

BONDSERVANTS OF CHRIST

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." Romans 1:1.

For a long time Saul of Tarsus thought that he was rendering yeoman service to God in persecuting Christians to the utmost. It was while he was engaged in this work that suddenly there came a great light from heaven, and he heard a voice saying: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads." Amazed and trembling, he asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" The answer was, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest."

Instantly he sank to the earth bewildered and stunned. A vision had come to him like a bolt from the blue, or a voice from the very presence of God. The meaning of it, as he came in time to see clearly, was an unmistakable conviction that in this Jesus Whom he was persecuting, Whom he hated with a bitter hatred, there was the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the lost. He came to himself, repented of his sin and believed on Christ, whereupon he was saved.

From the time of his remarkable experience with Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul's first relationship with God was that of a son. "For we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). From that time forward Paul was a changed man. He gave himself completely to the new Master of his soul. His attitude and spirit were unusual, in that from the day of his conversion he chose to be a servant of Christ. This did not in any way minimize the fact that he was a son of God, but it served to enhance it. On the day of his salvation Paul said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" A son need not do anything to be saved, but a servant should do everything to please Him Who has saved him. While the Christian is not compelled to do anything, he is impelled to do everything possible to please Christ.

When Paul wrote his marvelous letter to the Christians in Rome, the city of pride, pomp, title and rank, he introduced himself as "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ." He considered this to be the topmost rung of fame—"a servant of Jesus Christ." Much of life is spent in learning the meaning of great words, and I venture to think that one of the greatest words in our Christian vocabulary is that one word "servant." All of us are prone to be so ambitious of place, so covetous of honor, and so jealous of the credit for things we do, lest the honor should go to somebody else.

Paul's titles were not numerous or high-sounding. He gloried in the title of "servant"—"a servant of Jesus Christ." Consider what it meant for Paul that he became and lived a servant of Jesus Christ. To him it meant the loss of worldly prospects. He said, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things." To him it meant bodily suffering. He said, "For I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Even though he was a man of high mental endowments and of unblemished character, it meant a life spent largely in prison, with chains bound upon his wrists much of the time. To him it meant martyrdom, but of that he remarked, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." Three things sustained him as he trod that lonely path of service and suffering. He looked back to the cross of Christ on Calvary. He had the love and spirit of Christ in his heart. He looked forward to the crown of glory that awaited him.

Paul's greatness is seen in his attitude toward Christ. He had the greatest mind that Christianity has ever attracted, but he told us there was not anything that he desired to know except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. In that attitude there was no narrow contempt for other knowledge, but rather a confession that in this there is enough to absorb and exhaust the intellect.

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ." The very words are a hymn of devotion, an epic of self-denial and self-renunciation. It is worth our while to turn aside and to look at this man, with the lights and shadows of his character. He was a free-born Roman citizen,

and he never forgot it. He did not allow any privileged authority to rob him of his franchise. More than once he proudly boasted, "I was free-born!", much to the consternation of some magistrates who did not know their business. He did not fear any imperial consul, or dread any bench of councillors. He was the champion of personal liberty before the unprincipled Felix, the straightforward Festus and the frivolous Agrippa.

Paul was appealing to the Christians in Rome for a complete dedication of their lives to Christ. He had yielded his own life fully and wholly to Jesus Christ, so the first words that he penned to them are an expression of his real surrender. As a servant of Christ he had given himself up wholly to the will of his Lord and Master. He, like all of us who are Christians, was under an obligation to Christ which could never be discharged. In this passage Paul uses the same word that he did in writing to the Philippians about Christ Who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (2:7). He was completely subordinated to the Father's will and fully dedicated to the Father's service. He was so attuned to God that He was one with Him in purpose, as well as being one with Him in essence.

It is true that the Christian is the Lord's freedman. He rejoices in the glorious liberty of the children of God, and he stands fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free. He has been delivered from the curse of the law, the doom of sin and the service of Satan. Though free, he is Christ's willing slave. He has given up his old master, and he is serving a new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes you see the notice: "This establishment is under new management." The business of the Christian life, the establishment of the redeemed personality, is under the management of the Lord Jesus Christ. There can be no success unless He is in complete control. Spiritual bankruptcy is inevitable unless His word is final.

