:

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ *from another*? And what

do you have that you did not receive?
(1Corinthians 4:5-7)

Tragically, such rivalry and criticism among leaders and members in the Church of God has caused numerous divisions within, and the creation of separate organizations without. Competition to gain members has become a main focus of many church corporations. Members who once found considerable joy in being a servant to Christ lost their “first love” and were drawn away by trivial or false doctrines or vain prophecies.

Are God’s Servants Only Ministers?

Certainly, the ministers have an anointed call to serve God and His people. But, God’s servants are not just the ordained ministry. We are all to be servants of one another. In fact, the purpose of the church is to fulfill this very mission. The church exists that we might interact with one another. This is so that we learn to love one another, to help and protect each other, and learn to forgive one another. Notice Paul’s admonition:

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by

which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The ministry clearly has its service, but the brethren also have their service to perform. The ministers and lay members have been given different offices, talents, and abilities. We are to overcome self-centered human nature, and use the gifts God has given us to gratefully and faithfully serve others. Our calling is to learn to be servants of one another. A story illustrates the point.

There was once a woman who had become very ill. She was lying in her sick bed in absolute misery. In the sink were stacked piles of dirty dishes. A huge basket of clothes in need of ironing sat nearby. Two dirty children were fighting with each other in the corner. The cat was licking up the milk the children had spilled, and a smiling church woman stood in the doorway as she was leaving, and she said, good to see you Florence. Don't forget she said if there is anything I can do to help, don't hesitate to let me know. (*Biblical Ethics and Social Change* – P. 38)

In this humorous but biting story, the woman patted herself on the back for her good intentions. But good intentions have little meaning unless acted upon. Often it does not take much to make a difference in another's life.

A family in Inglewood, California is an example the author will always remember. The husband experienced a job loss and became poor for a time. A sack of food would sometimes appear on their porch. An envelope with a small gift of money would be in their mailbox.

Another case involved a woman whose bout with cancer was published in the church newspaper. She received

so many cards they covered her bedroom walls. She never stopped talking about those cards as she recovered. They meant so much to her that they were not taken down by her family until long after her death.

We all have an unlimited number of ways to help if we desire to serve others. Brethren have been taken in when they had nowhere to go. They have been visited in the hospitals, loved, and helped as if they were family—and the truth is that they are family. We are all God's Family. Widows have spent their time in prayer for others in need. Many have sent cards of encouragement.

These things should not, and are not, out of the ordinary. Such acts are what God expects of us if we are to become faithful servants. James wrote that:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

This service to one another is so important that Jesus Christ often took the time to explain the value of serving others. Listen closely to His words:

"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:40-42).

This truth can produce great blessings for those who hear it. Whether or not we attain the first resurrection, a final resurrection for judgment awaits all humanity. As the Savior explained; service to others will ultimately play a large role in His decision at that time:

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25:31-36).

It Isn't Really Yours

Giving to others always involves some form of distraction, inconvenience, or sacrifice. Yet we must realize that not one single thing we have is ours—not our food, home, car, money, or even our time. Nothing we have now will exist in the future. All things belong to Christ. He created everything, including us. Yes, He owns us. He created us, and then He bought and paid for each one of us with His own life.

All we are going to take to the grave is our track record of behavior and the hope of the resurrection. A necessary positive record can only be accumulated by being a good and faithful servant to Christ.

According to His words in the verse above, our readiness to help others in need plays an enormous role in His judgment. The point Christ is making is that when we serve others, we serve Him. And when we refuse, we are refusing to serve Him. There is so very much to gain by serving others, but too often we don't understand this principle fully, and don't give of ourselves freely. As Christ explained:

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me' (Matthew 25:37-40).

Christ is saying that He takes it personally when we serve others. He also takes it personally when we do not. Then, Christ warns those who are self-serving, saying:

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you

did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me' (Matthew 25:41-45).

Jesus said we are to always be willing to help others as we can, and even look for ways to do so. This too is a major part of the personal work we are called to do by our Master. Service toward others is such an important part of Christianity that James called it pure religion:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27; also see Micah 6:8).

We who call ourselves Christians need to understand this basic truth. The Almighty God has called us for the very purpose of learning to serve others. As we serve one another, we are serving our Master. Through this process, bit by bit, we are developing the heart and mind of our Creator.

