

CHIEF MINISTRIES

January 2015

New Year Blessings to you all!

Ah yes, the beginning of another year. Let this be the year of the servant. The Lord knows those who are His. If you are who you say you are, you'll be a servant, finding yourself in the middle of the work of the Lord. You won't have to stand in front of the masses longing to be heard or seen. And all servants must sooner or later learn the hard lessons of dying to self. True servants in every age are prone to crucifixion. Have you gotten on your cross yet?

Self-denial begets character and character servanthood. But just giving up "stuff" we enjoy will not bring us to a sterling humanity. We must wait on human need to find that. Character comes gradually in the process of allowing God to make us servants. But, oh the pain that lies in the pathway. Hurt is the unwelcome forge on which God hammers out our Christlikeness. We beg God to cover the hammer with felt. But the iron blows fall and the anvil tears. Some have actually had to die to serve Christ. And sometimes it is the very people we are called to serve who hold in their ungrateful lives the pain that breaks our spirits and crushes us beneath alienation and aloneness.

Unfortunately, serving people is the only way by which we can serve God. And serving people means that we are going to be hurt in the process. If we're not careful, the pain involved in our service can cause us ultimately to despise those we once felt called to love. Charlie Brown was right when he said: "we all love humanity, its people I can't stand!" We all want to serve God but it can be terribly degrading to have to serve people to do it.

According to Philippians 2, Jesus humbled himself and became a man. Now we must humble ourselves and become servants and people of character. The crucifixion can be a very nasty end to anyone who wants to be a servant. Why? We must turn our cheek and walk two miles for everyone who forces us to walk one. Serving our antagonists and blessing our persecutors can be the terrible job that fashions us in His image. But how do we become people of character? The character of a servant according to St. Paul must be a matter of yieldedness in four areas: the head, the heart, the knee, and the tongue.

The Head of the servant (Humility)

The head of the servant bows in humility. Pride is the steel dagger in the heart of humility. Beware of a proud and haughty spirit. This sin puts a great barrier between an individual and God. You will have a hard time being aware of God as long as you are filled with pride. If it gets Angels cast out of heaven, it will certainly keep your heart out of heaven. It was the downfall of Adam and Eve. It increases our separation from God and expels us from paradise. Most of us would like to gain humility without humiliation. Alas, this is not possible. Our arrogance is the least lovely of all our personal qualities and it is a stench in God's nostrils. Ego is the barrier that stands between God and His dream for our lives. Oh but that each of us could get rid of our selves. Pride sucks the vitality out of our character. As servants we are to be priests. Our work is priestly and it is glorious. Like Jesus, our great High Priest, we too wear the vestments to give grace and be gracious. Our humility may be easily seen in our love of helping others. Our service is our office. If the King of Heaven can wash feet, our calling is clear.

How can we escape the need to be what everyone else wants us to be? Christ bowed His head and became nothing - rather he made Himself nothing. He declared Himself to be free. We usually focus on the word "nothing". Let's not, and focus on the word "made". To "make" ourselves means we don't let anyone else "make" us.

The head must bow, it must take off the heavy crown of pride! It must bow as the servant asks, "What can I do my Lord.... for how long..... and where?"

Are you puffed up with pride? Do you welcome the praise of others? Do you seek the highest honors? Do you become angry when your will or word is crossed? Can you not serve God in a low place as well as a high place? Do you enjoy celebrity? Are you unaware of the deceitfulness and wickedness of your heart? Are you more ready to defend your innocence than to confess your faults? If those things describe your heart, then you are a proud person. It is not likely that you will have any familiarity with God. You too much make yourself a God. You are your own idol. How could you

possibly have your heart in heaven? You might speak a few proper words, but your heart does not understand what you are saying.

The Heart of the servant (Obedience)

As the head of a servant yields, the heart of a servant obeys. The heart bows on the inside and is committed to integrity and mercy. In fact the heart of character is mercy.

To be merciful is to have compassion, to feel another's sickness, to mourn with those who are in grief, to suffer with someone in trouble, to help in any way we can, and to comfort with loving words. To be merciful is to lovingly forgive someone who has offended you when they admit their behavior and ask for your mercy. To be merciful is to be patient with sinners, praying that God will ultimately convert them. To be merciful is to see the best in everything, to look through the fingers at many things and not make a grievous sin of every small little thing.

Jesus knew who He was and committed Himself to mercy and to His Father's will; *I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. ^{v7} But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. (Isaiah 50:6 -7 ESV)*

Integrity in obedience is the lesson of the cross. Jesus could have lied his way out of His dilemma. He could have said, "No, Pilate, I am not God's son - crucify someone else". But he clung to the truth even when they poured on the pressure. Pilate may have said, "Why this waste? Why didn't you just join the upper echelon of the pharisaical theologians, or go on a speaking tour, or write a book on how to be happy? Bend a little Jesus! Relax! Give up your cross and take a break from all this."

Obedience is a bending of the will. Keep your hearts from evil thoughts, for as evil choices estrange the will from His will, so evil thoughts cloud the soul and hide Him from us. Obedience is not the major work of the disciple. It is the only work. How are we to accomplish this yielding of our proud hearts?