However, the Christian, though he is God's freedman, is not free to do as he pleases, unless what he pleases is well-pleasing to his Lord. Since he is under new management, he must do those things which his Lord commands and the Holy Spirit prompts. Sometimes we are called upon to do things which naturally we do not like to do, but we do them because we want to please our Saviour Who did so much for us.

Dr. George Matheson gave expression to a fundamental spiritual truth when he wrote:

"Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be."

The whole of that hymn just breathes the sense of life captured and enslaved by love.

"My heart is weak and poor
Until its Master find.
It has no spring of action sure
It varies with the wind."

A slave or servant is one who has been bought by another. In Paul's day a slave was one who either by captivity or by purchase had been translated from one master to another. He had no rights of his own, and no will except the will of another. He was one whose life was at the disposal of another. His will, time, energy, etc., were at the service of somebody else.

Christ has bought us. He has delivered us from the power of darkness. He has translated us into His own glorious kingdom. Now, we are under obligation to be at His disposal from this time and henceforth. It is our duty to render implicit and unquestioning obedience to Him.

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Only when Christ is absolute Master, and we are willing servants, are we going to be able to overcome temptation and conquer sin. A biographer of George Fox has summarized his life of heroic self-abnegation by saying, "He was completely master of himself because completely a servant of God."

Through the amazing grace of Christ, slaves of sin become sons of God, who place themselves at the service of their Saviour. Because of the absolute uniqueness of His person, the efficacy of His work at Calvary, and the blessings that abound wherever He reigns, we should crown Him Lord of all.

I. We Are Bondservants Of Christ By Personal Choice.

Christ is not an aggressor, breaking down all barriers and taking control of our lives against our wills. There is gentle drawing, but no violent dragging. Every person has a will of his own, which he may either surrender to Christ or set up against Him. If the Christian does not make a glad and full surrender to Christ as Lord and Master he can never enter into the fulness of blessing. Christ wants complete control of our wills and lives and is entitled to it.

II. Being Bondservants Of Christ Means That His Will Is Our Will.

A servant has to do the will of his master, and sometimes the doing of it is difficult. Christians are in the world to do the will of their Lord and Master. That will is good and acceptable and perfect.

1. It is His will that we should suffer for Him.
He had to suffer in mind, spirit and body, and the servant is not above his Master. The purpose for which suffering is allowed to come in the providence of God is that we may be conformed more and more to His likeness.
2. It is His will that we take an active part in world evangelization.
The responsibility for taking the gospel to others rests upon every Christian. Surrendered to Christ and believing the truths of God's Word, we are committed to a program that is divine in its inception and world-wide in its sweep. Anything less than a global offensive, directed by the Holy Spirit, is not enough. Since we are the bondservants of Christ, there should be a glad submission to and a joyous delight in His will. Cleansed from sin and recreated in Christ we are commanded to follow Him along the pathway of self-effacing, God-glorifying and Spirit-directed service. Let us keep on serving the Lord Christ!

III. Bondservants Serve Their Lord In A Variety Of Ways.

All are called into service, but not all are called to do the same kind of service for Him. All are gifted in some way, but not all are gifted in the same way. There is a field of personal evangelism--a much neglected field, but it is ripe unto harvest. The greatest thing you can do is to introduce a person to Christ. When did you speak to a person about his relationship to Christ? Many are ready for leadership in the limelight, but they are not prepared for quiet, unspectacular service behind the scenes. Bondservants should be ready to go where their Lord sends, do what their Lord commands, and proclaim what their Lord is and has done.

IV. Bondservants Who Serve Faithfully Will Be Rewarded Fully.

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance" (Colossians 3:23-24). The

assurance of a glorious reward, a crown of life that fadeth not away, should be a great incentive to us to serve Christ with unswerving devotion. Christ said, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).

Being bondservants of Christ is truly a high calling. It is a soul finding a personality much higher and far better than its own and yielding complete allegiance to it. It is the finite bringing itself into harmony with the infinite.

"Let none hear you idly saying,
There is nothing I can do.
While the souls of men are dying,
And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly,
Let His work your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when He calleth,
Here am I, send me, send me."