

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

**Leading with
Unselfish Authority**

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Leadership in the Kingdom of God

God's way of authority and leadership in His kingdom starkly contrasts with the ways that are normally practiced in the world. We usually see those in authority looking out for themselves and their own interests as major priorities. But God gives authority in the Body of Christ – His Church – in order to provide well for every one of His children, for every member of His body. He wants each one to grow and develop individually and relationally: His priority is to prepare all of His children for a huge but unseen eternity with Him and other loving people. The Bible shows this loving purpose when extending His leadership authority to within the family and to the government of all the people within a region (which could be called a land, nation, state, or community).

Jesus provides the perfect example of servant leadership. We get to see key Scriptures that especially reveal what it is, and see major Biblical themes that are fulfilled by its practice. We also get to see ways that our Father leads His children to move into its practice. Of course, this life features *agape* love, which fully puts aside seeking for oneself in order to seek better for God's good to others.

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I call the New American Standard Bible the NAS or NASB. I add boldface to specific words and phrases in Scriptures to add my emphasis for discussion.

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Chapter 1

GOD AS OUR CREATOR AND LOVING FATHER

God created every person, including you. Each person is created in God's image, but we also fell and have features that are not like Him, and we are very limited compared to Him. He created everything else: huge mountains, the whole earth, the far larger sun, and much more. He has also created a wonderful heaven that no one sees before he dies physically.

God works on a level larger than anyone can imagine, but also in the tiny details. He numbers the hairs on your head: He knows you far better than you know yourself. God also cares for each person and his or her development and growth for eternity. As we shall see, He cares for each person as His creation, but He loves each person in Christ Jesus as His personal child. This is a far more special care.

God is good to us, but life on earth is full of problems caused by the willful, greedy nature of mankind and the devil. This has brought much sickness, pain, and death to people. Many have treated other people without any regard for what is

good for them, sometimes even causing pain for the pleasure of hurting others. Every one of us has also done some bad things that have hurt others. The devil (Satan) also works through demons to stir up evil desires and deeds in us.

God knows that mankind has been unable to overcome all of this sin, this evil that has caused so much pain and suffering. God wants good for us now and in all eternity, and so He has done something wonderful. He came to mankind as the man Jesus Christ, so that He could pay the just penalty for all of our sins. This gives each person an opportunity to know God as a very interested, loving Father.

God provides even more for us in Christ. God wants us to take on Jesus' wonderful, loving nature while we live on earth, so that we will continue to grow and develop in Him. This helps us to be well prepared to live with God and with other loving people for all eternity.

God provides servant leadership to help us grow. It is very different from the natural ways of mankind. Jesus modeled it for us. In order to understand His model better, we need to realize who Jesus really is.

Our Creator God Who Emptied Himself

John begins his Gospel by identifying a very special Word who created everything:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1-3)

Who is this Word? Later in John 1 we see that this Word is Jesus before He came to earth as a baby that grew into a man.

*And the **Word became flesh**, and **dwelt among us**, and **we beheld His glory**, glory as of the **only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.** (John 1:14)*

*For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** were realized [lit., **came into being**] through **Jesus Christ.** (v. 17)*

God came to mankind as Jesus. His human body did not create the whole earth. The eternal Word, Creator of everything, took off His almighty strength to become a helpless baby, a tiny part of His own creation:

*...Christ Jesus...existed in the form of God...but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:5-7)*

Why did God the Word reduce Himself? Because He loves us, and we need so much to see God in this way. John 5:19 shows that Jesus did only what He saw God the Father doing:

*...Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something **He sees the Father doing**; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does **in like manner.** (John 5:19)*

Jesus did only what the Father did, and did it in the same way. Therefore Jesus shows us exactly what God would be like if He would take on the limitations of being in a human body like our own. Living a perfect life on earth, Jesus provided a perfect example for us to follow (1Peter 2:21) and other essentials that no one has been able to provide for himself. This includes a just salvation from our sins and a blessed eternity with God and with other loving people who receive Jesus' redeeming sacrifice.

God Calls Us in Christ to Share in His Nature

These purposes for Jesus' coming fit into God's wonderful purpose for mankind: to transform each of us from glory to glory into the image of Christ Jesus (2Cor. 3:18, Rom. 8:28-30), so that we can share in His divine nature (2Peter 1:4). He changes our very nature – who we really are and what we are really like.

Romans 3 shows that no person except Jesus begins with God's full nature: all of us "*have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23). Therefore our fully just and righteous God needed to find a way to justly save people who begin with a fallen nature. God did this by Jesus' blood sacrifice on the cross.

Jesus' sacrifice came after He lived a perfect life on earth, so that we can see exactly how God calls for us to live. To the extent that we are living like Jesus, we are sharing in God's nature and manifesting it to other people – true glory! This helps others to turn to God and be saved by Jesus' sacrifice, and this destroys the works of the devil (1John 3:8). As a primary goal, he tries to separate mankind from God and His love, but Jesus reconciles us (2Cor. 5:18-21).

Indeed, the devil realizes God's loving purpose for mankind, so that he works as hard as he can against it and us, striving diligently to corrupt or destroy people. But Almighty God places just and merciful limits on what the devil and his army of demons can do, so that God can fully save us in Christ for eternity. In fact, God's loving purpose for us begins on earth, but most of it is fulfilled beyond our brief lives on earth. And our life of love in hard conditions on earth serves to prepare us to live well with

God and with other loving people for eternity.

Knowing why the Word came to earth helps us to appreciate what God was doing by coming to us as Jesus. By becoming fully like us, He shows us how God wants us to live – not merely give us commands that do not change our hearts. Indeed, notice that obeying a good, hard command requires diligent self-control but not necessarily a transformation – not a change in our real nature, our hearts. God calls for us to be transformed into His divine nature, into the image of Christ Jesus.

We can see clearly that God does a very special work for everyone who is in Christ Jesus, and this will last forever. This special provision in Christ cannot be obtained any other way.

God's Totally Unselfish Love for Us in Christ

Mankind's love often contains self-seeking, but God's love to His children does not: our Father never seeks good for Himself at a real cost to our total eternal welfare. That is against *agape* love. We shall see this thoroughly from the Bible in Chapters 4-7, but we need to realize this feature of God's love in order to realize the true nature of servant leadership (Chapters 2-3). A servant-leader looks out for the personal interests of those he (she) leads above his own personal interests.

We have seen a little bit of how Jesus provided this kind of leadership for us. He was God the Word, the Creator of all things, who could create anything He needed. But mankind was in a total mess and was helplessly unfit for eternal life with God or each other. In order to meet our great need, God the Word put aside His ability to provide anything that He wanted for Himself

and became a helpless baby, totally unable to provide anything that He wanted for Himself. As Jesus grew into a man, He was able to provide more for Himself by His own strength, but He kept His non-self-seeking attitude throughout His life on earth – doing only what His Father was doing (John 5:19, Matt. 4:2-4). This attitude culminated in His death, which is described below:

*²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an **example** for you to **follow** in His steps, ²²who committed **no sin**, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept **entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously**; ²⁴and He Himself **bore our sins** in His body on the cross, **that we might die to sin and live to righteousness**; for **by His wounds you were healed**. ²⁵For you **were continually straying** like sheep, but **now** you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1Peter 2:21-25)*

Jesus gave us this great blessing by being totally unselfish as He entrusted Himself to His Father and His leading. Notice that Father God did and always does judge righteously, but He does allow injustices to exist before He makes all things fully just and right for everyone within eternity. We can fully trust Him to be completely just and righteous to everyone, because He paid a huge price to add love justly for His helplessly unfit children in Christ Jesus. This can help us to embrace servant leadership in practice, because we can more fully stop seeking foremost for our personal interests in order to serve what is best for others. And as we see in Chapters 3-7, God builds His whole kingdom on this foundation of servant leadership.

