

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
298

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will challenge you with the high cost of following Christ. It involves total self denial! This is the key. We must move off the throne and allow Christ to completely rule our lives. Among other things, this involves taking up our cross every day (Lk. 9:23). Today's letter will refer to "slavery" which reflects one dimension of our relationship with Christ. We will not run from this offensive word for in reality it is our slavery to Christ that produces true freedom!

The Bible word for "servant" is "diakonos" from which we get our English word "deacon". It comes from "dia" which means "thoroughly" and "konis" which means "dust". The idea is that a faithful servant will kick up the dust as he hastens to obey his master. It is found 29 times in the N.T. Scriptures. It is good to be a "servant" of Christ and speedily obey His every command.

The Bible word for "slave" is "doulos". It comes from the root word "deo" which means to "bind or fasten with chains". It is found some 124 times in the N.T. Scriptures. It is also a good thing to be a "slave" of Jesus Christ!

The difference between a "servant" and a "slave" is simple. The "servant" is "hired" by his master, and the "slave" is "owned" by his master. The "servant" has a choice, the "slave" doesn't! The "servant" has rights, and the "slave" doesn't!

As we have said, both words apply to the followers of Jesus. When the mother of James and John asked that her sons have positions of honor on the right hand and left hand of Christ's throne, it caused the ten to be moved with indignation against them. So **"Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (diakonos), and whosoever wants to be first must be your slave (doulos) – 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'" (Matt. 20:25-28).**

Jesus, as you know, was equal with God but willingly gave up all of His rights and condescended to become a slave. The Scriptures are explicit! He did not count His equality with God something to be grasped, but willingly **"made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave (doulos)" (Phil. 2:7).**

Slaves were the lowest class in Roman society. Even freed criminals had more rights than slaves. Slaves had no legal rights at all. They could not have a family or own property. To all intents and purposes they were like an animal or a piece of furniture. They were owned by their masters. When Paul wrote to Rome it is estimated that 35% – 40% of the people in Italy were slaves. Disregarding the shame of slavery, Paul began his letter to Rome by identifying himself as a "slave of Christ Jesus". The Roman letter begins: **"Paul, a servant (doulos -slave) of Christ Jesus" (Rom. 1:1).** As we have said, there is a difference between a servant and a slave. It is sad that the translators have chosen to translate "doulos" as "servant". This translation softens slavery into something more acceptable. The brethren in Rome, however, knew that Paul was a "slave" of Christ Jesus and we need to know it too.

It is also clear that Paul expected all the followers of Christ to also consider themselves as slaves: **“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:16-23).** Each of these underlined words is “doulos” (slave) not “diakonos” (servant). As we have said, we are much less than servants, we are slaves to Jesus Christ. The deliberate choice of this offensive word was not an accident. It was chosen by God to emphasize the proper nature of our relationship with Jesus!

Paul’s repeated reference to slavery reflects the strategy of God. The fact that Jesus selected His Apostles from common peasants is significant. Paul recognized this and wrote: **“Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before him” (1 Cor. 1:26-29).** Since Jesus was not ashamed to be a “slave” we shouldn’t be ashamed to be “slaves” either.

The Law of Moses described two kinds of slaves (See Ex. 21:2-6). One was by law, and the other by love. The law slave had rights. After seven years the law required that he be set free. The love slave, however, gave up his rights. He loved his master so much that he wanted to be his slave forever! His love compelled him to serve without any preconditions. This is what Christ did! Because Jesus became a love slave, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him a name above every name (Phil. 2:9). When we became a love slave to God, He will also exalt us (Lk. 14:11).

Jesus promised: **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:25,26).** The happiest and most fulfilled people on earth are those who lose their life in service to Christ. In surrendering everything, we gain everything. In giving up everything we have, we gain everything He has! In giving up our little life, we gain abundant life! What good is it for a dead man to own the whole world? Dead people can’t enjoy anything, but we can enjoy everything! Eternal life is a prize worth sacrificing everything to obtain. As the late Jim Elliott said: *“He is no fool who gives up the things he cannot keep, to gain the things he cannot lose”*

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce