

# Servanthood

A Topical Sermon

by Charles B. Hodge, Jr.

*“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).*

*“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).*

Jesus *had* to die on the cross. He was that way. For my Lord to let anything else happen to Him would have been a contradiction. Paul said,

Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, . . . (Philippians 2:4-7).

## I. THE SERVANT IN JOHN 13

Turn to John 13. Jesus and the twelve were in the upper room. Ordinarily, somebody in a gathering of this kind would wash everyone else's feet. Who would do it? The low man on the totem pole would. But who wanted to be the low man on the totem pole? The twelve looked at each other and said, “We don't have any servants around here, do we?” Jesus then took a towel and a pan of water and started washing feet. This was the last object lesson of Jesus. This attitude is what builds a church, Proud minds always leave dirty feet. We come together and none of us will do the menial tasks, none of us will volunteer and serve as a servant. Therefore, proud men cannot build a church. Are you a servant?

James and John said, “Lord, I want a throne.” Jesus said, “I think I will hand out some towels,” Are we in the towel business?

Listen to this little poem:

I am like James and John, Lord.  
I size up other people in terms of what they can do  
for me, how they can further my programs, feed

my ego, satisfy my needs, give me strategic advantage.

I exploit people ostensibly for Your sake but really for my own sake.

Lord, I turned to you to get the inside tract and obtain special favors, Your direction for my ambition, Your blank check for what ever I want.

I am like James and John.

Change me, Lord,

Make me a man who asks of You and others, “What can I do for you?” and “What can I give?” rather than “What can I get?”

I think all of us have a little bit of James and John in us.

Jesus said, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus said, “I am in the midst of you as he that serveth” (Luke 22:27). We are not won to win. We are won to serve.

Here is a man who is lost. How do I serve him? I serve him by saving him. But unless I knock on a sinner's door as a servant, I will not save him. I am not over there to tell him off. I am at his door to serve him. The church is here to serve the world, and we will save the world only when we serve the world.

Here is a brother. What does he need? He needs to be edified. How do I serve Him? I serve him by teaching. But if I go to him with the spirit of a know-it-all, I won't teach him anything. But if I humbly open up the word of God and prayerfully and tearfully say, “Lord, help us to get what You want us to get out of this Scripture,” then I will be able to teach him.

Here is a man in need. I must not condescendingly say, “I am rich, so take this dollar. I am more successful than you.” No, No. Here is a man in need, and I cry and share with him. Beloved, God can only use servants. Jesus Christ was a servant. And if you are not a servant, you don't belong to Christ. As the fellow says, “Bloom where you are planted.” Don't be a sensation; just be a servant.

Go back to John 13. I can win any debate on foot washing! Foot washing is not an ordinance

in the church. Brethren, we have stopped foot washing. When was the last time you saw any foot washing? Jesus said we need to have the attitude of a servant. He is saying, "You must not say, 'I am not going to do that deed. I am too good to do it. I have more religion than to stoop and do it.'" Jesus says, "When you are that way, then you are out of it." I wish we hadn't had some of those debates. I don't believe in foot washing as a part of worship. But the attitude, the concept is there. When every member of the church will get down on his knees and wash anyone's feet, then we are going to build churches. I believe in foot washing. I do. I believe in service and servanthood.

Why don't more deacons become elders? I believe that any man who can scripturally qualify as a deacon, if given time, can qualify as an elder. That makes sense. When we raise the wrong questions, we cannot get the right answers. People are always asking me, "Why don't people come to Wednesday night Bible study?" That isn't the right question. The right question is this: "Why did they come Sunday morning?" When they come for the right reason on Sunday morning, then we won't need to plead with them to come on Wednesday night. Therefore, the question is not, "Why don't more deacons become elders?" The question is this: "Why don't more deacons become deacons?" You see, servant deacons will become servant elders. In other words, servant deacons make servant elders. If they misunderstand their job as a deacon, they will misunderstand the role of an elder. The elder shortage is a deacon shortage. Many think they are made deacons as a kind of reward or recognition. They will get their name on the stationery and be thought of as a little more religious than the norm. But, in reality, the office of a deacon is a medium of service to man and God. If you don't make the wrong man a deacon, you will never have the wrong man as an elder.

Any man who is too big to be a deacon is too small to be an elder. I have never had a preacher come to me and say, "The goal of my life is to some day be a deacon in the church." I just want you to step back and look at your goal. I don't care if you want to be an elder, I won't fight you over that goal. But I am saying, "Why do you want to be an elder if you don't want to be a deacon?" Being a deacon is not a necessary nui-

sance one must endure in order to be an elder. A man who learns to serve as a servant and goes out and does what God wants done will, if given time, be given greater responsibilities. An elder is a servant too. A deacon is a servant. A teacher is a servant. A parent is a servant. We are all servants. When we forget this truth, we are going to fail.

I was in a town holding a gospel meeting. I saw in the bulletin that the man with whom I was staying was to become an elder the next Sunday night. I had looked at the church stationery and noticed he wasn't a deacon. While we were riding home one night, I said, "Why aren't you a deacon?" I am not very smart, but I figured that if a man can be made an elder in a few days, he is qualified to be a deacon now. If not, he is going to do a lot of qualifying in the next few days. He was embarrassed and said, "They haven't asked me to be a deacon here." He had been there eight years. Eight years! He had come from Nashville, Tennessee, where he had been an elder at a big church. He said, "Brother Hodge, since I had served as an elder, they thought they would insult me if they asked me to serve as a deacon." May God prevent us from having that kind of attitude! Here was a church that had been deprived of a deacon for eight years because of their pride. We have to get back to the attitude of a servant.

