

TRUE SERVANTHOOD

(PART 2)

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INTRODUCTION

If somebody asked you to describe true servanthood, what would your answer be? If it was a full description it would probably touch on what servanthood is not, as well as describe what it is. In His teachings Jesus provided us with a description for servanthood. Throughout the gospels we see Jesus condemning various actions or words, and commending others. What was the difference between these; what did Jesus see? In Luke 18:9-14 we find the answer: *“⁹And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get. ¹³But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

What was the difference between these two men? One was full of self-righteous service, and the other was beginning the path to true servanthood. Let's take a look at what self-righteous service is and look for yourself. At every corner ask yourself, “Is this me?” If it is, confess your sin to God and resolve with His help to become more servant-hearted.

I. SELF-RIGHTEOUS SERVICE

A. Definition

Self-righteous service could simply be defined as service done for oneself; that is a very, very simple definition. However, since this is such a problem among Christians today we have included a more explicit description, which has nine sub-points.

These sub-points define self-righteous service as ...

1. *Service performed to impress others or to make you feel good.*

Remember what our topic is here, “self-righteous service.” We so often want to make a “good impression” upon others. Often we wonder more “what will others think,” than we do “what will God think?” We want to get some credit or have some recognition for what we have done. In gift giving we may get carried away focusing on what I like to give rather than on what will make the recipient happy. We drool over our gift. “Do you see that? Did you notice such and such? And it can do this too. Isn’t it truly cute? I just love it and thought you would too. Don’t you like it?” This places the recipient into bondage and she/he is forced to state “Oh yes, it is lovely dear. I love it too. Thank you so much.” Are you happy now? Do you feel good now?



2. *Self-righteous service is impressed with the “big-deal.”*

Many evangelistic efforts center around “the big deal,” and fail to produce lasting fruit. Many Christian brothers in Ukraine want to do “a big deal.” They don’t want to just talk to some unbelievers or to lead a small group every week and at the end of the year to have 8 people saved. No, they want to ask everybody for help and for money and rent the stadium and have evangelist Billy Victorious to come for one evening. The “big deal” feels good. Now they can say, “I evangelized my city.”

3. *Self-Righteous service wants reward.*

“I’m doing a key spiritual ministry in Ukraine and the country is so large and the distances are so big, you should give me a car. After all, it is for use by a servant of God.” Or, “When my wife assists me she should get some extra money for that. You know what Paul said about Christian ministers being supported.” Or, “Since I am traveling so much, and I sacrifice so much time away from my family, I should have a bit higher salary to compensate for that.” Or when you took special pains to clean the toilets you want someone to reward you by saying, “These toilets look great! Thanks for cleaning them.” We may not always be looking for a big reward, but often we stumble over those little rewards.

4. *Self-Righteous service wants to see results.*

Maybe I’m guilty. Maybe I’ll come to heaven and God will say, “Abraham, all you did was self-righteous; you just wanted to see lots of results.” For me it’s hard to live without results. But what about the missionaries who worked among the Muslims twenty or more years and never saw one convert? Perhaps God will say, “Abraham, you can go stand at the back of the crowd. But I have this missionary to the Muslims here and I have a wonderful place for him.” David says the heart is desperately wicked, who can know it. I am one of those people who have a deep need to see something happening. To see some results! I try to surrender this need and give that to God. I’m working on surrendering this desire, but perhaps I am not 100% there yet.

5. *Self-Righteous service wants to see the person served do the same.*

This is still part of the definition. You’re beginning to understand what self-righteous service is. When we do something for someone and that person doesn’t do anything for others we feel frustrated. Why doesn’t he also do something? I’ve been helping him and now look at his neighbor. He doesn’t do anything for his neighbor. Or I’ve been mending her clothes and she could mend some of the clothes for her children. It shows that we don’t have freedom in being a servant. We are not serving just to serve but because we want to see changes in somebody else’s life.

6. *Self-Righteous service chooses whom to serve and whom not to serve.*

It’s the beginning of a new day. At the top of your “to do” list is: “Serve someone today.” You pick a person. “Well, I’m going to help him.” Or “I feel sorry for her so I’ll do something for her.” Or “No, I don’t want to help him I’m busy right now.” What does it mean? You are in control. You are the boss. But if you have an attitude of servanthood you will serve whomever God puts into your path that day. You will learn to discern and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit when He tells you to serve someone.