We must also not forget that, if we are included in the first resurrection, serving will be our job in the Kingdom. As God is serving us right now (John 14:1-3), we will serve those in the cities He entrusts to us in His Kingdom. If we faithfully abide by His example now, we will teach this way of life to the rest of God's children during their time.

The Character of Christ

There remains one final and vital aspect of the work that we are commanded to do. We are to work sincerely to overcome our human nature and develop the image of the character of Christ.

Most people go about their lives serving themselves. They become servants to their pride, their appetites, their fleshly needs, their money, and possessions. However, this is no longer to be our way of life. If we drift through life the same way those in this world do, in the end, we will

find that we have lived our lives apart from God and wasted our time in human vanity. For these it will be a tragic and fearful thing to hear Christ say to us, “Verily I say unto you, I know you not” (Mat. 25:12).

To attain eternal life, and the blessings accorded to those who attain the first resurrection, we must overcome the self-centered way of life (Rev. 21:7). Christians are charged with the task of turning the self around. We must prepare for the Kingdom by learning to genuinely love other humans, and enjoy helping them to live richer, cleaner, more rewarding lives. A quote often attributed to Albert Einstein makes this point:

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is.

This statement shouts out a remarkable truth. The deeper one looks into our world, the more one sees the miracle it is. Sadly, few look to see this miracle. For this reason Christ came to us in the form of a human. He came to this earth to show us by example how God lives, as a pattern of exactly how God wants us to live.

Tragically, the vast majority today do not understand the miracle of life or its purpose. Most are seeking their fulfillment in physical ways. The spirit now influencing the human race is one of serving the self at the expense of others (Mat. 4:8-9; 2Cor. 4:4). Such self-centered ways may seem veiled by a mask appearing as sophistication today. However, the Scriptures condemned this same culture in Isaiah’s time, and the portrait displayed by those during his time appears very much like ours today. As God’s prophet wrote:

Yes, *they are* greedy dogs *Which* never have enough. And they *are* shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every

one for his own gain, From his *own* territory.
"Come," *one says*, "I will bring wine, And we will
fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; Tomorrow
will be as today, *And* much more
abundant" (Isaiah 56:11-12).

Christ agonized over the corruption that had developed among His people and the suffering it ultimately caused. We can clearly see His pain upon one occasion, while He was human on earth. Jesus looked over Jerusalem—and literally cried as He witnessed the people's suffering, alienation, fears, and loneliness.

Theirs was a result of a lack of real righteous character either in religion or their everyday business. Christ also lived among these people knowing their tragic end that would come in 70 A.D:

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, (Luke 19:41-43).

Unfortunately, people have not changed throughout the ages. We have become highly advanced technologically, but have degenerated spiritually. The way people were living in Christ's time led to enslavement and ultimate destruction. Tragically, we are headed down the same old, time worn path. As The Herald News states:

The decline of community; the rise of individualism; consumerism; falling values; family breakdown; youth crime; drugs and alcohol abuse;

poverty; immigration and racism; and crime. These, according to an influential think tank, are the 10 modern social evils facing...society (http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12767733.Our_10_modern_evils/ret 8/7/17)

Notice how this author's evaluation portrays both today's modern western society and Paul's prophecy:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2Timothy 3:1-5).

Christ came to save us from such a corrupt way of life and to teach us the righteous way to live—the way of give instead of get. If we can hear it, He is teaching us how to become a faithful servant of God. As He said:

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly (John 10:10).

As Christ's servants, are we living the life Christ came to give us? Are we practicing being servants to God and man? Do we start each day to do the work our Master has commanded us? In that context, J.K. Laney made an interesting point in his book, *Marching Orders*:

The great violinist, Niccolo Paganini willed his marvelous violin to the city of Genoa on condition

that it must never be played. The wood of such an instrument, while used and handled, wears only slightly, but set aside, it begins to decay. Paganini's lovely violin has today become worm-eaten and useless except as a relic (*Marching Orders*, J. K. Laney, p. 34)

This analogy applies to each of us who seeks the Kingdom of God. If we are not consistently used by God, we will only become weaker and less useful to Him. But if we are used by him, our spiritual growth will make us more useful to Him and more personally fulfilled.

