

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

"...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE..." ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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LETTING OTHERS SERVE US

By M. W. Bassford

Most Christians have a number of traits in common, both good and bad, but one of the most infuriating is an unwillingness to accept help from others. Take, for instance, that older Christian couple we've all known. They are wonderful people: uniformly hospitable, thoughtful, and generous. After every funeral, they will show up with a casserole. If your Uncle Harry whom they have never met is in the hospital, they will go visit him. If you need somebody to unclog your stopped-up toilet, they will show up with a plunger and a smile.

However, let's say that the shoe is on the other foot. Now, this couple that is so helpful to everyone else needs help themselves. Maybe he has had surgery. Maybe she's enduring chemotherapy treatments.

Will they allow you to bring them food and unclog their toilet? They will not! They will insist, kindly, politely, and at great length, that they can manage just fine on their own and don't want to be a bother to anybody. Only if they have truly been brought low will they allow other brethren to help them. Even then, you get the impression that they're lying there in bed counting the hours until they can get up and start doing nice things for you instead.

In the interests of full disclosure, I must admit that I am just as bad. When my family and I were staying with

brethren during the Hymninar a few weeks back, I spent the week arguing with my hostess about whether I would allow her to fix us breakfast. “We will be just fine eating cheese sticks and granola bars in the van,” I said, repeatedly. Only on our last morning there did I allow her to cook for us (and yes, it tasted about a million times better than cheese sticks and granola bars!).

It is tempting to ascribe such obstinacy to pride. I think this is most prominent when it comes to spiritual needs. If we accept help with our sin problem, we’re implicitly admitting that we do have a sin problem. However, what’s generally going on there is that brethren avoid offers of help by concealing the need. As long as they can play a Potemkin-village Christian on Sunday morning, they will often choose to die spiritually rather than owning the problem. It’s really a whole ‘nother topic (and possibly a whole ‘nother blog post if anybody’s interested)!

Rather, when it comes to help with physical problems, I think something else as important as (or more important than) pride is at work. In my experience, willingness to accept help often varies inversely with spiritual maturity. At one extreme, you have weak Christians who are happy to sponge off the church for as long as the elders will continue to cut them checks (and here, of course, I am not talking about those who are genuinely incapable of supporting themselves, but rather about those who are going to find another job Just Any Day Now and in the meantime insist on being maintained in the style to which they are accustomed). On the other extreme, you have pillar-of-the-church types who would literally rather die than allow someone else to clean their house.

In the case of the latter, I think they're at least partially motivated by a desire to follow Jesus but have a mistaken appreciation of what that entails. We all know that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give Himself as a ransom for many. We also understand that if the One we call Lord and Teacher washed feet, we also ought to wash one another's feet. As a result, we eagerly get down on the floor with a washrag and basin, but whenever somebody else shows up at our feet similarly equipped, we start kicking at them. Get away, you! After all, we can't serve if we're being served, right?

This, I think, is where we miss the point. It's impossible for someone to serve in the likeness of Christ unless they've got somebody to serve. If all the disciples had imitated Peter's original reaction and said to Jesus, "Never shall You wash my feet!", the Lord's intent would have been completely frustrated.

We too must beware of frustrating others' desire to serve. Even if we don't technically "need" help (and brethren can get downright Pharisaical on the subject), we will still benefit from it. What's more, our helpers will benefit from it even more than we will. After all, it is more blessed to give than to receive. If a Christian wants to imitate Jesus, who am I to deny them the opportunity?

Our role, then, is twofold. First, we must diligently seek opportunities to do good, especially to the household of faith. Second, we must learn to deal graciously with those who are diligently seeking to help us.

This is no small thing. For many Christians, it's considerably harder to say "Yes," and accept the service of others than it is to say "No," and do it themselves (or do

without). I'm certainly in that boat. If I'm not paying attention, I'm still prone to let slip that reflexive "No."

However, true humility consists not only of being willing to humble ourselves for the good of others. It consists also of allowing others to humble themselves for our good. Insisting on being Jesus all the time, when you get right down to it, is little different from the child playing make-believe who insists on being the hero all the time, never the sidekick. We need to let others be the hero sometimes too. If we don't, we're cheating them of the joy of service and the opportunity to grow, and that kind of "selflessness" isn't really selfless at all.

*[Originally published as a blog post on
<http://hisexcellentword.blogspot.com>]*

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:

How to Share the Gospel with My Family

PM LESSON:

Paul's Final Appeal (Galatians 6:11-18)

“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)