Chapter 2

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

We have seen how God the Word emptied Himself of His ability to provide anything that He wanted for Himself in order to provide better for the needs of others. Consider Phil. 2:2-9:

*²Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³**Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;** ⁴do not merely **look out** for your own personal interests, but also **for the interests of others.** ⁵**Have this attitude in yourselves** which was also in **Christ Jesus**, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a **bond-servant**, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him... (Phil. 2:2-9)*

A servant (v. 7) submits “getting what he wants for himself now” in order to serve another better. A servant-leader holds fast to God’s ways for his people while submitting his personal interests to theirs. If a leader listens to God and holds fast to God’s will instead of his own, and if his heart regards those

under his authority as more important than himself because of God's love for them, then he loves, leads, serves, and submits to those under his authority, even as Jesus did as our Example.

Jesus' ministry to mankind – especially to His disciples and to all of us through them – shows us the real nature of servant leadership. His leadership was decisive, but always firmly for the interests of God and other people above His own personal wants. This heart-attitude is the key issue (v. 3-5). In Chapters 2-3 we shall consider a few Scriptures that especially reveal Jesus' heart-attitude that we should also have in ourselves.

Jesus Illustrates His Heart-Attitude Toward His Disciples

In John 13 Jesus illustrated His heart-attitude in all of His ministry to His disciples. He also called them and us to minister to one another in the same way. This illustration and the record of Jesus' ministry in the four Gospels reveal the true nature of "servant leadership". Jesus' discussion with Peter in John 13:6-10 shows a specific kind of serving and washing that we are to do for one another. Let us see His illustration for His disciples and us. Consider John 13:6-11:

⁶So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do **you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.**"

⁸Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but **is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.**"

¹¹For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this

reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

This washing goes far beyond washing feet. Jesus had fully cleaned His 11 disciples spiritually (v. 10-11). In John 15:3 Jesus told them: ***"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."*** Every disciple of Jesus must first come to Him to be bathed completely in His blood and by His word. Then he is fully clean, so that he can fellowship with God in His pure holiness, which is a source of blessed growth in Christ. But as he continues in his walk with Jesus, he might sin for many reasons: immaturity, lacking faith, the surfacing of some unresolved impurities in his heart, etc. His feet get dirty with sin in his walk with Jesus, and they need cleaning again.

In v. 12-17 Jesus clearly taught them that He was illustrating the servant leadership that they should do with one another:

¹²"So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.'"

Notice the clearly stated situation. Jesus used His authority as "the Lord" to serve those whom He led with that authority. Jesus' ministry to His disciples in the Gospels shows His service to His Father and His disciples, plus His regard for others' needs as more important than His own personal needs (for example,

John 4:34). Remember again how God the Word put aside His ability to create anything that He wanted for Himself in order to help us people who were unable to help ourselves.

Three times Jesus exhorted us to do to one another as He did to His disciples (v. 14, 15, 17). How do we do what Jesus did? We should be helping our brethren turn to Jesus to get their feet clean: to remove the dirt that has come as they have walked imperfectly with Him. As Jesus did then, we do the tangible work to help people get their “feet clean”, and God does the real work inside them. Our tangible work is to set up God’s inner cleansing “*by the washing of water with the word*” (Eph. 5:26, in Chapter 3). A practice of washing real feet might be useful as a reminder for the spiritual work we should be doing, but washing real feet is not the real substance of our work.

John 13:3-4 provides a key insight to help a disciple to serve others in this cleansing way, and also to humble himself enough to receive this service from another disciple:

*Jesus, **knowing** that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that **He had come forth from God** and was **going back to God**, got up from supper, and **laid aside His garments**, and taking a towel, He **girded Himself**.*

Jesus knew who He was in God, so that He was free to look like and be a servant instead of maintaining a leadership image to His disciples. Indeed, this brief time of Jesus’ looking like and being their servant represented what Jesus actually did for them all of His time with them on earth: served what their loving Father wanted for them as a higher priority than getting Himself served.

Chapter 3

LEADERS AS SERVANTS

Heb. 13:17 shows key features of servant leadership:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

God does give some believers authority with accountability over other believers for their well-being, and He commands them to submit to and obey these leaders. Believers who do not obey or submit cause grief to their leader when he gives his account of them to God, and they experience unprofitable problems. V. 17 suggests that these problems are unnecessary.

Notice how this leader is an unselfish servant, serving God and seeking good for his people: he gives an account to God, and he unselfishly grieves for his people who suffer personal loss for causing a damaging report.

Peter put servant leadership into practice. He had apostolic authority and asserted it in 1Peter 1:1, so that readers could know the truth about the authority of this epistle. But when he addressed the elders in 1Peter 5, he did not mention being an

apostle, but called himself an elder like them. This could help them receive his message from God. In v. 2-3 Peter instructed them in servant leadership: not to lord it over those allotted to their charge, but prove to be examples to the flock; and not to exercise oversight for greedy gain, but willingly and with eagerness according to the will of God. Like Peter, the elders were to be examples for those under their authority and were to value God's will and the others' interests above their own greedy gain – above the self-seeking found easily in the world.

God insists that His Church and kingdom will have servant leadership, even while leaders in the world naturally lord their authority over those under them. Consider these Scriptures:

*And sitting down, He [Jesus] called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone **wants to be first**, he shall be last of all, and **servant of all**." (Mark 9:35)*

*And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as **rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them**; and their great men exercise **authority over them**. But it is **not so among you**, but whoever wishes to become **great among you** shall be **your servant**; and whoever **wishes to be first among you** shall be **slave of all**. For even the **Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many**." (Mark 10:42-45)*

*And He [Jesus] said to them, "The **kings of the Gentiles lord it over them**; and those who have **authority over them** are called 'Benefactors.' ²⁶But it is **not this way with you**, but the one who is the **greatest among you** must **become like the youngest**, and the leader like the servant. For who is **greater**, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am*

among you as the one who serves.” (Luke 22:25-27)

In Luke 22:26, the NAS translation into good English gives a softer contrast than in the Greek: ***“But you not so!”*** Jesus explained the servant leadership that He had modeled for His disciples is the opposite of what they had seen and experienced in the world (the Gentiles), but they must and will move into this servant leadership. This is the way His kingdom will operate! Indeed, I conclude that in His kingdom I can lead anyone only to the extent that I can serve him or her. (We shall return to these Scriptures in Chapter 6.)

How a Godly Authority Is to Submit

God puts authority in long-term relationships in the Church, the family, and each region of earth (through government). In this section we examine God’s instructions in Eph. 5-6 to people that He gives authority to lead in His Church and at home.

Eph. 5:23 tells mankind that the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the Head of the Church. This is true authority, and v. 25-26 tell husbands, ***“love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”*** The success rate of husbands loving their wives like Christ loved the Church is poor in the Church and far worse outside of the Church. The key problem is that most husbands lack Christ’s servant-attitude in their authority, often not realizing that God calls them to this attitude. In order to have it for our own wives and in the Church, consider the context of v. 23-26.

Eph. 5:18-21 describes the Spirit-filled life in Christ:

*¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled with the Spirit**, ¹⁹**speaking** to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and **making melody** with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰**always giving thanks** for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹and **be subject to one another** in the fear of Christ.*

I should correct a little mistranslation of v. 21 from the Greek, which says, “**being subject to one another....**” The five boldfaced participles in v. 19-21 specify characteristic features of the Spirit-filled life of v. 18, and the one-another’s in v. 19 and 21 apply especially in the Church, the Body of Christ.

The key insight for us is given in v. 21. In the Church we have different levels of authority, but we are being subject to one another. Of course, those who are under the authority of another person are being subject to him voluntarily – submitting to him. But there is a more surprising idea here. One who is in authority has a way to submit to those under his (or her) authority. Phil. 2 and Jesus’ example for us to follow show this way: the authority regards the best interests of those under his authority as more important than his own personal interests – servant leadership.