7. Self-Righteous service only serves when it feels like it.

You look at your list, "Right, my wife needs me to look after the children this evening from 7-8, but that's when I prepare my sermon. I'll just tell her to change her meeting. I can look after the children from 8-9, but I can't change the time when I prepare my sermon!" You do it when you want to do it. When you feel like it or have extra time. Or when it's convenient or when the people in the church would give you a testimony or when it's helpful for the ministry. That's why it's self-righteous, because you are looking out more for your own interests than for the other person's.

8. Self-Righteous service is insensitive.

We come in somebody else's room and we say: "Oh, that flower needs sunlight. Let me set it over by the window." So you take the flower and you set it over by the window. Or you say, "Oh that picture would look so nice over here by the cupboard." That is your taste; you have a special taste for decorating. You change the picture from here to over there. It is good and you did a good thing according to you. With your good taste for decoration it may look better but perhaps it's not what the person wanted. Often our self-righteous service is insensitive.



Perhaps you have had a coach come and ask for your help. When the time suited you, you went and gave him the gift of your presence. However, as soon as you arrived you noticed he was doing everything wrong, so you began telling him how he is doing everything wrong. You began to criticize him. As a matter of fact you "helped" him so much that you never found out what it was that he *wanted* your help with. Do you think that man will ever come back to you for help again?

9. Self-Righteous service wants glory for itself.

"I went to grandmother's house and after I left you could really see that I cleaned it up." There is this need to gather some glory for ourselves, some recognition. You may ask, "Didn't I do a nice job?" I remember one leader and he asked me all the time "How did I do? Did I do well? Was it successful? Were the people happy? Were there any complaints?" In the beginning when he was a student and a learner, I thought that was fine. But when he became a leader he was still asking those questions. Every time there was a meeting of some sort this person would immediately start asking, "How did I do?" Slowly I realized his interest in personal glory. Think about your own heart. There is some element of glory in the ministry. You will be the authoritative, responsible person for Poltava province! Feels good, right? That's why these are important truths to think about it.

B. The Pharisees exhibited this kind of service regularly

We can read again and again of the Pharisees doing this. The funny thing is that they never deceived Jesus. One Pharisee came and he said, "Lord, what is the most important part of the Old Testament?" Jesus said, "To love God and love your neighbor." He said, "You've answered right," and Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom." Jesus knew here was a good Pharisee because he had asked a genuine question.

About the others we read that they liked to have long robes on. When you work in the village you work with animals and do other things outside. Do you wear a very long coat that hangs all the way to the ground? No! People who do a lot of physical work wear a short coat so that it doesn't drag in the filth. A young lady who just tiptoes from the house to the office wears a coat that almost sweeps the street. When she gets on the bus and she picks up her long coat it still gets dirty. It's interesting, isn't it? That was the way they did it in Jesus' time and we are still doing it now in Ukraine. Pharisees loved to have long coats. They loved to give all kind of tithes, "How many of these cabbages are there? Oh, I need to give two of them to God!" They loved to pray nice prayers. Did Jesus say that it was bad? No! He said, "You should be doing those things, but your attitude should be completely different."

Their attitude was self-righteous. They really thought that they were more righteous than everyone else because of how they dressed, prayed, and all the good things they did! A lot of Christian service is done out of self-righteousness. It's not that service isn't good or it doesn't need to be done. It does. It is good and it does need to be done, but the attitude needs to be different.

Attitude is an important element for you to remember as you observe the different church leaders. You see a certain action and something inside makes you a touch uncomfortable. Remind yourself to look three months later and often it will show itself if it wasn't totally pure. Huge churches are being built for Christ, except is it really for Christ? Or is part of it for the prestige of the pastor? What about you? What about your heart? Do you have a servant's heart? Or are you convinced that you are righteous enough? Do you try and convince other people about your righteousness with your actions? Have you talked to the Lord about it recently? Do you know what true servanthood is?