## II. THE SERVANT IN MATTHEW 5

Now turn to Matthew 5. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men." A lot of us try *to act like* a servant, but the Bible says *be* a servant. I would like to show you the difference. When I say I am going to act like a servant, I choose to serve. I am still in control. I will serve here and there, but it will be to impress. It will be to suit myself. I am still in command. A real servant has no grounds upon which to stand. He just goes where he has been sent and does what he has been told to do.

Jesus didn't say, "Go shine your light." We say, "Oh, I will impress Him." So we turn our lights on. That is as phony as a three dollar bill. That is why people get tired of being manipulated, cheated, and deceived. Don't go around shining your light. Jesus said, "Let your light shine." This means that I just turn it on and I am not aware that it is on. I am not doing a thing

because it is impressive. I am just doing it because it is right. It flows out of my nature. It flows out of my life. It flows out of my attitude. I am just that way. *Let your light shine.* This is why we need seed-sowers instead of seed-growers. This is why we need plant-and-water Christians rather than folks who are out trying to trick people into the kingdom of God. We have to have a servant church—servant teachers, servant parents, servant preachers, servant elders.

### III. THE SERVANT IN ACTS 6

Turn to Acts 6. I am going to talk about Philip. The Christians had a little trouble in the Jerusalem church. Who solved the church troubles? Servants did. The apostles said, "We have trouble here. We have some Christians who are not acting like servants." What did the apostles say? They said, "Let us choose seven servants." The Bible says they chose Stephen and whom? Philip. We are introduced in Acts 6 to three men—Stephen, the first Christian martyr; Paul, the persecutor who became a preacher; and Philip, the servant. Where do I find Philip? I find him with a towel. I find him out serving the church. By the way, the Bible says the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied (v. 7). Why? It did so because servants served.

### IV. THE SERVANT IN ACTS 8

Let us go to Acts 8. Notice verse 1: "And Saul was consenting unto his death." There is the persecutor. Look now at verse 2: "And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him." There is Stephen. Now observe verse 5: "And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ." This is the first mission work, right? Who did it? Peter? No. Paul? No. Who did it? One of the new graduates from the college? No. A servant did it.

Servants are color blind. Philip wasn't looking for a big pulpit. As far as I know, he didn't even ask the amount of the salary. I hope that doesn't get back to our elders over here. They might want to hire Philip.

Look at verses 12 and 13. Philip converted Simon the sorcerer. Then notice what happened. The Bible says the church sent Peter and John to Samaria. What did Philip do? Philip could have said, "Where were you men when I started this

work?" They came and Philip is relegated to a back seat. But he could not do what they were doing. In other words, when the apostles came, they were saying, "This is of God; the Samaritans are bonafide members of the body of Christ. No longer do we have class distinction." Philip could have said, "Hey, I did all the work, and you are not going to take all the glory." But do you know what Philip did? Philip said, "I have taken you as far as I can go, and here are Peter and John, apostles of God. Let them preach." Isn't that great? You see, preachers can get along with each other as long as they are all servants, can't they?

About that time an angel said to Philip. "Close down the revival." Philip said, "What? We are reaching a lot of people." But the angel said, "Close it down." Philip said, "Okay. I am a servant." The angel instructed, "Go out to Gaza." If you look at a Bible atlas, you will find that Gaza is somewhere off in southwest Arkansas. It is over in the boondocks, isn't it? It is as far out as a man can get and still be there. Here was Philip. He was at the fork in the road at Gaza. Do you know what he was doing? He was singing, "Oh, how I love Jesus." Now how could he do it? He had closed down a big meeting, he was out in the middle of nowhere, and he was happy. Servants are happy when they are where God wants them to be. About that time the wagon came by and the Spirit said, "Get in that wagon." Philip ran and got in the wagon. Philip was a servant.

### V. THE SERVANT IN ACTS 21

Turn to Acts 21. If I ever debate an atheist, the first question I am going to ask him is this: "What has atheism ever done?" Have you ever visited an atheistic hospital or an atheistic orphan's home? When you think about philanthropy and charity, do you immediately think of an atheist?

Who are our men? Stephen, Saul, and Philip. Let us look at Acts 21:8. Paul entered the house of Philip, the evangelist. If Luke had just said, "Philip," I might not have known which Philip he had in mind. But notice how the Bible tells us about Philip. It says, "Philip . . . who was one of the seven." Who is in Acts 21:8? The same man as the one in Acts 6—a servant.

Paul knocks on Philip's door. Philip says to his wife, "Honey, somebody is at the door." She says, "I am washing dishes. Would you get it?"

Philip goes and opens the door. Let me ask you something. Who killed Philip's best friend? Paul did. What if some man had killed one of our elders and you went to open your door and he was standing on your porch? How would you like it? Paul is a servant. Philip is a servant. What do they do? They embrace. They cry. It is as hard for Paul as it is for Philip. Only Jesus Christ can get Paul and Philip to embrace. Somebody says, "I don't read that in my Bible." I do. Drop down to verse 12. "And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem." Here is Philip's group saying, "Paul, if you go to Jerusalem, you will get stoned like Stephen." What did Paul say? He said, "What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart?" When people are crying and praying over each other, I have an idea they don't mind hugging each other. This is what constitutes a

servant. If a man could have ever hated a man, it was Philip. If he had been there and seen Paul stone Stephen—seen Stephen's angelic face, heard Stephen's prayer, seen Stephen's blood—how could he have ever forgiven him! How do you think Paul felt? Someone has wisely said, "If Stephen had not prayed, Paul would have not preached." As they embraced and cried, Paul must have said, "Philip, I have had nightmares. I have cried bucketfuls of tears over Stephen." Philip must have said, "But, Paul, that was before your conversion. At your conversion God forgave you and I forgave you." Don't you know they talked about forgiveness. They were servants.

### CONCLUSION

Jesus said, "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11).

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