Eph. 5 immediately applies this servant leadership in the Church to husbands and wives in the family. In fact, the relation of v. 21 to v. 22 is much tighter in Greek than in the English translations that I have seen. Therefore I translate v. 21-22 literally (you can see the NAS translation of v. 21-22 soon):

*²¹being subject [= submitting] to one another in fear of Christ,
²²the wives to their own husbands as to the Lord.*

V. 22 does not have its own verb, but English translations

rightly insert the verb of v. 21: “the wives being subject to their...” My point is that this feature of the Spirit-filled life in the Church is very tightly connected to the relationship of husbands with their wives. Now let us see the NAS translation of Eph. 5:21-27 and discuss v. 25-27:

*²¹and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. ²²Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For **the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.** ²⁴But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. ²⁵**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,** ²⁶**so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,** ²⁷**that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.***

V. 23 says clearly that the husband is the head of his wife like Christ is the Head of the Church. We have seen Christ's servant leadership of the Church, His disciples: He used God's authority to provide what they needed instead of serving Himself foremost. Jesus submitted to His disciples by treating their needs as a greater priority than getting Himself served, even suffering greatly and dying so that they (and we also) can live. V. 25-27 tell each husband to love his wife in that way, saying again how Christ loved His Church: the Head gave up His own personal well-being in order to provide for her needs. A priority in any wife's needs is to grow and develop in Christ.

V. 26 identifies the Godly results produced in the Church as

Jesus did not serve Himself, but instead did all that God the Father wanted and only what He wanted (John 5:19). Eventually Jesus will be served very well, even without working to serve Himself. He will eventually get a glorious, holy, and blameless Church as a Bride with no spot or wrinkle, which will be fulfilling to Him whose nature is unselfish *agape* love. In the same way, *“he who loves his own wife loves himself”* (Eph. 5:28).

In Eph. 5:33 Paul concluded: *“Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to **love** his own wife even as himself; and the wife must see to it that she **respects** her husband.”*

In order for the head to put v. 22-27 into Godly practice, he must realize that submitting or being subject is to be done by the submitter. This is a wife’s voluntary action and he is not to force it, even as Christ Jesus works in our lives to produce our voluntary submission as He respects our God-given wills.

A wife can more easily submit to her husband if she knows that he is listening to God and has her best interests in his heart – realizing that he loves her. The most effective way a husband can help his wife to submit to him as to the Lord is to *agape* love her and to let the Holy Spirit lead him as well as he can at his level of development. The command to *agape* love her in Eph. 5:25 and 33 is to unselfishly put her well-being above seeking for himself (this love is discussed further in Chapter 4).

For her part, she can encourage him to seek the Lord by her respect for him at his level (v. 33). He is like the rest of mankind and knows in his heart that he does not hear God perfectly, and he can easily get discouraged. Therefore he needs her respect,

even if some of his actions cannot be respected (see below).

Finally, Eph. 6:1-4 provides instructions for another family relationship that clearly contains God-given authority: *“**Children, obey your parents in the Lord...**”*⁴*Fathers, do **not** provoke your children to **anger**; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”* It is easy for children to get provoked to anger, even when parents do what they should. V. 4 warns parents against needlessly provoking their children to anger, to be sensitive to this danger. Parents provide a strong expression of God’s nature to their children – whether or not this is accurate – and this can affect their relationship with Him. V. 4 is fulfilled well with servant leadership, which does include firm discipline with totally unselfish *agape* love whenever this is good.

Does v. 1 mean that children should obey parents who tell them to murder, reject Jesus, or ...? No! If children are able to make a choice, they are to obey the Lord who told them to obey their parents in the Lord along with other commands. Children are not to obey parents if they command their children to sin. In fact, a parent who commands his child to sin is truly not a “parent in the Lord”. (To add balance in this paragraph, v. 2 tells children to honor their parents, which can apply at any time.)

There is a feature of authority in leadership that v. 1-4 make very clear. God’s establishment of authority of one generation over the next clearly does not suggest His favor of the earlier generation. Indeed, authority, ability, or an esteemed job is totally unrelated to a person’s value to God. 1Peter 3:7 confirms this point: *“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives*

*in an understanding way, as with someone **weaker**, since she is a woman; and **show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.***” This point is illustrated further by the Body of Christ (Chapter 5).

An Example of an Authority Submitting

In this section I explain how I submit to my wife Nita even while leading her in Christ. I shall appraise our relative strengths and weaknesses so that we can see how they do not need to be a major issue in leading with authority.

I value God’s work in her as highly as I want it in me. We have agreed that Christ Jesus should be the real head of our home, and that as the husband, I am the visible head. We both want God to lead us, but we can fail to “hear” His leading. We also receive God’s free forgiveness that cost Jesus so much. Jesus is our loving Lord, so that “who is first to be right” is truly not an issue.

Nita and I have different ways that we usually hear God. My most frequent way to hear God is especially slow, and Nita’s is quick and with unusual sensitivity. If our initial opinions about what He is saying to us are different, I estimate that she is right perhaps 80% of the time. But I am the authority in our home, I consider each of our opinions for what they are, and I make decisions with authority as needed.

With this weakness, how can I lead well? God knows each of our weaknesses and guides us with love and great wisdom at a good level of difficulty in discernment. His calling for me to lead our home does not depend on how often I am first to be

right. Instead, I need to be humble enough to want His leading over my ego or my “self” that would mislead me. I want and respect Nita’s input as I seek to hear from God and do His will, so that this is not a power struggle between us as we both seek God’s and the other’s interests above our own. By respecting my wife’s discernments as a good but fallible source of God’s guidance to us, I get help in my own discernment of what He is saying to us. I also free her from the “impossible” load of needing to be right in every discernment: she is free to speak her opinion to me before she is sure that it is right.

Therefore I need to hear God without being intimidated about my weaknesses. Because I realize the above truths and also God’s ability and desire to communicate to me – His child with my current set of strengths and weaknesses – I can provide servant leadership as firmly and decisively as God wants it to be.

Indeed, leaders in the Church should realize that they will not be the only ones through whom God will provide His insights. 1Cor. 12:22-25 even suggests that God might give some needed insights for the Body of Christ through members whom many people regard to be “less important” than an honored leader:

*On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, ²⁴whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But **God** has so composed the body, **giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,** ²⁵so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the*

same care for one another.

(V. 24-25 will be considered from the perspective of God's great care for everyone in His body in Chapter 5).

In this example, notice how prideful self-seeking can treacherously undermine servant leadership. As we shall see in Chapter 4, God shows His solution for this problem.

Chapter 4

LOVE VS. SELF-SEEKING

“God is love” (1John 4:8, 16). Jesus was love in action on earth as He manifested God’s love (John 5:19). God’s first word to the servant-leaders of the home is, *“Husbands, **love** your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for her”* (Eph. 5:25). Love also fulfills the Law (Rom. 13:8-10).

Here we examine the real nature of this *agape* love. We find that the greatest enemy to this love is not hate, but seeking foremost for oneself. We shall also see how to co-operate with God’s work to take each of us beyond this self-seeking.

Agape (= Love): What It Is and What It Is Not

More than any other Scripture, 1Cor. 13:4-7 tells what love is and is not. Indeed, realizing its opposite helps us to understand the real meaning of love, so that we can live better in Christ. Consider the 16 qualities of *agape* love in v. 4-8a:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all

*things. Love **never fails**.*

All of the qualities together provide a picture that conflicts with common ideas about “love”. *Agape* love goes far beyond mere good attitudes or actions toward another: I can have or do them while bragging arrogantly, rejoicing in unrighteousness, being self-seeking or easily provoked, etc. Hate, a feeling of intense dislike and hostility against another, is not the opposite of this love. I can hate patiently and without jealousy or bragging or being arrogant, etc.