II. TRUE SERVANTHOOD

Now that we have covered self-righteous service let us take a look at true servanthood. Covering true servanthood both from a negative and a positive approach should make for a complete picture. Here are some of the characteristics of true servanthood. We will list 7 points for you.

A. True servanthood welcomes all opportunities to serve

I'm just shocked over and over again at my wife and some other wives. They are always asking, "Would you like a cup of coffee," or "Do you want a hot drink?" And I'm thinking, do you never get tired of serving? Do you never tire of asking if I need something? Men, there is something so beautiful that God has put into women, it is fantastic! Men are like "get away; leave me alone, I want to do this now." Women all the time are asking, "What can I do for you? How can I help you? Do you need something else?" Lots of times I'm just shocked. I wonder, "Don't you just want to sit down and read a book for two hours and forget about me and everyone else?" But she is happy to serve, even if I am not always very appreciative. I suppose you husbands are a bit like me and forget to express your appreciation sometimes. Did you know that saying a sincere "thank you" is also service?

I noticed specifically how many women don't make a distinction between whom or when they serve. The cook brings the soup out, and every time I see ladies from various groups go to help carry the soup. They could sit down and say, "Well, I'm a guest here. It's so nice that I don't need to carry this soup for myself." But they don't seem to feel that way. It's normal; it's natural for them to help out. They just welcome all opportunities. That's true servanthood. A person who exercises true servanthood does it without even thinking about it. He or she is not calculating, "Shall I help Kostya or shall I help Misha?" True servants welcome all opportunities.

B. True servanthood welcomes hiddenness

If the service can be performed quietly the servant is happy. For instance, I've been married over 30 years and eat three meals a day, which makes well over 30,000 meals. Just imagine Diane coming to me and saying: "Have you already told them in one of your lectures how many meals I've prepared?" She would never even think of that. Probably if she would see one of my lectures where I say something about her she would later say, "Why did you do that?" The difference between self-righteous service and true servanthood is that self-righteous service wants to have some glory. It wants to be noticed but true servanthood has no need for anybody to find out about it. It is done for God's glory and welcomes hiddenness.



C. True servanthood can serve enemies just as easily as friends, the powerful just as easily as the weak, the important just as easily as the nobodies

If you want to help someone, do it now. Don't wait for some important person to come along. Just serve those who are around you now. Show friendliness when it is needed. Why is that important for you to do? Jesus was known as a friend of sinners. Perhaps you are a church planter and several months from now you may be leaving your village. Will you be known as a friend of sinners? That's probably the most important phrase. Jesus had no problem with followers. He had no problem getting people to listen him, "Jesus, are you going feed us tonight? Okay, I'll listen all day to you. It is easier than work." True servants can serve enemies as easily as friends. I don't think I can say the same about myself. If my enemy had a need I would probably think, "I know what the Bible says and I want to be a good Christian so I'll do it." But it would not come as easily as serving a friend. Diane wouldn't feel like that. She would just cook a meal and give it to anybody.

D. True servanthood doesn't need the right 'feeling' to be able to serve

Have you ever asked someone, "Why haven't you done that?" And their reply was, "Well I didn't feel like it." Or "I didn't think of it." True service doesn't need a feeling. It comes out automatically. A true servant is always available for service. Look at Jesus; did He chase the crowds away when they searched Him out? No! He rebuked the disciples for chasing the mothers and children away! He was ready and willing to serve

even when He was tired or hungry. He didn't rely on His feelings to serve; He just served anyway. That's what we are talking about. There are so many different elements in this lecture. You may need to read it once a month or at least once a quarter for a year before you understand all the different things about being a servant and before it becomes automatic. Our idea is that you practice this now during the summer months so that in the fall it will at least be partly automatic.

E. True servanthood is permanent

It is a life-style. New Life for Churches is all about raising up new leaders. That can be your lifestyle but by and large that is your ministry. Servanthood should be your lifestyle. It should be part of your character combining love and patience and other virtues. It differs from ministry in that you are not going to serve a year or two and then do something else. It is meant to be learned and developed in the heart as a permanent lifestyle. If it is not there in the heart, it will not last longer than 6 months or a year. Servanthood is something that we should acquire as a Christian virtue.

