

ON THE RECEIVING END

It is said that in this world you have two classes of people – “the givers” and “the takers.” Some people think that most people just use others for their own personal gain and interests. In servant leadership the leader is expected to give and not receive anything in return.

If you had to look at the passages Matthew 26:6 – 13; Mark 14:3 – 9; and Luke 7:36 – 50 I am sure that you will notice that there are in fact two different accounts of Jesus being anointed with ointment. The accounts given by Matthew and Mark relate to an incident at the end of the ministry of Jesus, whilst the one in Luke relates to an occasion near the start of his ministry.

When Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him and other guests I am sure that he knew how to treat people, but in the case of Jesus we do see that he failed to treat Jesus with proper courtesy. He decided to instruct his servants not to wash the feet of Jesus possibly because he did not want to be embarrassed by his friends.

It is whilst they are eating, that a woman disturbs the meal and washes the feet of Jesus. Clearly it would seem as if this woman had a bad reputation and was looked down upon by the deeply religious community as being a terrible person. The Bible does not say what sin she was guilty of but if we think of the behaviour and customs of those days it would not be surprising if she had been a prostitute or an adulteress. Such a woman was not welcome in the house of a good Pharisee and in the mind of Simon should be sent away.

However, before Simon could do anything about her presence in his house, the woman had already knelt at the feet of Jesus and opened her alabaster box. Jesus had not done anything to stop her. Clearly, two things provoked Simon to anger – how could a woman with such a bad reputation just come into his house and have the audacity to wash the feet of one of his guests? What was even worse was the fact that Jesus must be a fraud as a man with any spiritual discernment would have known that the woman was a bad woman.

When Jesus compared the behaviour of the woman to the neglect of courtesy on the part of Simon, Jesus pointed out that Simon, in his own home was worse than the woman who though uninvited, had washed, kissed, and anointed the feet of Jesus.

High and Mighty

In some circles of society a pastor is elevated and put on a pedestal. He is after all a very important person and must also act the role. He is the only one who can minister and in most cases will not accept ministry from people below his station or status. As in the case of Simon the Pharisee any ministry from people below him is totally unacceptable. From the scripture portion it is clear that Simon did not know what type of leader Jesus was and as a minimum put Jesus on an equal footing with himself.

Here we find that Jesus did not minister to the woman but rather allowed her to minister to him. Whenever we look at Jesus we see him as the one who is ministering and we forget that there are a number of passages where Jesus was ministered to. Luke 8:1-3 is a perfect example where women from their own means helped and supported the ministry of Jesus.

Whilst we all might recall that Jesus said that it was better to give than to receive, when we are in leadership we are blind to the fact that we need the humility to graciously accept the ministry of others. Even, if they are people, who in our opinion have not reached our level of maturity.

A carnal leader is one who hates the appearance of being in a **subordinate** position or in the place of need when surrounded by **subordinates**. On the other hand a servant leader realises that in the Bible context there is no such thing as a **subordinate**, and that he, as is common with all humanity always stands in the place of need. He recognises that receiving ministry from a follower actually allows the follower to grow in confidence.

The servant leader is unconcerned with image and what people might say of him, and acknowledges his own need, not being afraid of placing himself in a **subordinate** role if it will help others grow into wholeness.

The leader willing to receive ministry from a follower – be it encouragement, correction, or instruction – elevates the follower to a place of worth and usefulness in God’s kingdom. Simultaneously he removes himself from the pedestal of self-importance.

The Lonely Leader

At Bible College I was taught that to be a good pastor, you had to keep a distance between yourself and your congregation. So that is what I did. I was always available to pray for or counsel people, but never allowed them to get close to me. I fell into the trap that most Christian leaders have fallen into. We put ourselves “above” the congregation. I had an image to protect. What would the congregation do if they knew I was human, or say if I was not as regular in prayer and Bible study as I should! If I fail in a project would the congregation still look up to me and would I be able to project the image of perfect leadership.

The exact opposite is true. Nobody wants to spend time with a person who is projecting an image rather than being real. Most of us would rather have a leader who is flawed but real than one who appears flawless but is phoney. God is the only perfect leader who also has the strength of character to handle perfection, and in my experience it was a relief to the congregation and to myself when they saw that I was human and not a robot.

In my estimation seminaries reason as follows: - If, as a leader, you get too close to your followers, they will not respect you as much. Therefore, they will no longer follow you. If we are supposed to follow the example of Jesus then we must ask ourselves how involved was Jesus in the lives of his disciples? And did he keep his distance in an endeavour to make people respect him?

When Jesus was about to be crucified he prayed that if it was possible that this cup may be taken from him. If we were honest and used today’s language then the prayer would have been that of “I do not want to go to the cross. Is there not another way?” Jesus displayed vulnerability and not failure. He was not afraid of asking disciples to accompany him so that they could see him at his worst. This was part of the discipling process.