What is the opposite of *agape*? Every quality, 16 out of 16, specifically opposes and corrects a self-seeking heart-attitude and value system. Consider how each quality of *agape* love corrects a problem caused by self-seeking, which pulls me:

- * to be impatient with others as I look for what I want
- * to be jealous and be too concerned for myself to be simply kind
- * to brag often and be arrogant
- * to act unbecomingly when I am resisted or overlooked
- * to seek its own (specifying the central issue)
- * to be easily provoked and be very sensitive to a wrong suffered
- * to rejoice in anything that I want, whether or not it is the truth
- * to poorly bear, believe, hope, or endure things from others
- * to fail often to provide well for others as I seek first for myself

God’s greatest commands are to love Him and our neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40), and He often commands us to love one another (1Thes. 4:9, 1Peter 1:22, 4:8-10, 1John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, 2John 1:5). Therefore love is a command. We respond to any command by choosing to obey it fully or else disobey or ignore it fully or partly. Therefore I choose to love or not.

My choice to love depends totally on what is in me and how I relate to my commander – God! I do not base my choice to love on a good feature or merit of the one I am to love, but my choice to *agape* is given like grace: *agape* is a free gift and cannot be earned. If I am seeking foremost for myself, then I lack interest in providing good for you unless that helps me. Love chooses to reject the self-seeking in my heart in order to seek for the good of another. *Agape* corrects self-seeking and also ministers to any indifference or hatred I have.

Self-seeking creates problems whenever people relate. Unless people consistently *agape* love others, how can heaven stay a great place to live? But if I keep loving by His Spirit, then I relate well to others, seek their good, and might help all of us get prepared for our eternal futures. Indeed, love is a key to fulfilling God's purpose for our lives on earth and all eternity (p. 8).

What does *agape* love look like? There is no simple answer to fit all situations. Therefore our loving Father sent Jesus to show us love by a perfect Example instead of telling us a complicated answer.

One way it is complicated is that the specific expression of love to each person depends on what he needs. To illustrate, any parent should know that a sensitive, obedient, and compliant child needs a different expression of parental love and instruction than a rebellious, strong-willed child – but both need love.

To illustrate again, 1Thes. 5:14 shows that 3 kinds of people have different needs, even while all need the patience of *agape*: “Now we urge you, brethren, ***admonish the unruly, encourage***

the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.”

The weak lack strength: encouraging and admonishing (correction by confrontation) do not give the needed strength. For example, encouragement to run is useless for a person with no legs, but can be good for one with legs: encouragement is good only if one has the capacity to do the thing. In contrast, the fainthearted have the needed strength, but are not using it. Instead of help, they need encouragement to use their own strength, and correction by confrontation usually confirms their insecurities and causes them to withdraw farther. But the unruly are actively doing wrong things: they need admonishing (firm correction) to do better and grow – not help or encouragement.

Therefore God instructs us to provide what is truly good for each person, which depends on what he needs in that situation.

As we saw, God tells those to whom He has given His ultimate authority in the home: *“Husbands, love your wives”* and *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger”*. And Jesus told His disciples to *“love one another, just as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). This is for everyone’s relationships in the Church. *“...You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matt. 22:39). This is for anyone in or out of the Church or family: our neighbor is the one next to us at any time, the one we are interacting with. This chapter is intended to show us better what love means, so that we will indeed love without the self-seeking.

God’s Totally Unselfish Love – Especially for Us in Christ

We began this book by emphasizing God’s great loving care for everyone in His creation as He relates closely to everything

as its Creator. Mankind is created in His image, but we also naturally misunderstand Him because His capacities are different and because we naturally have a self-seeking nature.

The Bible shows God's far greater capacity than mankind by His care and provision for the lilies, grass, and birds (Matt. 6:25-34), and by His numbering the hairs on each person's head (Matt. 10:30). This last example also illustrates the special fatherly love that Father God has for each child in Christ. And the Bible (for example, 1John 1:1-2:2) makes it clear that anyone has the potential for becoming one of His children in Christ. This can help us respect each person – including “myself” – even if he or she seems to have no strength or influence.

Now that we have seen the totally unselfish nature of *agape* love, let us establish the clearly stated Biblical truth that “**God is love**” (1John 4:8, 16). We should do this because mankind's self-seeking naturally causes many to misunderstand and misinterpret His commands to love Him above all, to worship only Him, and to give Him glory and praise. Let us consider how God gave all of these commands to help people.

Consider God's foremost command: to love Him with all that we are (Matt. 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-30). How does loving God above all help people? It causes love to abound to people: loving God causes us to obey His commandments (John 14:15, 23), and He commands us to *agape* love others unselfishly (p. 26). This gives extra goodness and blessings to those who receive this love. God loves them fully, better than the lover does, and this means that He seeks for their best.

My love relationship with God equips me to unselfishly love

others more consistently and effectively: *“We love, because He first loved us”* (1John 4:19). If I receive His great love for me when I do not deserve it, then I will be able to love Him more and will be better equipped to freely love other undeserving people.

God also provides for anyone who loves others because he loves God. As a part of His complete wisdom, God knows how He created each of us and how to best satisfy and fulfill us for all eternity. Loving God helps one to go beyond a natural desire to seek things for himself and takes him out of self-directed motives that fail to deeply satisfy himself. Indeed, self-seeking never stays satisfied, but is driven to further feed its lustful appetite. This helps us realize how God created us: to get fulfilled more by loving others – *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”*.

To worship only God is to stay dedicated to Him. In our fallen world there are many alternatives to worshipping the true God. Our Father is the real source of all life and goodness, and relating to Him provides vital ingredients for our eternal life. Worshipping only Him helps our hearts to want to hear and receive all that He provides.

God also loves other people. Being dedicated to His nature and character causes us to want to love like Him. And He gladly leads His willing children into loving well, which greatly pleases our unselfish God. Therefore worshipping God helps others by our better love for them and also by their getting to see our true worship. Both ways help them to regard Him favorably and with respect, which helps them also to turn to Him and receive all they need for their eternal good.

“To give God the glory” gives Him credit or recognition for a good action or result. (More generally, Biblical “glory” is the manifestation of internal qualities). For many reasons most people like to be honored, and so they naturally tend to see God’s calls to worship only Him and to give Him glory and praise from their own self-seeking perspective.

Again, this self-seeking perspective misleads us. God is the wise Creator of everything, and He gave mankind a little wisdom to use with our little knowledge. Opinions of people who know and understand so little do not disturb God’s ideas. If no one approved of one of God’s qualities, He (who knows all truth) would not be shaken by our combined ignorance. If He wants our recognition, He can merely open our eyes to see Him – the Creator of everything, so that the whole earth is like a tiny speck of dust in what He has made.

God has a different goal in calling His people to love and worship Him and give Him glory and praise. As we have been seeing, God is love, and doing any of this helps people. It helps God only in that He is love, so that He deeply cares that people get what they need – and mankind’s greatest needs are eternal.

How does giving God praise and glory help people? We naturally focus on the visible manifestations, the things that work. God reveals His nature and character in a far more gentle way, which helps us adopt His less spectacular qualities for ourselves. To do this, He made Himself invisible to us and made it necessary for us to relate to Him to receive all that we need for our eternal good. Therefore with love our Father teaches us to look for the invisible source of the visible results, to go beyond

our natural impressions in a world of sin and false appearances.

Our loving Father calls us to be His children and to grow into His likeness – His character or nature. We get to be increasingly like Him. Then people will often regard us as the source of blessings. If we give God the glory when providing for others, then we help them know God's love and relate directly to Him, the invisible source of goodness and eternal life. If we keep the glory, then people might join us but miss the truth and real life.

