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So You Want to Be a Slave

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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So You Want to Be a Slave

I think it's time we stopped giving up our rights. You heard me correctly. I think it's time Christians stopped giving up their rights. We attend seminars, preach sermons, teach lessons, and in general devote a great deal of energy to trying to get Christians to give up their rights: the right to their money, the right to their time, the right to good health, the right to acceptance, the right to success. I've been guilty, too. I think we ought to stop.

It just doesn't make sense. The world has been after us for years to stop this foolishness. The world says we deserve those rights. On the other hand, Christian leaders are claiming it's our job to give up our rights. Who's right? I think they're both wrong. We don't deserve them, but they're not ours to give up. And the sooner we get that message, the sooner some of us will begin to live in the sheer victory that is ours as slaves of Jesus Christ. I have taught and written for years that we ought to "give up our rights". In one sense, it's true, but perhaps it's time to go one step deeper.

In reality, you can't give up your rights. If you get sick, for instance, and someone asks you to give up your right to good health, tell them, "No, I refuse." Why? Because it was never yours to give up. You are a bondsman of Jesus Christ. And as a slave, you do not possess the rights you claim to be so nobly surrendering. Can't you picture in your mind a servant going to his master, saying, "Lord, I'll clean up that field for you after all, I've given up my right to play golf this afternoon." He would reply, "You've given up what? You are my servant. You do not favor me by giving up what is not yours. You favor me by acknowledging that the only right you have is the right to please your master. Should He grant you any privileges, they are a gift."

Giving up rights is a pseudo form of pride. It says to God, "Here's a religious act of commitment I am willing to make because I'm so spiritual. I'll let you take away my car, or my health or my finances, provided that..." or "Here, Lord, is the

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title to my marriage, my children, etc.” Even Job knew better than that. He said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”¹ You don’t let God take anything, Beloved. You don’t let God test you because you are so spiritual. You don’t relinquish claim to possessions or success at given intervals, then take them back and expect rewards for giving them up again.

Every time you “give up your rights” you have robbed God. Before you can give them up, you have to steal them from Him. You’re a thief, not a hero. When you came to Christ, you were in a state of utter depravity. Maybe you didn’t realize it, but your sins had so separated you from God that the only right you had was the right to an eternity in hell separated from His holiness, separated from His righteousness, separated from His love. But He loved you. Oh, how He loved you. So He went to the slave market of sin and purchased you back from your master, Satan. He bought you. And what a price He paid. When He bought you, He rescued you. He snatched you out of the mire of sin and set you on a solid rock. He put a new song in your heart, and He promised you that when your term of service on this earth is done, you will be lifted into the heavenlies never again to be touched by the ravages of sin.

In the meantime, you are not your own. You have been bought with a price. And the terms of your purchase make you a slave by choice to a new Master, one who loves you, one who always has your best interest at heart. And it is not in your best interest for you to run your life. So He is going to do it for you.

In the truest sense, you have no rights. Got it? You have no rights. He owns you. He can do with you whatever He wants, whenever He wants, for however long He wants. When trial comes, it will not be up to you give up your rights to happiness so you can patiently endure as a hero whatever He has allowed to come your way. You insult Him when you do that. As His servant, you should awaken every day, acknowledge His total ownership of your life, and report for duty. If it’s a day of blessing and victories, praise Him. If it’s a day of storms and tribulation, praise Him. But don’t insult Him by giving Him the right to do what is already His right to do. Just quietly praise Him. He’s the Master. He knows what’s best.

¹ Job 1:21c (NJV)

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That's the Mind of Christ. That's the essence of humility, because it is the essence of servitude. It stops trying to bargain with the Master and just lets Him be the Master He is. What a relief. What a joy. What a gospel.

And it is that gospel that we are exploring in our study of the Mind of Christ. We are looking at Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and examining His example to determine how He in us will live in this hectic, frenzied, self-oriented world. It's not at all the way the world lives. In fact, as the world hurls itself headlong to its own destruction, the differences are going to become increasingly obvious. The church seems bent on tailoring the gospel to the generation we live in to such an extent that the world will feel comfortable. That's a Satanic substitute for the real thing. The "new gospel" touts self-awareness and self-consciousness and "self-image" as vital ingredients in self-discovery.