One woman confided that, as she first opens her eyes in the morning, she asks God, "What can I do for YOU today?" This lady had found the most wonderful way to begin each day! We were created for this very purpose—to be put to use by God each day.

If it is our desire, God's Holy Spirit will motivate us to practice His way daily. However, we must allow it to direct us within His path of thinking. As the psalmist wrote:

I am Your servant; Give me understanding, That I may know Your testimonies (Psalm. 119:125).

Still, some confused service to God with service toward self. For example, some may serve their superiors, thinking they are practicing service to God. However, this can easily begin to tip slightly toward gaining the favor of others, slip further into serving in order to be seen by others, and ultimately done for our advantage. A raise in salary, position, or status is often attractive bait, but it is bait we must not take.

There is no question that humanly, we want others to see and value our work. We naturally want to be rewarded for it now, but this is not being a faithful servant.

An old story makes the point about what is inside and what is shown outwardly:

“There’s an ancient oriental legend that tells the story of a jeweler who found the perfect pearl. The pearl was so beautiful that the merchant wanted to place the pearl in the proper setting. So he conceived the idea of building a special box of the finest woods to contain the pearl. He sought these woods and had them brought to him, and they were polished to a high brilliance. He then reinforced the corners of this box with elegant brass hinges and added a blue velvet interior. Then jewels were embedded in the outside. As a final step, he scented that blue velvet with perfume, then placed in that setting this precious pearl. The pearl was placed on display and people came from miles around to see this perfect pearl. But as people walked past (it), they all seemed to comment about the beauty and workmanship of the box. The pearl was barely even noticed.” (<http://successify.net/2012/09/26/the-parable-of-the-perfect-pearl/ret> 8/7/2017)

We frequently find ourselves concerned about how we appear to others, yet our outside person should be a reflection of the Spirit of God inside us! We have found a pearl of great price hidden in our heart and mind. As Christ once said:

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:45-46)

Christ compares seeking the Kingdom to finding a pearl of enormous value. Is it possible the Savior was thinking

of the enormous Pearl Gates on the walls of the New Jerusalem when He spoke these words? Attaining access through those gates is of more value than anything on earth.

Because the hope of the Kingdom is inside us, we know and believe that God's Spirit is there to motivate us to seek the pearl gates in the New Jerusalem. Still, our human ego and pride are always at work. This world and its values can easily take us off track. Our desire for God and His Kingdom in us, can become infected by human nature, so that we begin to care about how we appear to others more than God. The truth is that many religious people are guilty of this.

The ancient Pharisees were noted for primarily being motivated by how they were viewed by others. They would pray in public to be seen, blow a trumpet when they made an offering, disfigure their faces when they fasted, and wear large phylacteries on their forehead (Mat.23:5).

Their example is something we should never repeat. Instead we should strive inwardly to seek Christ's approval above all else, whether in church meetings, out in public, or on our job. The Apostle Paul frankly explains our rule that we are to live by, stating:

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:22-24).

Using the Holy Spirit

Christ was the perfect example. Our glorious and majestic Creator was not looking to appear more important or greater than others. He was a true servant who was never

self-serving. If we have any aspiration, it should be to seek, and keep on seeking His Kingdom, the Family of God, and His righteousness (Mat. 6:33). We pray and study to learn of Him, to develop an intimate relationship with Him, to practice living as He lived, and to overcome our human self-centered nature. As stated in the Proverbs:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6)

This is the reason we have God's written Word, His ministry, and His Holy Spirit. It is this gift that is needed to accomplish Christ's ultimate work in us. As Paul writes:

For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. For "WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD THAT HE MAY INSTRUCT HIM?" But we have the mind of Christ (1Corinthians 2:11-16).

This is a magnificent truth! Further, it is a primary key to developing the righteousness of Christ (Mat. 6:33).