Jesus again is the perfect example for us. He delivered people, healed, and performed other miracles, so that the visible source of these mighty blessings became the center of attention. Especially the Gospel of John shows that this visible source directed the disciples' attention to His invisible Father, and later they would teach this to the people. This has helped all of us to connect with and relate to invisible God. As we can see from Luke 7:31-35, the key issue is to receive God's invisible Spirit, whether He comes from one visible source or another (in v. 31-35, John or the man Jesus).

Both worshipping God and giving God glory help the glorifier to grow in good ways for all eternity. My redirection of honor and favorable attention from myself to God in true worship is unselfish love both to God and to others who seek Him better. Giving Him worship, glory, and praise helps me to grow in love and turn away from pride. These benefits are vitally needed for our blessed eternity with God and with other loving people. And the abounding love for many pleases our totally unselfish God.

Chapter 5

THE BODY OF CHRIST

In Chapter 4 we saw how God is love, so that He seeks what is truly good specifically for each believer in Jesus Christ. It is vital for every believer to realize how important each of us is to Almighty God as we relate to others. A leader especially needs to realize this, because God calls him to serve His people with authority. God's care and desire for good for each of His children is illustrated well by the Body of Christ in 1Cor. 12.

1Corinthians is a single letter written to a church – all of the believers living in Corinth. They were relating poorly with each other. Paul (their Apostle) described their behavior to them in 1Cor. 1-4. In 1Cor. 5-11 he showed the Corinthian church how to handle many specific relational problems. In 1Cor. 12, insights from considering the Body of Christ expose this key underlying cause of the many relational problems: each believer was seeking foremost for himself instead of seeking good for the body. 1Cor. 13 shows *agape* love as the cure for this self-seeking and the sick relationships in their body, and 1Cor. 14 provides an example of how *agape* fixes a problem in their body.

We examined *agape* in Chapter 4. This can help us see how

1Cor. 1-14, especially 12-14, fits together with love as the cure for their sickness. Therefore we examine this fit now.

At the time of this letter, the Corinthians were contending with one another, trying to exalt themselves or their own group. Notice their boastful attitude in their quarrels and divisions:

*...there are **quarrels among you**. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephus," and "I of Christ". (1Cor. 1:11-12)*

*For since there is **jealousy and strife among you**, are you not **fleshly**, and are you not **walking like mere men**? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men? (1Cor. 3:3b-4)*

*So then, let no one **boast** in men... (1Cor. 3:21)*

*Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that **no one of you** will become **arrogant** in behalf of **one against the other**. (1Cor. 4:6)*

Paul brought out this key point in 1Cor. 1-4: at the time of his letter, the Corinthians were relating terribly – boasting arrogantly!

Notice how 1Cor. 12 addresses the problems in 1Cor. 1-4. 1Cor. 12:27 gives the key to 1Cor. 12: "**Now *you* are **Christ's body**, and **individually members of it**."** V. 24-25 show the care that both God and each member of a healthy body have for every other member: "*...But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the **members may have the same care for one another**."* V. 7 also brings out a feature of any healthy body: "*But to each one is given the **manifestation of the Spirit for the common good**.*"

V. 12, 14, and 20 all tell us that there are many members, but one body. V. 17-19 ask: *“If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now **God has placed the members**, each one of them, in the body, **just as He desired**. If they were all one member, where would the body be?”* There are many different kinds of members of the same body, each contributing in its own good way. A good body has eyes, but also ears, hands, feet, and many other different members.

Why is this obvious truth so necessary? The Corinthians' behavior in 1Cor. 1-4 demonstrated that too many were trying to be at or near the top. This kept them from the priority of caring for one another and the common good, and from fitting into the Body of Christ in the ways that God designs for each member. This is confirmed by examining what is immediately after v. 7-27.

In 1Cor. 12:28-30 Paul listed gifts in an order:

*²⁸And God has appointed in the church, **first apostles, second prophets**, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹**All are not apostles**, are they? **All are not prophets**, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? ³⁰All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?*

The self-seeking Corinthians could recognize an order in this list: the authority and influence that each gift provided the gifted one. This perspective would cause many to seek the highest gifting for what it would give him instead of what the body needs. Specifically, too many arrogant believers would seek to

be an apostle, prophet, or teacher. This would be a very unhealthy body – like a body that had four eyes instead of two eyes and two ears (v. 17).

Instead, consider 1Cor. 12:18: *“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as **He desired.**”* God’s order in v. 28-30 is for a different purpose: to provide gifts and authority in His body so that each member of it can get good care, and so that the whole body can function well. The order of gifts is the same with God’s purposes or self-seeking purposes, but a self-seeking person will not use his gifts well and will not fit into Christ’s body well. A person is not ready to seek the greater gifts until he has the servant attitude of Christ Jesus.

Therefore here is my translation of the last verse in 1Cor. 12: *“³¹But you are earnestly desiring the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way”* (the NIV puts a similar translation in a footnote). The Corinthians had been seeking the greater gifts from God for the purpose of exalting oneself or one’s group over others instead of giving to others what they truly need. V. 31 first reproves the Corinthian believers for seeking the spiritual gifts with self-seeking motives, but then shows them the right way to seek the greater gifts: by pursuing *agape* love in 1Cor. 13. This is God’s cure for their problem.

Love changes the meaning of a “greater gift” to a gift that ministers better to others without regard to what it does for me. Indeed, 1Cor. 13:4-8a looks like an answer to a list of grievances caused by the Corinthians’ self-seeking. If they would put off their self-seeking attitude in order to pursue love, then – and only

then – were they prepared to be commanded to “*earnestly desire the greater gifts*”. Therefore 1Cor. 14:1 commands believers: “**Pursue love, yet *desire earnestly* spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.**” Pursuing love rejects self-seeking in the heart in order to seek for the good of others.

This is exactly the change in heart that they needed in order to start seeking the greater gifts. Without it, their carnal definition of a “greater gift” caused them to seek gifts for the wrong reason, so that they used gifts poorly and produced a shamefully unhealthy body. Too many believers were trying to get the self-seeking exaltation of being a prophet, and probably too few were seeking to prophesy only for the good of the hearer.

{Here I shall make a parenthetical explanation of why many otherwise good translations mistranslate 1Cor. 12:31. In Greek, “*you are earnestly desiring*” and the command “*earnestly desire*” are written the same way. The context should show which one is implied. In v. 31 the Corinthians did not need to be commanded to “*earnestly desire the greater gifts*”. As we saw, 1Cor. 1-4 shows their desire, and 1Cor. 14:12 is explicit: “**So also you, *since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.***” The Corinthian believers were already zealous for spiritual gifts. But with a self-seeking attitude, they would seek and use the greater gifts to glorify themselves instead of edifying the Church (building it up in love).

If – but only if – they pursued the totally unselfish *agape* love, then they could earnestly desire spiritual gifts in a healthy way. 1Cor. 14:1 and 12:31 contain identical words, but the context

shows that 14:1 is a command and 12:31 is a statement saying what they had been doing. Most translations of these verses do not show the total difference made by the *agape* in 1Cor. 13.}

In 1Cor. 14 Paul compares tongues and prophecy to show the Corinthians how a body is to function well. V. 2-5 show that tongues build up the speaker – a great work – but prophecy is better in a meeting because it serves other people better. This shifting of the focus from what serves me to what serves other members of the Body of Christ is the *agape* of 1Cor. 13 and the heart of a servant-leader that God wants for His kingdom. *Agape* love is that “*more excellent way*” of 1Cor. 12:31. God distributes His gifts for the good of those who receive the ministry, not to give ammunition for the gifted one to boast against his brethren.

The Body of Christ in Ephesians

The book of Ephesians reveals God’s design for the fully mature Body of Christ (the Church). This vision reaches a climax in Eph. 4:11-16. V. 15-16 concisely reveal the nature of the mature Body of Christ and how we shall grow into it:

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Speaking the truth in love is decisive leadership by one who has done what he should to be led by the God of love and truth.

