

Lose to Live: Slave or Servant

*“The [Greek] word “doulos” means slave,
the meaning is so unequivocal,
no study of history is necessary.*

—John MacAuliffe

As has been said, the minimum requirement is, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But hidden under our desire for predictability is the pacifying and comfortable question, “What is the minimum God requires of me?” We Christians have a tendency to cleave to our comfortable views and presuppositions in evaluating our lives and priorities. The price of this cleaving is the loss of a more abundant life. This life is always just a few committed steps away. These steps would quickly usher us into a richer spiritual life of following in Jesus’ path of complete selflessness. But these thoughts of a more fulfilling life—like Jesus’ life— seem to give us anxiety and fears. These fears keep us from risking much, doing much, and ultimately being much for Christ. John Piper identified this innate reservation early in his thought life: “The thought of building a life around [...] minimal significance—a life defined by the question, ‘What is permissible?’—felt almost disgusting to me.”

One hits the mark when one loves his neighbor as himself, but that is *the minimum mark*. We often think this is the highest of Christian standards, but

it isn't. Loving your neighbor is a command; anything less is sinful.

Higher Levels of Christian Living

Jesus places opportunities before us to live at higher levels of life than the "love your neighbor as yourself" minimum. These higher levels are namely, the ministries of servant or slave to every person with whom we interact. Jesus modeled this type of ministry most clearly in the feet washings He gave His disciples the night of His arrest. He performed the work of a slave even though He is The Creator of the universe. Jesus is God; yet, He was willing to serve people in the humblest of ways.

Have we learned to wash feet? That is, are we willing and learning to serve in the most humble ways in this life? We live life more like Christ as we trust in what He said more and more. In other words, when we have theological clarity and buy-in with the corresponding commitment and actions, we have the resulting love, faith, feet washing actions in measurable ways. Jesus offered us higher levels of life as we become more and more selfless. Forget "I need to be second"; we need to embrace "I am last!"

What Holds Us Back?

The words are less challenging in the English.

The following is a lengthy excerpt, but look at what has happened over the years regarding Bible translations of the word for "slave":

"If you go to the New Testament, you will find the Greek word for "slave" about 150 times in all its forms. And you will find it actually translated "slave" only a few of those 150 times. The New Testament translators only translate the Greek word for slave "slave" when it's referring to an actual physical slave, or when it's referring to an inanimate object, like "slaves of sin" or "slaves of righteousness."

So there is this concept of slavery in the Scripture that has been completely hidden to the English reader. Now this was by design

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because the word “slave” is the most important, all-encompassing, and clarifying word to describe a Christian used in the New Testament, and yet whenever a Christian is in view, it’s not translated “slave.” The word is doulos. Have you heard that word? The word is doulos. In the Greek, that word means “slave”—never means anything but “slave.” It doesn’t mean “servant”; it doesn’t mean “worker”; it doesn’t mean “hired hand”; it doesn’t mean “helper.” There are six or seven Greek words that mean “servant” in some form. Doulos never means “servant.” A servant is someone hired to do something. The slave is someone owned. Big difference—huge difference—and yet all through the New Testament the word “slave” is masked by the word “servant,” or some form of the word “servant.” Truly a remarkable thing.”

When I started doing the research on this word, I found 22 English translations of the New Testament, 22. There was only one of them of all the translations of English New Testaments going back to the King James—up until today—there was only one of those 22 that translated doulos “slave” every single time, even though everyone knows it means slave and only slave. In fact, the most formidable of all Greek dictionaries, Kittel, says, “The word doulos means slave, the meaning is so unequivocal, no study of history is necessary.” It always means slave, and yet it’s not translated slave.⁶⁷

We have stopped using the word “slave” in our Bible translations due to our national stain of slavery. By doing this, translation committees have diminished the highest goal for the Christian. While it is true that American slavery and slavery of the first century had differences (see Abarim Publications⁶⁸), there are many similarities; more than some may admit.

Jesus taught that the way to the top is the absolute bottom of what humans

⁶⁷ John MacArthur, “Servant or Slave” Sermon (Aug 26, 2010), accessed Jan 2, 2020, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY129/Servant-or-Slave>.

⁶⁸ See **ABARIM** Publications. “Servitude and lymphedema.” <https://www.abarim-publications.com/DictionaryG/d/d-o-u-l-o-s-fin.html>

would want apart from God. Even in our saved condition, making our minds up to be the slave of humankind takes tremendous commitment, and recommitment, and recommitment, and recommitment It takes daily recommitment. It takes the work of God to accomplish. Jesus taught, “whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27, 28). We are to possess Jesus’ values and do things “just as” He did.

“[S]lave of all How totally opposed to all my natural leanings. ... How would my family react if I were to come home and brag to them that I had been chosen as slave? [...] Maybe nothing about the nature of Jesus and my living it out lends itself to advertising.”⁶⁹ Being the slave of all takes a death of all self desires.