Accountability is a Two-Way Street

It is said that the higher you go up the ladder, the more inaccessible you are to people and the more hidden your personal life becomes. Many of these leaders demand accountability from those under them but are deliberately inaccessible to those same people. Thus accountability goes in one direction – upward.

One-way accountability is the single most dangerous element found in many leadership structures of today.

First of all it is dangerous for the leader because it places him in a Godlike role that only God is able to fill righteously. Over a period of time the leader in this type of system will develop a secret life that is at odds with his message to others. When this happens the poison of self-deception takes over.

Second, one-way accountability invariably leads to authoritarian abuse of power. Even people with the best intentions succumb as the corrupting influence that unilateral power develops in the heart of fallen mankind. As the leader is not practising what he preaches (“You must be accountable”), he lives by an automatic double standard.

Some leaders try to get past this by establishing a long-distance link with a spiritual leader who becomes their mentor. This does not really work as the mentor can only react to what the leader is telling him. Such a report might not really be a true reflection of what is taking place. The only people who can hold the pastor accountable are those who know the truth of what is taking place on a daily basis. In other words, the people *in the pastor’s congregation*, including his staff.

The servant leader is willing to expose his humanity, including his fears and failings. He realises that his followers are ultimately to look not to him as their leader but to the one true leader – Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the need to look impressive **is not** a part of the thinking of a servant leader.

The “S” Word

Here in all honesty it must be said that the misuse and abuse of one word has stunted and destroyed millions of Christians. Today, millions of people are in rebellion because of how we in the Body of Christ interpret the word **submit**.

The **principle** of submission has been turned into a **cardinal doctrine** of many churches and ministries. In the name of submission people have been told by ministries when they may take a holiday, or even who they should marry.

In the New Testament the principle of submission does **not** have to do primarily with obedience and control. The Greek word used most often for submission is *hupotasso*. The two English words that qualify this particular type of submission are **voluntary** and **mutual**. Paul uses this word in Ephesians (Eph 5:21) Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.

The person who walks in submission of this type communicates an attitude of **humility and collaboration in interchange with others**. Paul uses the exact same word in the next verse dealing with wives in relationship to their husbands. The concept of a **voluntary yielding for the sake of love** was totally foreign to Jewish culture of that day especially between husband and wife. Up to this point, culture had dictated that the wife had no choice but to come under domination and control of the husband. Paul actually introduced a new relationship not based on duty, but on the **mutual and voluntary choice to love**.

People of that era were also familiar with a different word that is translated as submit. The word is *hupotage*, which has to do with control and obedience. It is this word which Paul uses in Galatians (Gal 2:5) to whom not even for an hour did we yield in subjection, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Here he was speaking of the strong pressure on the part of the Judaizers who were compelling Gentiles to become Jewish before converting to Christianity. This particular word for submit **is never** applied in

the New Testament to the relationship of leader/follower. Neither is it used to describe the relationship of man to God.

Unfortunately many leaders teach that you must “come under” your leader in obedience to him. This we call the ***principle of covering*** which is meant to give the idea of a divine protection or umbrella of authority that comes over those who walk in obedience to their leader. This teaching also states that when you are under your covering you are not really responsible for your choices because your leader takes responsibility.

In some circles this concept is considered as a doctrine and the “proofs” for this teaching come from a mixture of **unrelated** incidents in Scripture: the historical account of a pillar of fire and a cloud leading the Israelites through the wilderness; David telling his men not to kill God’s anointed leader, king Saul; Jesus’ description of himself as the good shepherd; and Paul’s admonishment to the church at Corinth that women wear a covering over their heads. Put all these together and you have the modern concept that followers are to come under the control/covering of human leaders.

It is in major contrast that when Jesus speaks of any type of submission it is always directed to the leaders or the ones who want to be great in the kingdom, and they are always **ordered to submit downward and not upward**. Philippians 2:5-7 ([Phi 2:5](#)) and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought:

[\(Phi 2:6\)](#) Christ was truly God. But he did not try to remain equal with God.

[\(Phi 2:7\)](#) Instead he gave up everything and became a slave, when he became like one of us.

To my mind is a perfect example of this kind of submission which has its origin in heaven. In the Godhead, mutual submission is the norm, not the exception, because it is an act of love.

When a person is taught to come under the dominion of another human being we are then moving away from the New Testament into cultish control

Proper submission exists when a servant leader practises rather than preaches. It is a submission rooted in humility and has to do with being a learner. The servant leader knows that he always has much to learn.

He is never an expert but instead wants to grow in understanding. He will try to learn from everyone he meets, but at no time does this mean that he obeys all.

(Luk 7:36) And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

(Luk 7:37) And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

(Luk 7:38) And stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment.

(Luk 7:39) Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

(Luk 7:40) And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

(Luk 7:41) There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

(Luk 7:42) And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

(Luk 7:43) Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

(Luk 7:44) And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head.

(Luk 7:45) Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

(Luk 7:46) My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

(Luk 7:47) Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little.

(Luk 7:48) And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

(Luk 7:49) And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

(Luk 7:50) And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.