Chapter 6

BREAKING SELF-SEEKING

Near the time of Jesus' crucifixion, His disciples had been with Him for three years and mentally knew His teachings well, but still were tightly bound to self-seeking and its resulting problems. It would have ruined each one's eternal development and ruined the Church that Jesus had been preparing them to lead. God would soon break them free from this self-seeking, and He will free us in our day. Their example can show us much about ourselves and God's ways for His people.

Of the Gospels, Mark best shows how prideful self-seeking kept the disciples from understanding key spiritual insights and vision, and from developing as needed. Consider Mark 9:31-35:

*³¹For He was teaching the disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will **kill Him**; and when He has been killed, **He will rise three days later.**" ³²But they did **not understand** this statement, and they were **afraid to ask Him.** ³³And they came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴But they **kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.** ³⁵And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone **wants to be first**, he shall be last of all, and **servant of all.**"*

In v. 31 Jesus gave the disciples a greatly needed spiritual vision, but they did not understand it and were afraid to ask Him. They normally were not afraid to ask Jesus anything, but v. 34 shows why they were this time: they were discussing who was the greatest – the issue filling their hearts. Each disciple faced this dilemma: “I don’t understand this, but if I ask Jesus, then the others will think that I am not the greatest.” Every disciple’s prideful seeking for himself kept him from asking Jesus and understanding this spiritual truth that they would greatly need.

In v. 33 He asked them what they had discussed even though v. 35-37 show that He knew the answer without being told. Each one kept silent: fear of showing his ignorance caused all of them to not ask Jesus in v. 32, and then all even refused to answer His question in v. 33-34. His question revealed how effectively their own vision and goals were keeping all of them from understanding His vision. The focus of their hearts on this issue kept them from thinking or asking about this powerful spiritual vision that Jesus was telling them clearly.

Even Jesus’ teaching did not reach the disciples’ hearts. A little later Jesus revealed this same spiritual vision to the disciples, and they could not hear it for the same reason. Consider one chapter later, Mark 10:32b-37:

*And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, saying, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit upon Him, and **scourge Him, and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again.**” And James*

*and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying to Him, “**Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.**” And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And they said to Him, “Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left.”*

The hearts of James and John again ignored the needed spiritual vision in order to manipulate Jesus for their own vision and goal, which would exalt them above the other disciples.

Jesus did not promise their request in v. 38-40, and then the self-seeking heart-attitude surfaced in the other ten disciples: *“And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John”* (v. 41). Why were they indignant? They saw two of their fellow disciples trying to get above them, and they were able to realize that they should not ask it for themselves, even though their hearts wanted the same thing.

Mark 10:42-45 shows Jesus’ response to all of the disciples:

*And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as **rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them**; and their great men exercise **authority over them**. But it is **not so among you**, but whoever wishes to become **great among you** shall be **your servant**; and whoever **wishes to be first among you** shall be **slave of all**. For even the **Son of Man** did **not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**”*

In order to help the disciples repent from their destructive self-seeking, Jesus clearly explained the servant leadership that He had modeled for them. It is the opposite of what they had seen and experienced in the world, but they must move and will move into this servant leadership (Chapters 2-3). This is the way His kingdom will work, so that every part of His body grows well!

Jesus' teaching is so clear here, but the disciples still could not understand any of this needed spiritual vision, because their hearts were still filled with their own visions and goals. Therefore the disciples returned to their dispute. When did it arise again in the Gospels? When Jesus was again giving the disciples a spiritual vision that they would need. Consider Luke 22:21-27:

*"But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Me on the table. For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. And there arose also a **dispute among them** as to **which of them** was **regarded to be greatest**. And He said to them, "**The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them** are called 'Benefactors.' But it is **not this way with you**, but the one who is the greatest among you must **become like the youngest**, and **the leader like the servant**. For **who is greater**, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But **I am among you as the one who serves**."*

This time the ignored spiritual vision would tear into their lives and break them of their self-seeking, which never shows up again in Luke or Acts. This breaking of "self" is the key that let them be fruitful and move into servant leadership. Let us see this breaking, because this is also a key to our growth.

These boastful disputes came from each disciple's confident pride in his own strengths. Each disciple found special features in himself to exalt himself over his brothers, but each would soon find that he could not trust in his own loyalty or commitment to Jesus. Each disciple's confident trust in himself needed to be replaced by his trust in the ability and love of Jesus to keep him,

which is true faith. Realizing God's grace as the real source of his abilities and good works cut through unhealthy comparisons with each other and helped them to hate their self-seeking goals. This is real repentance, a true "changing the mind" (the literal meaning of repentance).

Unaware of what the disciples needed, Satan asked God for permission to get to them. In Luke 22:31-34 Jesus told Peter:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission [literally, intensively asked] to sift you [plural] like wheat; but I have prayed for you [singular], that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." And he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death." And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me."

Mark 14:27-31 adds important details about Peter's denial:

*And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But **after I have been raised**, I will go before you to Galilee." But Peter said to Him, "Even though **all may fall away**, yet **I will not**." And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that you yourself this very night, before the cock crows twice, shall three times deny Me." But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they **all were saying the same thing**, too.*

Jesus was giving the needed spiritual vision again, and again Peter's self jumped in. Peter is the best known and most vocal of the disciples in making this honest vow, but all made it and all soon broke it.

Notice the great confidence of each disciple in his own strength when he insisted that he would not fall away and deny

Jesus: the Lord Jesus quoted a Scripture showing that all of the disciples will be scattered when their Shepherd was struck, and the Lord applied this Scripture explicitly to them. This is authority! But every disciple was so sure of himself that each insisted that the Lord Jesus was wrong in applying this Scripture to him.

The confidence of each disciple in himself kept him from realizing the sovereign authority and wisdom of God's word in his own life. And this confidence in himself had been keeping each disciple from fully appreciating God's love, grace, kindness, and faithfulness in His calling, choosing, and keeping each one to Himself. This damage from self-pride revealed by Mark 14:27-31 adds to the damage revealed in Mark 9-10. There we saw that selfish ambitions repeatedly kept the disciples from grasping the spiritual vision about Jesus' crucifixion, which left them unprepared for it.

The humbling and breaking of all the disciples began in earnest in Luke 22:39. In v. 39-46 these committed disciples slept through Jesus' agonizing prayer. Then came Judas' betrayal where all the disciples were scattered, and then Peter denied Jesus with an oath. From Peter's denial of Jesus in Luke 22:62 to the report by women to the eleven in Luke 24:9, all 11 apostles are completely missing in action in Luke and Mark (John's Gospel includes a little exception: John followed at a distance so that Jesus could commit His mother to John).

Luke 24 shows Jesus' resurrection which fulfilled the spiritual vision that the disciples had ignored, and shows the restoration of the eleven to Himself. The disciples truly needed their severe

breaking in order to hate their self-seeking goals that kept them from fully repenting and living in Christ. But restoration is a crucial follow up to a breaking, so that the disciples would be built up in faith instead of staying crushed.

Notice. The disciples' preconceived ideas and dreams had previously helped them to follow Jesus, but the devastation of their dreams freed them to draw near to God by faith better than ever before. What insight does this offer us today? When Jesus calls someone to follow Him, he or she will normally have a vision from God mixed with or added to his or her own ideas. As with the disciples, these ideas may have motives driving them that will require repentance when the depth of sin is realized. But before then, these wrong ideas are tightly interwoven with God's work in his/her life and might have been a major driving force in making some good decisions and resisting temptations.

For example, my pride and personal ambitions helped keep me out of many devastating sins near the time I started following Jesus. But later, these self-seeking, self-centered ideas and dreams started to work against God's calling for me and my living by faith in Him – my trusting confidence in Him.