It isn't who you are that's important, Beloved, it's whose you are that matters. You are God's. You don't eat of the trees He forbids. Not because you wouldn't enjoy it, but because God would not be pleased.

"The Mind of Christ" is laying aside who you are. Jesus thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but He laid aside His reputation. He gave up the right to his Name, so we who deserve death could bear that Name and have life instead. For us to have that life, He had to taste death. He gladly did that. Now He is saying to us, "Let this Mind be in you." In our last study, we discovered that Jesus not only was willing to be found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself even more, and became a "doulos", a bondsman. He chose to be the Father's slave, and thus to become the servant of man. And every act and attitude of servitude He allowed the Father to demonstrate through Him, pleased the Father the more, so He served the very ones who despised Him and persecuted Him and reviled Him. In so doing, He demonstrated how a slave behaves.

Now He lives in us. And if we are to be the slaves we are, our behavior must perfectly reflect the Mind of Christ. In today's study, we are going to begin a look at what the Scriptures say about servanthood. Our goal will be for "This mind to be in us".

To pursue our objectives, it will necessary for us to look at what the Scriptures portray servanthood to be, and what a slave

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looks like and acts like in real life. Because the term “slavery” and “servanthood” have such negative connotations in our world, we miss a great deal of the impact that is necessary if we are to become joyful “bondslaves” of Jesus Christ. The title of today’s study is: “So You Want To Be A Slave?” It will take more than one lesson to pursue the elements of servanthood necessary for us to have “The Mind of Christ”.

THE BARRIER OF SURRENDER

Perhaps the greatest issue at stake in becoming a servant is the issue of surrender. A slave of God is not a hero for placing himself “at God’s disposal”. He is God’s...period. Therefore, the man-made limitations we place on “what God can or cannot do” are not Scriptural. We like to teach that as you grow as a Christian that you, little by little, give up more areas of your life for God to control. Experientially, that may be true, but Scripturally, that’s not appropriate. That would be like stealing money from a charity a day at a time, then nobly giving it back in a grandiose gesture of generosity. You might look like a hero to those around you, but the money wasn’t yours in the first place.

The problem is that we so desperately want people to come to Christ, we are afraid to explain to them the dynamics of salvation. Salvation isn’t enlightened man working out a deal with God to co-labor in His vineyard, so God can have one more employee on His payroll. Salvation is sinful man, lost, without hope, on his way to an eternal hell, being purchased for a price beyond imagination. You don’t favor God with your soul. You surrender to God and joyfully accept His offer to buy you back and make you His servant. From that moment on, He owns the rights to your contract.

Christianity isn’t like professional sports. If you have a good year, you don’t renegotiate with God for better working conditions, or less tribulation. If it wasn’t for God, you wouldn’t be on the team. He did it all. You were through, washed up, finished. He found you in the gutter and paid for you as though you were a superstar. So the issue isn’t how magnanimous can you be and allow God to have His way with you. The issue is: “How dare you struggle with your Master over what is best for you?” And until you get that straight, the Mind of Christ will only be a shallow pond that glimmers in the night for you. You will never be submerged in its cooling waters.

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In Matthew, chapter eight, Jesus had just come down from the mountain, where He had preached what we call “the sermon on the mount”, and great multitudes were crowding about Him. A leper approached Him, and asked to be healed. Jesus healed him. Then in verse five, we begin reading an account of a man who understood authority, a man of great power, but who, in this situation, had to humble himself. It reads like this:

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him,

saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.”

And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.”

The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.”

(Matthew 8:5-8 NKJV)

“For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel.”

(Matthew 8:9,10 NKJV)

The truths that pour from this passage are too numerous to deal with in this study. But suffice it to say that part of the awesomeness of this man’s faith that so impressed the Master was the fact that he was a man who thought it not robbery to be in authority, but in the presence of real authority, he humbled himself; and his sheer unworthiness led to his faith. But there is another truth that cries out to be recognized. It is that little word “doulos” again. It was what a servant naturally does. When the master says “go”, he goes. When the master says, “come”, he comes. When the master says “do this”, he does it. Now the centurion was not marveling at these facts. These were assumed. A servant is expected to do whatever he is told. He is expected to serve wherever he is placed.

