

It's not easy to be a Christian. You cannot follow Jesus unless you are ready to deny yourself.
(Billy Graham)



On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

(Romans 9:20-21)

SUBMISSION

GOD-ORIENTED SERVANTHOOD is not something to be endured, but something to be embraced. And there's simply no better way to come to grips with trials and testing than to accept the fact that Christ is the Master and we are the servants. Some people spend their entire lives fighting against this truth and, as a result, miss out on all the joy that comes with it. His joy is a gift that comes *through* trials, not in spite of them.

We can fight against His Lordship tooth and nail, stiffening our backs and refusing to accept His power over our lives, but none of our fighting will make any difference in the truth—the truth that the Lord God has every right to mold and shape us to His pleasure.

Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel."

(Jeremiah 18:3-6)

Christians who struggle with their role under Christ imagine that becoming His servant means that they will have to go

without. They imagine certain rights and privileges will be removed when they submit to Him. But in fact, the opposite is true. When we release ourselves from those invisible bonds that hold us back from Christ, our world of possibilities actually widens. When we practice and live servanthood we gain freedoms never before imagined: freedom from worry, freedom from despair; freedom to rest in the arms of someone more wise, more experienced, more compassionate than anyone else we know.

When we refuse to submit to this good and healthy order, we are, instead, submitting ourselves to a life of frustration, anger, and recurring feelings of hopelessness. Trials will come; they are inevitable. The

only question is: Will we face them with or without the kind of relationship to Christ that will see us through?

Servanthood is an attitude, methodically practiced, that changes our natural inclination toward selfish, protective behavior into a yearning to see and experience every moment of life from God's perspective. It doesn't come naturally; it must be practiced and developed.

With a servant heart, trials become manageable, at times understandable. We are equipped to more quickly see their value for our lives. Without the attitude of servanthood, however, instead of flowing with the trials, we struggle against them. And in that lies only despair.

Servanthood represents a conscious choice to submit to God's will, and in that, it has a close relationship with lordship. Acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord—confessing that He, and He alone, is the one in charge of our life—is the key to peace in the midst of trials. And, in contrast, the key to a life of utter despair and hopelessness, anger over circumstances that come our way, and a life clouded with bitterness is the rejection of Christ's deserved position as Lord.

LEARNING OBEDIENCE

Lordship is at the root of our willingness and ability to become like Him. Jesus understood His responsibility under the Father: obedience.

"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

(Luke 22:42)

From Jesus we learn obedience toward the Father, and the truth of His word. There is a tendency in our society, however, to pull back from the truth in moments of crisis. Instead of confronting the moment from the perspective of heaven, we try to talk around the pain, and rationalize it from the perspective of man.

The result of this dissembling is to effectively demote God from Lord to spectator.

In the painful wake of a school yard shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in which a teacher and four students were gunned down by two boys from the same middle school, a Baptist youth minister was being questioned by a TV reporter. In the interview, the young minister was asked what

he tells those in his charge when offering comfort. How does he explain this horrible event to them? He answered the reporter, "I tell them that it's not God's fault. God didn't pull the trigger."

To be fair, it must be terribly difficult to look into the tear-drenched face of a youngster who has just lost a friend to violence, and tell him the truth. There is surely a strong temptation to explain his pain with words more comfortable to the ears.

Technically, part of the youth minister's answer was correct: God did not pull the trigger; it was not His hand on the gun that day. But either "Jesus is Lord of all," or He is not. We can't pick and choose; we can't have Him in charge when life is comfortable, then relieve Him of all responsibility when life gets hard.

"The Lord kills and makes alive;
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The Lord makes poor and rich;
He brings low, He also exalts.
He raises the poor from the dust,
He lifts the needy from the ash heap
To make them sit with nobles,
And inherit a seat of honor;
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
And He set the world on them."

(1 Samuel 2:6-8)

Job knew. Even sitting in his ash heap, miserable with the loss of virtually everything dear to him, Job had heaven's perspective.

"His wisdom is profound,
his power is vast.
Who has resisted him
and come out unscathed?
He moves mountains
without their knowing it
and overturns them in his anger.
He shakes the earth from its place
and makes its pillars tremble.

*Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Search me and try me, Master today!
Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now,
As in Thy presence humbly I bow.*

He speaks to the sun
and it does not shine;
he seals off the light of the stars.
He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.
He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of
the south.
He performs wonders that cannot be
fathomed,
miracles that cannot be counted.
When he passes me,
I cannot see him;
when he goes by,
I cannot perceive him.
If he snatches away,
who can stop him?
Who can say to him,
'What are you doing?'"

(Job 9:4-12 niv)

TRUST

The rules don't change just because we're unable to explain God's logic. His justice and wisdom are not malleable, but steady and true. God does not adapt to our level of understanding, but steadily encourages us to rise to His.

Are events taking place around you that don't make sense? Are you having a hard time explaining that God's hand is in them? Fine. Then everything is as it should be, for nowhere does it say that the clay is to understand every decision made by the potter.

I don't want to worship or serve a god who plays by my rules; that kind of god is little more than a plaster saint. I prefer to serve a God who is Master and Lord of the universe. Nothing is beyond His grasp. He is never surprised by events taking place in a school yard. And if I don't understand His logic? Fine. That's how it should be. Any god who can be fully explained is no god at all.

*Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Wounded and weary, help me, I pray!
Power—al power—surely is Thine!
Touch me and heal me, Saviour divine!*

*Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!*

(Adelaide A. Pollard)