Lest I be remiss, I will add too that God is The Perfect Master, not an earthly master that would kidnap His slaves and mistreat them. Yes, He may very well call His people to a short life through an early death at times, or He may cause us to suffer much in our walks toward Him, but we must never forget that He is perfect in all He does, and “he rewards those who sincerely seek him.” (Hebrew 11:6).

God still presents an offer of voluntary slavery (at least the first century type) for every Christian as the supreme level of service. It takes great courage to enter this kind of service. We have to choose these higher levels of Christian living by giving up more of ourselves and lives.

Modern Hindrances

It is not commonly taught or heard. Becoming a slave of every person is not commonly heard in the churches’ hallways. There are many reasons for it, but one is that we have stopped hearing, reading and believing the hardest words in the Bible. We seem to gloss over them and explain them in comfortable ways.

⁶⁹ Gayle D. Erwin, *The Jesus Style* (Cathedral City, CA: Yahshua Publishing, 2009 ed.), 46.

Leadership is not leading the way. Elders, deacons, and churches' staff should be models of servanthood. When working properly, they serve one another from the bottom up, and also serve the members. When leaders don't know how to be a slave of all, how will the members ever buy-in and get it? If we are leaders, we should be the leader in service—in spiritual slavery really. Our nameplates should read “slave” not CEO. Unfortunately, many ministry structures are carbon copies of corporate boardrooms. Biblical leadership should be sacrificial service at the bottom of the heap. True leaders eat last, serve the longest, and lead the way to their death.

It is not our personal experience, knowledge, and skills that will change the world for Christ; biblical selflessness will.

Self loves self on the throne. We tend to think about ourselves and our immediate families 24/7. Living our life with only self in mind is our natural, earthly tendency. These tendencies stand daily in our way, kicking and screaming against the idea of a totally committed life to our suffering Savior. We must have a resolute mindset and reliance on God to change this for us. It takes a surprising gut-level determination to move *completely* off the thrones of our lives.

“Within the human heart things have taken over. Men have now by nature no peace within their hearts, for God is crowned there no longer, but there in the moral dusk stubborn and aggressive usurpers fight among themselves for first place on the throne.”⁷⁰

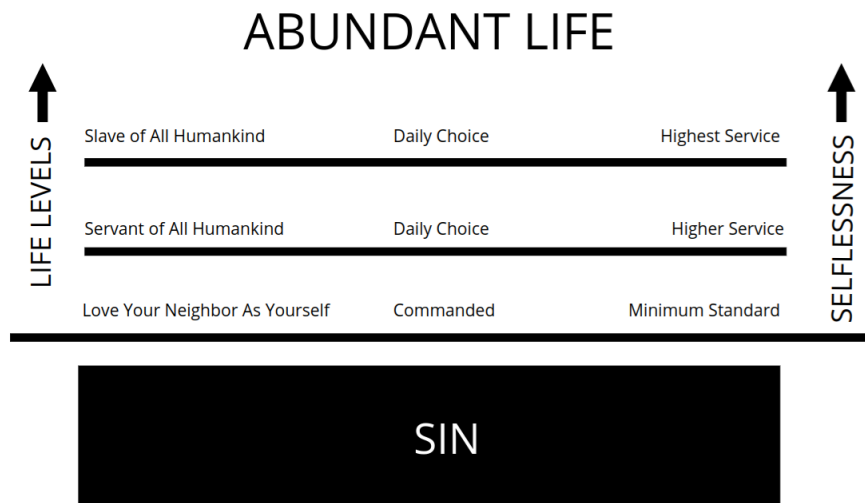
The Way to the Top is to the Bottom

Recap: love your neighbor as yourself is the *minimum standard* for behavior between Christians and people. It is the second greatest commandment, but it is not the highest form of love between people. Two other levels are even more challenging; both are voluntary. Both however, take significant commitment.

⁷⁰ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publication, Inc., 1948), accessed April 13, 2020, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25141/25141-h/25141-h.htm>.

LOSE TO LIVE: SLAVE OR SERVANT

Below is a chart that illustrates the truth of Scripture.



In Slavery, We Find Our Richest Fulfillment

We find life to the fullest as we live like Christ through the power of God. We were saved and designed to be His representatives in this life. We represent Jesus most effectively as slaves—living selfless lives. Most Christians will never set their aim on the highest potential that Jesus offers us. We are afraid God will not meet our needs and will leave us stranded, empty and/or even homeless. But Tozer’s words are reassuring here:

“... God is so vastly wonderful so utterly and completely delightful that He can, without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature

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is.”⁷¹

Scripture Passages

Matthew 18:1-9

Matthew 19:25-20:16

Matthew 20:20-28

Mark 9:31-41

Mark 10:17-31

Mark 10:32-45

John 13:1-17

Questions

- 1) Have you ever considered being the servant of every person in your life?
- 2) What would keep you personally from making the paramount commitment to being everybody’s servant—or even slave?

⁷¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), 42.

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Aim Point

1) Take one day and purposely take every opportunity to serve every person as there are opportunities. Open every door, be first to set up for a meeting, do the dishes after a public meal, etc. Repeat, repeat, repeat