And many of the great traumas that fill the counseling rooms in our generation could be more easily dealt with if Christians simply understood the concept of servanthood. Servanthood rests in sovereignty. The master is sovereign. Whatever he does, or whatever he allows, is accepted and acceptable. One who is a

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servant by choice knows that nothing the master does is cause for rebellion, because He negotiated away his rights in exchange for the benefits of being a part of the master's household.

So most of the things we chafe over are not justifiable causes for bitterness or anger or retaliation or rejection. Most of the things we seek counsel for are, in reality, the natural results of living in a world under Satan's domain, and none of them could have happened had our Master not allowed them. Therefore, until we rest in His sovereignty and stop chafing over how we have been mistreated, or abused, or neglected, or betrayed, or left homeless or helpless or powerless, we can't have the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ assumes that part of the cost of serving is rejection, persecution, unjust authority, failure, trauma, and pain. They are written in the job description. "In the world you will have..." what? "tribulation,"² that's what. So why not learn when pain or abuse or disappointments enter our lives to simply say, "Lord, I'm your slave. If this is part of my calling as a servant, I want to thank you. You know what I need. I humble myself. Yes, I'm a child of God. But until I get to heaven, I have no more rights than your Son had. And, oh, how this world treated Him." It will set you free!

In Matthew, chapter ten, Jesus turned to His servants and apprised them of their calling. He told them about their "rights" as disciples. Listen:

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.

You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;

For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.

² John 16:33 NKJV

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And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!

Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known."

(Matthew 10:16-26 NKJV)

This passage ought to be taught more in today's world. We like to attribute its harshness to the impending persecutions of the early church or liken them to the trials Christians would experience in the underground churches of nations like China, where persecution is expected. But by doing that, we miss a lot of truths. The principles apply, at varying levels, to every believer in every age.

1- We are being sent forth into a world filled with enemies (verse 16,17). In the light of the warfare that awaits us, we are to be wise in our understanding, but harmless in our response. We are to expect it, but not become embittered by it.

2- Our problems will be designed to create our ministries (verse 18). The disciples would be falsely accused and taken before magistrates, but the real purpose behind it would be so they could be taken before governors and kings as a testimony.

3- They were not to worry about the outcome (verse 19). When caught up in these "undeserved traumas", they were to understand that what took place happened to develop a testimony. God would, if we would allow Him to, place words on our lips, and responses in our hearts that would astound the unbelieving world. The call is to "rest", while God does the rest.

4- Don't be surprised if the warfare comes from those closest to you (verses 20,21). How easy it is to become downtrodden when those who ought to be defending you, turn against you. Christians who complain that their loved ones don't "understand" their faith, and stay depressed over it, don't understand this

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passage. Jesus said, “Don’t even be surprised if your children hand you over to be punished unjustly.” All through Scripture, brothers and sisters and loved ones became the very tools Satan chose to declare war on the depth of God’s work in a man or woman’s life. Don’t be surprised, and don’t be dismayed.

5- You’re not out to win a popularity contest, you are out to declare the whole counsel of God (verses 22-24). Jesus said, “They hated Me, they will hate you, as well.” Expect opposition. Expect warfare. Expect Satanic intrusions into your life. You are not going to a concert to be entertained. You are going to war. And you are the soldier they are shooting at.

6- A disciple is not above his teacher, a servant is not above his master (verses 24-26). If they will kill the master of the house, what makes you think they will spare his servants? If the enemy is out to destroy your Lord, why should he make your life easy? Don’t be so presumptuous that you expect better treatment from this world order than Jesus got. They hated Him. They betrayed Him. They crucified Him. Are you better than He is? Then why are you whimpering over that bad cold that kept you home from work? Why are you depressed over that car repair bill you weren’t expecting? If you are God’s slave, and this world made His life as miserable as it could, what makes you think you deserve something better? You don’t understand the life of a slave.

THE EXAMPLE OF SURRENDER

So our example of what a servant can expect can best be seen by looking at the life of Jesus. What He received and how He responded will help us to understand what Paul meant when he said that Jesus “humbled Himself and became a slave”.