Organize your time so that you can find a period every day for resting, meditation and prayer. This will become easy when you truly love Him. We never wonder what we will talk about. And He talks to me in the most bizarre places. He is our friend. Our heart must be open to Him. We must be completely candid with Him, holding nothing back. Even if there is nothing to say to Him, it is a joy just to be in His presence.

Spirit and flesh have a very close marriage they live and hurt and die as one. It is a rare person who clings to integrity in the face of severe suffering. Yet Jesus did it. He humbled himself and clung to obedience and died in blood and gore. But, best of all, he sacrificed himself to the pleasure of his servanthood. That's what confirmed servants do. They obey! Obedience is the source of character.

The Knee of the servant (Surrender)

The knee of the servant bends, *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (Philippians 2:10 ESV)*. Where the knee bends, character is born. Not that posture alone is the key to power with God, but it is an indicator of how we see the Almighty. The knee must bend in prayer. When the knee bends, the King comes. I am convinced that the key to God is a bent-knee attitude. Kneeling should not be seen only as a symbol of devotion. It is far more than that. When our knees straighten up, we know we must walk again into the fields of service. There is so much to do.

Our lives will come to ruin if we live as if we have no knees. I know now that the form of a servant is a kneeling form. Consider the things that keep our knees straight. First, there is self-sufficiency. We need to learn poverty of spirit. See yourself as poor and you'll come kneeling and kneeling you will receive. Then you can insert yourself into the Be-attitudes - blessed are we who are poor in spirit for ours is the kingdom.

Pride keeps us from kneeling. But so many are great at false-humility and work hard at not looking self-centered. We know how to look sheepish and duck our heads and yield if only to keep our spiritual reputation. In our public prayer life we cry "oh to be nothing, nothing, He must increase, I must decrease." But in our inner lives we cry, "I love me-self, I love me-self, I pick me up and hug me-self!" Remember this: Narcissus was beautiful. But he drowned trying to embrace his own reflection. Preachers, concert artists, teachers, church committee leaders, talented soloists, dramatists, gifted people: How many in all those categories live lives serving their own bogus godhood? The apostle's remedy is to bend the knee to Christ - a higher God than ego.

The Tongue of the servant (Confession)

Ultimately, Jesus will be confessed by all men. It is only a matter of when. I have tried to imagine that moment when every tongue confesses. Atheists, university professors, literacy greats, all come before the towering glass throne in the great finale in history. I see them wide-eyed, staring in disbelief at the towering throne of God. God Almighty clears His throat with thunder and says "Ahem". The agnostic philosopher falls to his knees weeping, "Oh my God". The know-it-all physicist cries "I can't believe it!" Imagine it, Karl Marx and Frederick Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, Madeleine Murray O'Hair, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, All our Presidents, world leaders of the past and...you. Crying the name "Jesus" at the gates of foreverness. It is the moment of the dumbfounded "yes", every name confessing the name it perhaps spent a life time of doubting.

What do we confess here and now? How about: "God, I've very little to give to you. All I've got left is my future." This is salvation. To be redeemed is to start where the future begins and breathe the name "Lord." At this word Christian character is born.

The tongue of the servant must be forever proclaiming. "Jesus is Lord, master of everything." Anything less would be like fingernails across a blackboard, a cell phone in a movie theater or a catfight in the middle of the night. Shrill, irritating and entirely inappropriate. Instead, let our lips forever be filled with adoration and praise for our majestic Savior.

Character is a byproduct of our hunger for a deeper relationship with God. Character is a word of dignity. It's the hidden "us". What we are in the dark. You can buy personality cheap. But character is not for sale.

How do we get it? By being tested in the extreme and by learning spiritual dependency. When you are no longer in charge of your circumstances. Being under the heel of someone else's will or suffer the indignity of crushing incarceration. These give wings to your spirit if you let them. When Jesus went to the cross, it looked like He was losing. But, He was winning. *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 ESV)*. My favorite verse. The first verse I remember memorizing as a kid in Sunday school. How often we turn from the nails and try and avoid the naked humiliation of Golgotha. Not possible. Remember: we seldom arrive at humility without humiliation. We must bless the cross that produces good character. Only when we realize we are not in charge of the world will the real "you" come to be. Can you say "Prison, I bless you!" In Philippians 2, Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus were all crying that. Crushed by prison bars and nasty cells, Paul sings his song of servanthood. Christ's character does not come until we have lost control. While we are in charge, we swagger in our arrogance and should grow smug in our weakness, which we assume to be strengths. But when we lose control, we see our weakness and let God transform them into strengths. Those who are in charge long enough use their power to crucify others. But the nail side of the cross is the wisdom side of crucifixion. The nail side of dying is the place where character is born! *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ^{v7} so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7 ESV)*

Character begins its life were ego dies - literally dies - and never notices its passing. Jesus alone imparts such character. He calls us to it, ordains us in it and equips us for it.

Become a servant of character this year.
Read the Bible too. It's good for the soul.

Your servant,

Chief

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Christ's

Heart

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