It is easy to see how the apostles' egos and ambitions would have paralyzed God's good work in both the Church and each apostle when Jesus was not there physically: such egos and ambitions have paralyzed many congregations today. But by being delivered from vain self-images, the apostles got free to relate much better to God and each other: they would continue to hate their self-seeking goals that would interfere with moving into

God's better ways, which are full of love for many. Therefore this painful breaking was essential for them to become effective leaders in the Church.

God's previous work in the apostles, their breaking in Luke 22-23, Jesus' resurrection and their restoration in Luke 24, and their walk with the Holy Spirit all produced the fruit of faith described in Phil. 2:2-5 (p. 11-12). The disciples were of the same mind, intent on one purpose, maintaining love, and united in spirit (v. 2). Each disciple humbly regarded one another as more important than himself (v. 3). Each had become a servant much more like Christ Jesus (v. 5). And all of this fruit of faith was missing before and during their breaking.

Mark 10:42-45 and Luke 22:25-27 in this chapter show that the Kingdom of God operates by the loving authority of servant leadership. But it is intimidating to get broken in ways that we need in order to serve others fully. Each of us naturally looks out for himself or herself, so that we truly need to trust God to look out for our best interests while we follow Jesus in serving others foremost. We will courageously move into all that we need by being personally assured of God's totally unselfish love for us.

Therefore we further consider His loving eternal purposes for us. Getting a better vision of His great plans for us can help assure us and provide direction for our lives on earth. This can free us to put aside our self-seeking goals – hating them until we fully repent (change our minds) about them – in order to serve others with God's totally unselfish love.

Chapter 7

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Remember (from 2Cor. 3:18, Rom. 8:28-30, and 2Peter 1:4 on p. 8-9) God's loving purpose for mankind: to transform each of us from glory to glory into the image of Christ Jesus, so that we can share in His divine nature. Jesus had God's full nature. None of us starts out fully like Him, but He changes our natures: who we really are and what we are really like. Some key changes must be made in our fallen world, and our life of love in hard temporary conditions serves to prepare us to live well with God and with other loving people for eternity.

But most of God's loving work in us will be fulfilled beyond this brief life on earth. The Bible is clear and consistent that the Kingdom of God begins in believers in this life, but also is fulfilled far greater and better in eternity. In fact, our wise, loving Creator puts us and keeps us on earth in order to accomplish some work in us that is essential for our lives in eternity, and that would not get accomplished as well in more blessed conditions.

One essential work is God's training of all His children to learn to relate well with others. Where does the Bible show this? Almost everywhere! The key to relating well is Spirit-led *agape*

love. Many Scriptures show that our hearts need to learn God's ways in relating to others. First consider Matt. 22:36-40:

*“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “‘You shall **love** the Lord your **God** with **all your heart**, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is **the great and foremost** commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall **love** your **neighbor** as yourself.’ On these two commandments **depend the whole law and the prophets.**”*

Remember (Chapter 4) that love is not self-seeking, but is relating unselfishly to others. These two commandments are about relating well to God and others, and Jesus says that major parts of the Bible depend on them. For example, the first 4 of the Ten Commandments are about relating well to God and the next 6 are about relating well to others.

The rest of the Bible strongly reinforces this key purpose for us in many ways. In John 17 Jesus prayed for us – His people beyond the eleven. V. 20-23 emphasize that we believers are to be one with Jesus and the Father, and that we all are to be one with one another like They are. These are healthy relationships.

God calls all believers in Christ to form the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5, 1Cor. 12:12-27, and all of Ephesians). As discussed in Chapter 5, we are individual parts of this body, and parts of a healthy body relate very well to each other. From the Scriptures examined in Chapters 2-6, I conclude that God wants each part of His body to receive the care that it truly needs.

Consider the one another's throughout the Epistles: these are vital ways to build up, strengthen, and not poison our relationships with each other and with God.

We are to:

- * love one another,
- * accept one another,
- * prefer or honor one another,
- * forgive one another,
- * pray for one another,
- * fellowship with one another,
- * live in peace with one another,
- * submit to one another,
- * serve one another,
- * seek good for one another,
- * speak to one another,
- * care for one another,
- * be kind to one another,
- * bear with one another,
- * admonish one another,
- * comfort one another,
- * encourage one another,
- * build up one another, and
- * stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

We also must not:

- * judge one another,
- * bite and devour one another,
- * pridefully challenge one another,
- * envy one another,
- * lie to one another,
- * repay evil with evil to one another,
- * speak against one another, or
- * complain against one another.

Notice: as our hearts rejoice in obeying these commands,
we are learning to relate well to others on a long-term basis.
Love is the key to relating well and a great motivator to serve
and obey, because we want to please the one we love and to
learn what pleases him.

Consider 1John 4:21-5:1: *“And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also...and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.”*
Loving Father God and loving His children go together, and
doing both from our hearts prepares us for living together for
eternity. Indeed, this whole chapter helps us to realize this loving
purpose of God for mankind on earth.

A second essential work on earth comes by trusting God for His righteousness instead of striving for our own. As could be explained further (for example, in *Knowing God*, at www.lulu.com under James Tarter), God's way to save us (with His gift of righteousness for us by grace through faith in Christ) is precisely the humbling or breaking that we need to be freed from a self-exalting pride. It produces self-righteousness, which is especially bad for long-term relationships that will exist in eternity.

Jesus' question in Matt. 24:45 reveals what He looks for in picking people to lead in His household or kingdom, and what He expects from them: "*Who then is the **faithful and sensible slave** whom his master **put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?***" This is the servant leadership that we have seen throughout this book: on earth we let God lead us to give His children the right food at the right times.

God's work in His people on earth to transform and prepare us for our unseen eternal life brings out a key feature of eternal life. It is with God, but also with other people in Christ, who will have been transformed into unique expressions of Christ. We shall be loving and serving God and one another from our hearts, even as Jesus did. This in itself totally changes the world in which we shall be living. Instead of a world where the normal way of life is self-seeking at a cost to others, the norm will be the *agape* love by transformed people.

What an improvement over this life! What a blessing that He is preparing for us! God really is looking out for the total best interest of each believer with an eternity that we do not see now.

Chapter 8

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN GOVERNMENTS ON EARTH

On p. 17 I identified three areas where God has delegated His authority to people on earth: in the Church, in the family, and in a government that has an authority over all of the people in a region. In Chapters 3-7 we focused on servant leadership in the first two areas. We saw from Mark 10 and Luke 22 that the government authorities of the world do not naturally work as servant leaders, because they first look out for and serve their own best interests. The Gospel has already impacted the earth enough for some governments to accept the standard for itself of being “of the people, by the people, and for the people”. The last is servant leadership in government, and this should increase wherever the Gospel is impacting the government. Therefore let us consider this third area of God’s delegated authority on earth.

Rom. 13:1-7 summarizes God’s purpose for government:

¹Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ²Therefore

*whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ³For **rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior**, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of **authority**? **Do what is good and you will have praise from the same**; ⁴for it is **a minister of God to you for good**. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not **bear the sword** for nothing; for it is **a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil**. ⁵Therefore it is necessary to **be in subjection**, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for **rulers are servants of God**, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷**Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.***

This Scripture clearly shows God's calling for all government authority: to be His minister and servant to exercise righteous judgments on earth. Even as God's authorities in the Church and the home have often fallen short of God's standard for them, government authorities have also fallen short. Ps. 2 shows them even rebelling against God and His Anointed. These renegade governments might distort justice for a bribe or other self-seeking perk, might condone or execute murder of the innocent, might fight many of God's values in the Bible, might hate Christ, might cause fear of good behavior, and often do not act like servants of our good God. Paul and Roman believers were under Caesar's government, which had these features.