God's Holy Spirit resides within us. It provides the Christian with the means to be certain regarding right from wrong (Mat. 16:13-15). It leads us in the way we are to live. Thus, each believer is to use God's Spirit to grow in developing the mind of God. It is for this very purpose God has given this miraculous gift to us—it is to be our guide. As John writes:

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1John 4:6)

By God's Spirit we can know truth from error. When confronted with questions regarding how to act, or what to say, we can seek the Spirit residing in our conscience to give us direction. By practicing this each day, we reflect our respect and admiration for our Master. We show that we believe His thoughts and values are greater than ours, and are acting on our desire to imitate Him. It is striving to live by His message of love, and growing in the fruits of His Spirit that leads to becoming more like Christ. Every day we should work at this goal as part our personal service to our Master.

What if We Don't?

We have seen that Christ is literally our Master and King. He rules in a depth of love that humans cannot fathom. Further, we see this world, its violence, abuse, and greed. We see the self-serving, and it should jar us into spiritual reality giving us a deep desire to accomplish the work our Master has given us. That job is to literally be a good and faithful servant who will be invited to God's Kingdom and part of the marriage supper. Thus, simply professing allegiance to our Savior is not enough. Our promises are worthless if we do not live by what He taught. A proverb makes this clear:

A servant will not be corrected by mere words; For though he understands, he will not respond (Proverbs 29:19).

This verse is saying something every servant of God must understand. It is speaking of a servant who will not be corrected by words. He will not answer (He will not respond by doing what he has been commanded), even if he does understand what the master's words mean. By implication the verse is telling readers that in such a case, punishment will be required.

It is obvious to all that the world is unstable right now. The nations are saber rattling. Immigrants from Islamic Middle East nations are pushing at Europe, causing terror attacks and in many cases, raping women. Citizens of the Western world, like the United States, are witnessing more crime, violence, and corruption in our corporations, government agencies, and in our streets.

When we view our modern world, it has the look described in the Bible as the end-time. In that context, God's people are also keenly aware that a terrible time of punishment is destined to come upon the whole world. The Scriptures speak of a terrible time of tribulation to come.

On the one hand, punishment is coming for those who are like the servant in Proverb 29. They hear their master's words but do not respond. The point is that, as this terrible time of trouble approaches, we who can hear our Master, should both, listen, and respond to Christ's Words. A window of opportunity is still open for us to take action and experience protection and escape the harsh correction of the great tribulation.

Let us seek to be the servants God called us to be. He promises not to put more than we can bear on us (1Cor. 10:13). So let's put real effort into seeking this goal—to be

His good and faithful servants. Seek His mind in our daily prayers, our actions, and in our personal relationship with our Master. Then all that is left for us is to keep going.

A Never Ending Work

As the firstfruits of God's plan of Salvation, we, along with the prophets of old, are sojourners on a magnificent quest. We are seeking a destination that no man has ever attained except Christ. Once resurrected, we will continue forever to do the Father's work. In that context, the following story reflects a vital aspect of our journey:

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. According to Leon Jaroff in *Time* magazine, the satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph it and its moons, and beam data to earth about the planet's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, because up until then no satellite had gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target. But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past Jupiter in November 1973, the space probe was hurled at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system by the planet's immense gravity. At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune, at nearly three billion miles; Pluto, at almost four billion miles. By 1997, 25 years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun. And it's still going. Though now nearly 8 billion miles from the sun, the satellite keeps sending signals; some were received as recently as April 27, 2002. And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continues to beam back radio

signals to scientists on Earth. "Perhaps most remarkable," writes Jaroff, "is the fact that those signals emanate from an eight-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night-light, and take more than nine hours to reach Earth." "The Little Satellite That Could" was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of only three years. But it has kept going and going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny eight-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible. (preachingtoday.com/2002/july/ret/8/7/2017)

We who are the called are destined to perform a similar task. We may seem small and weak, but Christ will ultimately do more with us than we or any human ever imagined if we are good and faithful in doing His will.

God can work through us and empower us through His Spirit (Phil. 4:13). We can only be stopped if we quit or let down. Let's never do that. Let us never let up, but instead continue to broadcast God's message by preaching the gospel, feeding one another with inspiration and encouragement, helping one another when needed, and personally developing the character of Jesus Christ through His mind in us. Let our example to others be humility. Let us continue our course of overcoming human nature and growing in the Spirit of God to the very end.

The Good and Faithful Servant

*The disciple is not above his master: but every
one that is perfect shall be as his master.
Luke 6:40*