

The service industry is a huge part of any modern economy, where workers are paid a wage for the service they perform, for something they “do” versus something they “make.” In fact, in modern times, the service industry is generally the largest economic sector of any country. But the English word originates from Latin “servus” and “servitium” which both mean “slave” and do not make provision in their definitions for any form of payment. Today **we tend to draw a clear distinction between servant and slave**, and I can think of at least two elements that define the difference. I already mentioned payment, or some type of desired compensation, which is absent from the position of slave. The other element is consent – or agreement to the arrangement. Surely there are no modern slaves that are such by choice. But, the seemingly unimaginable concept of **voluntarily being a slave to someone is not unheard of in ancient times**. The New American Standard translation uses the term “bond-servant” to describe the idea of being a voluntary slave to God. This is translated from the Greek word “doulos” (Strong’s G1401) which includes the ideas of both voluntary and forced enslavement. Maybe there could be a benefit to us today in learning about ancient Hebrew and Greek cultures and how or why people might agree to become a slave. Perhaps it is the idea of having humility toward and honor for one greater than oneself. Or, it could be that voluntary enslavement is better than starving to death? More research is needed on my part; please feel free to help out with that if you have any insight.

So, what about those bond-servants in the New Testament? Most of those references use the term to describe an individual: Paul, James, Simon Peter, Epaphras, Tychicus, Jude, Moses... But, in the second chapter of 2Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy, and us I think, to be voluntary bond-servants or slaves to God. He uses examples of a soldier, a farmer, and an athlete, as people who are **willing to sacrifice and endure for a greater good**. Our service to God is a necessary act if we are to be considered followers and children of His. So, how do we serve God?

Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. (Luke 7:44-46)

In John 13, we see Messiah doing the same for His disciples as an example of how to serve, but washing someone’s feet is not so much a useful or appreciated service for anyone today; it is more of a symbol of true, physical servitude. That symbol leads us to humility toward others, providing for their needs without pride or concern for self. **Selfless giving is true sacrifice**.

"The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:40)

This passage tells us that our physical service to God is perfectly reflected in our service to our neighbor. So, voluntarily being enslaved to God, which is something that many of us could align with and agree to, is in some respects the same as **enslaving ourselves to another human**. Sure, that is a stretch, but if I consider this idea using the ancient definition of slavery discussed above, I can start to imagine that as a possibility for myself. Through my desire to serve God, I will freely sacrifice my time, money, or other resources to better another person’s existence, without expectation of any return.

"But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45)

If we are to imitate the Christ, we are to give up our life for others. That is an extreme statement, but one we should think about as we choose our actions in life. **Serving others can be a way to serve God**, which should be a priority for us. Remember 2 Timothy? We are called to volunteer our service to God. But, there is another service that we need to consider in life.

*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For **the whole Law is fulfilled** in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." (Galatians 5:13-14)*

Indeed, through love, serve one another. "Love your neighbor as yourself" could be understood as "serve your neighbor as yourself." How do you serve yourself? How SHOULD you serve yourself?

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Serving the flesh is obviously not a good idea. If your flesh is anything like mine, **servicing it will certainly get you into trouble**. No, when you serve yourself, you need to focus on the good things – those things that will draw you closer to God. Serve yourself the things that will benefit you. Serve yourself healthy things. Serve yourself food that sustains.

*"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? **Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance.** "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David. (Isaiah 55:1-3)*

Listen to God, that you may live. Feed on good things. Enjoy the fruit of the Spirit. Crucify the deeds of the flesh. If you serve yourself in the right way, **your desire will become to serve others**, thereby serving God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:22-24)

In Romans chapter 13:12, Paul tells us to "put on the armor of light" and then to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." And, one more reference to Galatians, this time 5:16: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Isaiah said above, "Listen to God, that you may live." God does speak to us in many ways, but the most direct and easiest to discern is through the scriptures. Investing some of your valuable time every day in **His Word will draw you closer to Him**, guiding you to walk by the Spirit.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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