

## Muzzle not the Ox?

### Are we to serve or be served?

By Michael Clark

Supporting himself by day and teaching the saints in Thessalonica by night, Paul was the abject servant of all men and Christ. Did he do this as a commandment that only HE followed or was this to be an example to *all* the saints?

When I was a younger, church-going Christian, I looked to the example of pastors and leaders. I saw that if a person had a "ministry" he could expect to make a living at it. So for many years I thought, "If I could just get a paid position on a church staff, I would be free to be a 'full time minister' and thus be more effective." I am sure many of you have heard this line of reasoning in your own heads, but was it a reasoning that was from God?



There are two forms of leadership on the earth today in the final analysis. One is of the Kingdom of God, lived out as servants to Him and His people. The other is of the world system or "kosmos." You know how the world system works with its kings, presidents, chancellors, CEO's, board chairman, CFO's and ministers of finance, officer in charge of development, vice president in charge of internal affairs, secretary of this and that. The kind of leadership is all top down. "You do it my way or it's the highway." "If you don't pay me the wage I want, I'm gone!" "He is the best corporate leader that money can buy."

On the other end of the spectrum is the kingdom of God. Jesus told His disciples



that the kosmos system (translated "world" in the New Testament) was not to be emulated among them, and then He did a remarkable thing. He led by example, doing the opposite of the world. He stripped Himself of His clothes, wrapped Himself in a servant's towel and washed their feet! Consider what He taught the disciples in by His actions and in His words:

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28 RSVA)

And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:25-27 RSVA)

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." (John 13:3-7 RSVA)

In each of these passages Jesus is either speaking of Himself as a lowly servant or is serving them in the lowest place. He is not only talking about serving, but He actually *did* serve. He also taught the disciples to serve those around them just as He did. Paul also taught that this Servant Christ is our example to follow saying...

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8 RSVA)

When the early church in the Book of Acts was overflowing with new converts to Christ, there were some among them that were needy. The apostles took up a collection that was laid at their feet, not put into their money bags (if they even had any [see Acts 3:3-7]). It was there for any who had need and the result was that "no one said what they had was their own" and "no one was lacking." Collecting money was about meeting the needs of the widows and orphans and the strangers in their gates who came to Christ, not supplying the leaders with a salary or starting a building fund as it is today. They taught that the church, the elect of God, are His temple and the saints literally brought their offerings into that same temple and His house was full.

Jesus told the disciples, "Freely you have received, freely give." This principle is all through the scriptures once you let the Lord show it to you and are no longer blinded by the traditions of today's false church leadership. Too many are into "ministry" for gain or to *be served*. Paul himself was a servant at all times even unto his death. The verses below show how he not only did not demand support money from the churches (being served by them), but he worked day and night among them so he could provide for *their* needs. If you look for this example in today's steeple houses you will be hard pressed to find it.

Please consider how God feels about this in Paul's words to the elders of the church at Ephesus...

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears... I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:29-35 KJ2000)

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he was very emphatic about his stand concerning the asking for donations as being an affront to the preaching of the gospel saying,

If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your material things? If others be partakers of this right over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this right; but endure all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ... But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my boasting void. (1 Corinthians 9:11-15 KJ2000)

He continues in his letters to the Corinthian church saying,

What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my right in the gospel. For though I am free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. (1 Corinthians 9:18-19 KJ2000)

Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:33 KJ2000)

Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. (2 Corinthians 7:2 KJ2000)

And when I was present with you, and in want, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. (2 Corinthians 11:9 KJ2000)

Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly

spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? (2 Corinthians 12:14-15 RSVA)

So was this an attitude of life and his service to the saints in Corinth only as some insist? Read again,

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be a burden unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. (1 Thessalonians 2:5-9 KJ2000)

Supporting himself by day and teaching the saints in Thessalonica by night, Paul was the abject servant of all men and Christ. Did he do this as a commandment that only HE followed or was this to be an example to *all* the saints? Read on:

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing; but worked with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you: Not because we have not that right, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10 KJ2000)

And what was Peter's council to the elders of the church?

Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3 RSVA)

How about John the apostle whom Jesus loved? What was the example of true servants among the saints that he sent out?

Beloved, you do faithfully whatsoever you do for the brethren, and for strangers; Who have borne witness of your love before the church: whom if you send forward on their journey in a godly manner, you shall do well: Because for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth. (3 John 1:5-8 KJ2000)

In these passages, Paul refers to taking support from the churches as being *burdensome* to them and refuses to do it except for what He got from the Macedonians and he called *that* robbery. He was the abject servant who lived after the pattern of Christ. Even Peter and John spoke of the free giving of service to the saints, not seeking anything in return.

Isaiah warned of the excess we see today as so called "ministers" beg for money and use their positions for the purpose of getting gain. He wasn't very nice about it, either, calling them greedy dogs!

For Israel's watchmen are blind, the whole lot of them. They have no idea what's going on. They're dogs without sense enough to bark, lazy dogs, dreaming in the sun-- But hungry dogs, they do know how to eat, voracious dogs, with never enough. And these are Israel's shepherds! They know nothing, understand nothing. They all look after themselves, grabbing whatever's not nailed down. (Isaiah 56:10-11 MSG)

The prophet Micah also spoke for God concerning this sin of prophets seeking their own saying,

Thus says the LORD: Concerning the prophets who make my people stray, who bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that puts nothing into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. (Micah 3:5 KJ2000)

And regarding the rest of Israel's corrupt leadership, Micah says,

Hear this, I pray you, you heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, that abhor justice, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. Her heads judge for reward, and her priests teach for hire, and her prophets divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? no evil can come upon us. (Micah 3:9-11 KJ2000)

Sound familiar? It should! Whenever I have seen a dispute between two families in a church and it came before the pastor, the one that put the most money in the church coffers always won. Pastor-teachers (equivalent to Old Testament priests) being on salary is common place. Prophetic conferences where an attendee can get a special "personal prophesy" for a donation is common place. The attitude is, "Everybody is doing it. God must be pleased!"

These are only some of the verses that I have found where the Bible speaks out against charging for service to God's elect. You will not hear these verses preached from the pulpit unless it is a portion that is preached out of context like, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" which was written to the *elders* of the churches that *they* would give to the needs of the people!

I hope that I did not overburden you with all these verses about *giving freely* to the people of God. Yes, the laborer is worthy of his hire, but when these "laborers" are so focused on *their wages*, they seem to do a poor job of what they have been "hired" to do. The heart of God is on giving, not getting, and on serving, not being served. If the ox harnessed to the mill that grinds out the corn ate all the farmer's profits as we see today, he would soon be part of an old fashioned barbeque! The farmer (in this analogy, God) could not afford his services for long.

"For God so loved the world, *that he gave his only begotten Son...*" requiring nothing in return but faith in Him alone. Go ye and do likewise.

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