The reason this is so important is that most believers today never enter into the rest of God and experience the peace of God because they have not fully taken upon themselves the cloak of a slave. And until we see ourselves as slaves of God, we will have expectations about this life that we were never intended to have. Those expectations will keep us from enjoying the peace of God when the storms of life rage about us. The “exchanged” life we hear so much about cannot be experienced fully unless you understand the sovereignty of God. If you don’t, you will trust in God to live through you, but the moment things go awry from your perspective, you will yank the reins away from God and assume that trusting Him didn’t work. If you were trusting God,

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but the house burned down, then either God wasn't capable of protecting you, or you didn't have enough faith to believe. Right? Wrong. God has a plan. He is sovereign. He is the master. You are His slave. He makes no mistakes. So by trusting Him, even that calamity becomes a time to rest. It's the Master's house, not yours, and if He allowed you to live in it for a season, praise Him. But don't run from that blessed peace because the storms of life took from you one of your "blessings".

Blessings are things God gives us to help us grow spiritually. Sometimes the "blessings" we think we have to have are actually hindrances to our growth. The Master knows the difference. The slave doesn't. Trust Him. The absence of peace in many of our lives can be traced to a lack of understanding of the sovereignty of God and our role as slaves. Jesus was our example. He never left the perfect will of God. He never departed from the Master's plan. He never sinned. Always, He pleased the Father. If you must compare, compare your lot with His, not with Joe Smith or Mary Brown or someone else whose temporal standing in life is better than yours. Think about it.

1- He was, by human standards, not attractive. Most people, we are told, suffer from a negative self-image. One of the primary causes is our appearance. We do not think we got a fair shake. Most of you ladies don't think you look like the gals on the TV commercials, or even the ones in the Sears catalog. You'd kill just to be able to wear those clothes, let alone be able to afford them. Most of us men aren't constructed like the guys on the football field. Most of us don't have either the looks or the personalities of the "average" guy on a TV commercial. Before long, we get angry at God because if only He had made me like that, I'd feel secure. We are arguing over the packaging, rather than developing the contents. Doesn't God owe it to us to make us look handsome or beautiful? How did He make His own Son? The prophet Isaiah said this:

He has no form or comeliness, And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

(Isaiah 53:2b NKJV)

God did not create for His own Son a body that drew attention to itself. He placed His own life in a shell that was unattractive by design, so the inner beauty of God's Holiness that radiated from within would have no competition. He apparently did that for the Apostle Paul as well. Some, He makes tall. Some, He makes

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short. Some, He makes beautiful. But all, He makes. Therefore, as His servants, we ought never to be bitter over how we look. To do so, is to make fun of our Master.

2- He was rejected. The next verse adds;

He was despised and rejected of men, (Isaiah 53:3a NIV)

Jesus won no popularity contest. The very people He came to save turned their backs upon Him.

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

(John 1:11 NKJV)

How often men and women cannot cope with the sovereignty of God because He allowed them to be rejected as a child, or rejected in a marriage, or rejected in a relationship. “How could God do this to me?” they ask. Beloved, He is your Master. If the Master’s plan can best be accomplished by your rejection, if He can best create in you a heart of acceptance for others by letting you taste the cup of despair, does not He have that right? Could He not have created a perfect atmosphere for His Son to come to earth and set up His kingdom? His own people could have been waiting at the hospital with fanfare and applause. What hospital? God had to be born in a manger. And the people He came to save became hostile to the point of murder. Why? Couldn’t God have done better? He could have done anything He wanted. But, no, Beloved, He couldn’t have done better, because God’s ways are higher than ours. Did not Isaiah write: “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me”³? What did that rejection accomplish?

But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. (Romans 11:11b NKJV)

You are the recipient of salvation today as a Gentile believer because Jesus was rejected by His own. He gladly suffered that rejection that God’s higher plan might be accomplished. If, through that experience in your life that so seemed to “scar” you, you became open to God’s grace, and thus equipped to share that grace with others, ought you not rather to be grateful to God that He allowed such rejection? It’s all a matter of perspective. The disciple is not greater than his master. Jesus’ own “inner circle”, those He poured His life into day after day, when the heat was on, forsook Him and fled. That’s acceptance? In Heaven you will experience the ultimate in acceptance. Your greater family will

³ Romans 10:20b (NKJV)

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be one in Christ Jesus. There will be no backbiting, no gossip, no comparisons, no anger, no bitterness. That peace is available to your heart through the Holy Spirit even now. Would you have gratefully received it, had you not suffered that trauma? Who knows? God knows. Do you want to be a servant? Thank God for that rejection, and begin to appreciate the sovereignty of God. He is your Master. He makes no mistakes.