This Scripture shows God's design for government on earth, even as Eph. 5 shows His design for husbands and wives instead of describing how most believers have lived. Rom. 13

also tells us to be subject to government authority, to not rebel against it. It – even a “Hitler” – is not our primary enemy (Eph. 6:12). Jesus lived under rebellious government authorities, so that He shows how to apply Rom. 13 in this case. Let us see how Jesus loved Godless official representatives of God – giving them truth that could have saved them even though it set up His painful death on earth. In short, Jesus was not against them, but really sought their eternal good (which secondarily helps earthly service) as much as they allowed. I quote from Luke 20:1-8.

In v. 4 Jesus asked them: *“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”* If they wanted truth instead of their own goals, this question could have helped them to realize the truth about Jesus and His authority from God. But they merely *“reasoned among themselves”* (v. 5) about how the people would regard their answer: they did not care about the truth. If a man’s hypocrisy were shaken enough later to become open to the truth about Jesus, then His question and this whole scene would help that man to know the truth, repent, and be eternally saved. Jesus helped these leaders as much as they let Him, but most of them would never receive God’s love because of their unrepented hypocrisy and continued demand for their own personal goals.

Likewise, we do not set ourselves against human authority, but we can ask our Father to help it move into His clearly stated calling. We can also let Him lead us into all of the true good that He wants us to do for the government and the individuals in it. 1Tim 2:1-4 instructs us:

¹First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ²for kings

and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who **desires all men to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We are to help God's government to serve Him better as much as it allows. Our real battle is not with them even if they attack us for doing God's will (like Jesus was attacked): we do not let their attacks distract us from what He wants us to do.

In recent centuries, we have seen a new way for believers to help those in government, and this has already helped a few governments to move toward servant leadership. These governments have accepted the standard for themselves of being "of the people, by the people, and for the people".

"For the people" is servant leadership. "Of the people, by the people" is an accepted ideal of any democracy that has free elections. This actually represents a transfer of spiritual authority of the national government to the people who get an opportunity to select their leaders. If people can select a better leader but refuse God's leading for that, then they either condone or accept the elected leader's governmental decisions and thereby share responsibility for them. As a priority, we need to be doing all that God wants us to do to help our government (1Tim. 2:1-4, above).

The ability of God's people to improve the quality of God's government of a region of the earth should increase wherever the Gospel significantly increases its impact on the people in that region. Ps. 125:3 shows that we can expect Almighty God to remove unrighteous government from a land where the people have become righteous: ***"For the scepter of wickedness shall***

not rest upon the land of the righteous, so that the righteous will not put forth their hands to do wrong.” A scepter is a symbol of governmental authority, so that God will not allow an evil government to continue for too long in a land where so many people receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ. I get the same conclusion from other Scriptures about healing lands.

Eventually the Body of Christ of Eph. 4:11-16 will fully mature in every land, so that we can expect that governments in many lands will be impacted well. At the same time, other lands will lose their good start to a more Godly government because too many people there are rejecting God’s Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All of this is illustrated in the Appendix.

What are the key points in this chapter? Rom. 13 helps us to recognize a Godly government and to realize that God calls His people to help governments to exercise authority better instead of refusing to submit because of their imperfections. Governments of regions are imperfect because mankind fell, but they have purposes from God and need help to fulfill them. 1Tim. 2 confirms that we must help governments to exercise authority in more Godly ways. We also saw that a free election is another way to help the exercise of government authority beyond the instructions in these two Scriptures. This has been opened up to believers in many lands in only the last few centuries.

The earth has been full of kingdoms where those in authority seek foremost for themselves. But that kind of leadership does not fit into God’s kingdom or body. A leader must regard others’ interests as more important than his own, and his leadership is limited by how well he serves what God wants for His children.

Appendix

A Transfer of Government Authority

On p. 54 I stated that God's authority for government in some lands has been transferred to the people who select the government leaders. Let us see how the U.S., which could be considered as a birthplace of "government of the people, by the people, and for the people", has moved toward this standard and then has fallen away from it.

The foundational documents of the U.S. record a transfer of authority to the people and a partial return of authority to the government. The Declaration of Independence declared that the Creator has given mankind the right to alter or abolish any form of government which continues to reject righteousness. At the end, the Declaration called on Him as "the Supreme Judge of the World" for the rectitude of their intentions – for God to judge the righteousness of their cause. Against great odds, God gave them victory, which could be considered to be an insightful answer to the appeal to Him at the end.

Twelve years later, the U.S. Constitution was approved. It returned authority to the national government only for six clearly stated functions in the Preamble. The Tenth Amendment was established three years later. It declared that the powers which the Constitution did not give the U.S. government nor prohibit to the states are reserved to the respective states or to the people. The Constitution clearly recognized the authority of the people

and strictly limited its transfer back to the national government.

In the U.S. Civil War (87 years after the Declaration of Independence), President Abraham Lincoln spoke the phrase “government of the people, by the people, and for the people”. The Civil War was largely related to expanding “the people” to fully include slaves, because slavery was also being abolished.

There has always been much room for improvement in Biblical, Christ-like authority in the U.S. government. But more recently it has moved backward, going further into rejecting Biblical practices and values and into serving themselves foremost. The increased rejection of the Bible is clear. There are exceptions among U.S. leaders, but their trend to self-service is also clear. For example, Congress recently voted an incredibly generous retirement package for all of its members (even for “serving” a short time), and voted for an exclusive health care package for its members while forcing the rest of the population into a much worse package. In reality, the U.S. is forming an “elected aristocracy” with an exalted status for those who have the means to get elected.

I know about an interesting contrast to this development in the U.S. I have seen evidence in South Sudan that leaders on the tribal, provincial, and national levels have grasped the basic idea of serving as a leader, and demonstrate an awareness of their accountable authority under Jesus. Of course, there is room for improvement in these individuals in Christ as well as for expansion to other leaders in all of these levels, and this will happen by continuing in Christ.

About the Author (Jim Tarter)

I met God in 1972 when I was 27, a Ph.D. physicist and an agnostic. He quickly started showing me that Jesus authentically represents God, and that the Bible is His word. I had started reading the Bible thinking that it is full of contradictions, but I got surprised. The Bible's contents provided much evidence to show that the Lord had inspired and then protected these contents to say precisely what He wanted them to say.

Having missed God so completely in my life and in the world, I read the Bible with a deep hunger to learn more about this One who knew my thoughts and who numbers the hairs on each person's head. I also joined a church in Pittsburgh, PA. The pastor was Joseph Garlington, who provided a rich spiritual foundation. This congregation had many other believers who had met Jesus and sought to put His word into practice. When I moved to Roanoke, VA, in 1978, I actively participated in another congregation that was "alive in Jesus". Such experiences helped me to learn more about God and His ways, and have provided many perspectives about His calling for the Church in the Bible, what we have done in reality, and what we need to do to fulfill His word concerning us.

I am an elder at Grace Covenant Church in Roanoke and taught in public schools in 1976-2009. I wrote two books in the 1990s: *God's Word to the United States* (basically, from Obadiah) and *Why, God?* (from the book of Job). Updates of both books plus 15 other books about the Bible are available at Lulu (see below).

In summers my wife Nita and I have taken extensive trips to South Sudan, the Congo, and elsewhere. Her heart for Jesus and sensitivity to His leadings have blessed me mightily.

Years after I first met God through Jesus, He started opening up whole books and certain sections of the Bible, which provide concepts and perspectives that the vast majority of the Church has not yet realized. The term "servant leadership" is well known, but I believe that the perspectives in this book are powerful, needed, and not well known.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP is available online at www.lulu.com. Type "James Tarter" in their "search" space at the top. At the time I write this, this printed book costs \$5.45 plus \$3.99 S&H (with an extra \$1.25 for each extra copy). You can download a free PDF file of the whole book or view all of it in a free Preview under its title. An ebook (Apple or Nook) is also available. You also have these options with my other books at Lulu.