F. True servanthood can withhold service just as easily as perform it, without feeling uncomfortable

Self-righteous service says, "Let me do this. I'm good at it." But true service doesn't have a need to show itself, so it has no need to absolutely have to do it. It's not the idea, "I must be busy; I must do it." If there is the need, sure, but if there is not, that's okay too. Somebody else has done it and that is wonderful! True servanthood is willing to accept the service of another and is not spoiled by that, but continues to humbly look for ways to serve others.

G. True servanthood quietly goes about caring for the needs of others

That's another wonderful quality about being a wife or a mother. Mothers know what their children need before the children know it themselves. A child may come in the house and mom already has a sandwich and a hot drink ready for him. "How did you know I was hungry?" The intelligent, loving, caring mother knew that the children were actively playing outside and would soon come home hungry and thirsty. True service goes quietly about caring for the needs of others. That makes it an underlying quality for other ministries. It is that quality which would say, "Well, I want to counsel you a bit tomorrow night and instead of coming to my house I'll come to your house. It's cold out, so let me come to your house." That's not the job, but it's that underlying attitude of a serving person. Masha came this morning and said, "I've brought some water and some cups." I didn't ask her, but of course we needed it and I was wondering how I could ask somebody. I didn't need to ask. Masha wanted to take care of us. Praise God for true servanthood.

CONCLUSION

Do you understand the difference between self-righteous *service* and true *servanthood*? Service is something that we do for someone else; it is the action of helping someone. But service may be done with a positive or a negative attitude, or we may even be paid for our service. Unfortunately, we often have a self-righteous attitude instead of recognizing our own unworthiness. True servanthood on the other hand recognizes what a great privilege it is to be able to demonstrate Christ's love and character by serving. True servanthood is about the attitude, not the service.

True servanthood is more than deeds. It is an attitude, an expression, a look, a touch. It is anything that lifts another person up. Examine your heart. It is so easy to be self-righteous, especially when you are already a leader. It is so easy to feel that you are better than others, that you do more than they do. But our comparison is never with others. Our comparison is with Christ. Am I a true servant like Christ was? Or have I deceived myself and in my heart I'm only another Pharisee? Now is the time to pray and ask God to search your being, root out all selfishness, and make you a true servant following in the footsteps of the greatest servant of all, Jesus Christ. Please miss your next meal and spend it in prayer and meditation.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Do you understand the difference between *self-righteous service* and *true servanthood*? Service is something that we do for someone else; it is the action of helping someone. But service may be done with a positive or a negative attitude, or we may even be paid for our service. Unfortunately, we often have a self-righteous attitude instead of recognizing our own unworthiness. True servanthood on the other hand recognizes what a great privilege it is to be able to demonstrate Christ's love and character by serving. True servanthood is about the attitude, not the service.

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To help you with this, for the next two weeks at the end of every day go over the following list and evaluate your day's service or servanthood. In a notebook summarize your day's findings. Take time to meditate and pray about how you can do better. Make sure you are completely honest in your answers. At the end of the two weeks review your summaries and spend some extra time in prayer and meditation on servanthood. Be prepared to discuss your discoveries about servanthood in your life with others at the next meeting.

Self-Righteous Service:

1. Service performed to impress others or to make me feel good.
2. Self-righteous service is impressed with the 'big-deal.'
3. Self-Righteous service wants reward.
4. Self-Righteous service wants to see results.
5. Self-Righteous service wants to see the person served do the same.
6. Self-Righteous service chooses whom to serve and whom not to serve.
7. Self-Righteous service only serves when it feels like it.
8. Self-Righteous service is insensitive.
9. Self-Righteous service wants glory for itself.

True Servanthood:

1. Welcomes all opportunities to serve.
2. Welcomes hiddenness.
3. Can serve enemies just as easily as friends, the powerful just as easily as the weak, the important just as easily as the nobodies.
4. Doesn't need the right 'feeling' to be able to serve.
5. Is permanent.
6. Can withhold service just as easily as perform it, without feeling uncomfortable.
7. Quietly goes about caring for the needs of others.