3- He had no earthly security. The next thing most of us fault God over is His “absence of provision” to meet our “needs”. Scripturally, if we are not starving to death and have clothes on our backs, this is not a valid complaint. Once again, Jesus is our example. He said,

...but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.

(Matthew 8:20 NIV)

The Living God came to earth to live. You and I, using our standards of how God should “bless” those He loves, would have prepared a palace with the most elegant of furnishings, beautiful grounds, surrounded by servants to do His bidding. He would have had the finest of chariots to use to visit His flock. His clothes would have been of the “designer” variety. His meals would have been prepared by the world’s most noted chefs. Nothing would be too good for royalty. And He was more than royalty, He was God. But this world was not His ultimate objective, nor is it ours. And the Father wanted us to understand that. So He sent His own Son to earth as a servant, rather than as a King, so that one day we who are called to be servants, could live like kings in glory.

His first bed was of straw. His first neighbors were pigs and chickens. He never owned a piece of real estate, had to borrow a donkey, lived like a transient, and ultimately had to be buried in a borrowed tomb. He had no beautiful cathedral to preach from, no large offerings to construct facilities. He fed the multitudes at an all-day seminar by using borrowed loaves and fish. The world looked at Him from a human perspective and saw poverty, weakness and the absence of beauty. But there flowed from His life such a richness of spiritual treasure, that those who were seeking, soon saw a beauty beyond comprehension, treasure beyond understanding, strength beyond imagination. He had not come to earth to display His ability to accumulate temporal power. He had come to earth to be a servant, and by serving, to demonstrate a kind of spiritual power the world had never seen before.

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Think about that when you begin arguing with God over the size of your house or the condition of your car or the style of your clothes or the size of your pay check. He forsook those things so we could see that there were treasures beyond, that we would miss if our focus fell on things temporal. If God has chosen to give you worldly possessions, praise Him. But if not, then praise Him for that, too. You do not deserve them. You do not deserve more than He gave His own Son. The slave is not above His Master. Learn to be genuinely grateful for whatever God gives you of this world's goods. It is more than He gave His own Son. You are a slave. A slave does not deserve "things". If he gets them, he is grateful because they are a gift. If not, he understands, the Master knows best.

Don't stop there. Take a look at the things in your life that are troubling you, the things you chafe over when you think of the sovereignty of God. You're not appreciated? Look at Jesus. The very religious leaders He came to minister to, sent spies to try to trip Him up so they could have Him murdered. You say your friends have let you down? Try spending every waking hour giving your life to twelve people, then watch what happens when you need them. They all ran like cowards, and the "Chairman of the Board" curses and denies He even knew you. Are you troubled that someone you love has been taken? Did you feel they deserved a longer life? God Himself only got 33 years. Is your body racked with pain, and you consider that unfair? Oh, Beloved, read once more the account of what Jesus endured on that Cross for you. You have never tasted pain like that.

Are you angry with God that your ministry is not as fruitful as you think it ought to be? Try spending three years developing a team and preaching to all who will listen with total disregard for your own comforts, and then watch them look the other way while you are mercilessly and falsely accused and convicted. At His death, Jesus had no semblance of an earthly ministry to show for His months of labor. But that ministry goes on 2,000 years later, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. You cannot measure success the way the world does.

Are you being unjustly persecuted? Do others ridicule you, falsely accuse you, take from you your dignity? More than they did to Jesus? Of course not. And is the servant to be favored above his Master? Of course not.

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So you want to be a servant? You want to be the slave of God? Then begin to enter into that precious place near the heart of God called “rest”. It is a place where total peace reigns, total freedom beckons, total joy abounds. It is not a place where pleasant circumstances dominate. No, it is often the place where the storms of life seem to find their targets, and the enemies of God seem to aim their missiles of destruction. But tucked in the center of that place is a haven called “the sovereign love of God”. Those who abide there are those who have come to understand what it means to be...a slave. It means that the Master is in charge, and the Master is perfect. Therefore, whatever the Master deems is best, is best indeed. So never is there any situation that does not generate praise. And never is there any time when the heart cannot be at rest.

There is a place for you there. Even now, Jesus is calling once again, saying,

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

(Matthew 11:28 NKJV)

That’s what’s available to a genuine slave. That’s what’s available for you.

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