

Becoming A Love Slave

by Ern Baxter

The bondage that releases us to our highest fulfillment.

Last month we examined the significance of being released from the old order of slavery in order to become slaves to God. In Part 2 of this article we are going to look at Jesus' teaching on being a servant and examine the distinctive characteristics of a love slave.

It was the night the disciples had gathered to celebrate the Last Passover with their Master. The narrative would lead us to believe that the disciples had entered that upper room and settled around the table with unwashed feet. Customarily, when coming in from the street, one's feet would have been washed from contamination of the road by a slave; or if a slave was not available, the washing would have been performed by a member of the household. However, each of the disciples, feeling either that he was "greater" than the other or that it was not his obligation to perform this servile task for the others, had apparently walked past the water basin.

Our Lord, taking in the situation at a glance and understanding its implications, could not let this opportunity go by if He was going to be faithful in training His disciples. He rose up from the table and girded Himself with the towel of the slave, took the wash basin, and moved toward the disciples to wash their feet. Peter was distressed at this, and cried out his refusal to submit to the Lord's ministry of foot-washing. However, our Lord told Peter

that if he did not allow Him to wash his feet that he could have no part with Him. In the larger spiritual context Jesus was saying that if Peter did not have a clean walk in His presence, then their fellowship was broken. More than that, fellowship with Him involved serving each other. This is seen in His use of the occurrence to teach His disciples mutual submission and service.

"And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at table again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher, and Lord; and you are right; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you should also do as I did to you'" (John 13:12-15, NAS). Our Lord first performed the service of a slave, and then communicated to His disciples the lesson to be learned from His action. If He, the Master, would wash the feet of His disciples, how much more ought they to wash one another's feet. What shame and embarrassment must have gripped them as they saw their pride and self-serving in the light of their Master's love-slave performance. They would never forget the sight of Jesus as He knelt before them, taking their soiled feet in His blessed hands, and washing off the common dirt of the road. Christ's life with His disciples not only consisted of oral teaching, but of so living before them as to

provide the perfect example of One who lived in complete submission to the authority of Another. Peter said of Him that He left us an example that we might "follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

THE SERVANT ATTITUDE

Many of the great passages in the New Testament concerning our Lord, when looked at carefully, are to be seen in terms of example. We are thinking at this point of Philippians, chapter 2, one of the most beautiful insights into the life, nature and purpose of our Lord in all of Scripture. And yet, this portion is addressed to the Philippian Christians, not that they might just have a great doctrinal statement concerning Christ, but that they might see actually in Christ's life that which God desired to be reproduced in theirs and in ours. First is an exhortation to withstand "selfishness or empty deceit, and with humility of mind regard one another as more important than ourselves." Next, it tells us, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5, NAS). The passage then describes the condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ in the humiliation of the incarnation, telling us that He took the form of a bond servant, or slave, that He might so serve lost humanity and fulfill the will of God that nothing, including death, would keep Him from a total obedience to the Father.

Let us realize that all of this is said

to urge us as Christians to "have this attitude in ourselves." In the new society, we do not serve the Lord Jesus in some abstract self-defined way, but we actually serve the Lord Jesus Christ when we serve one another as members of His Body. Nor are we permitted by the Scriptures to establish the boundaries of our service. If we are to be guided by His example, we will find that our service to one another will require *the master* to wash the feet of *the disciple*. It is difficult for us to receive the word *slave* as being applicable to our relationship to one another as Christians. This was the very point at which our Lord's disciples found themselves in controversy. . . they were sure that each was more important than the other, and debated the matter right up into the sensitive hours before our Lord's passion and death.

It is certain that our Lord realized this would be one of the most difficult adjustments for us to make in the new order. We would want to drag in with us the kinds of selfish self-serving that had characterized our lives in the old society. This was true of the attitude of His own disciples who, living in the very presence of Jesus' total obedience to God, were yet unable to shed many of the old society attitudes. It was necessary, therefore, for Him to spell it out in the clearest of language. It seems that we also need it spelled out again and again, for we seem to be forever forgetting it. We are constantly trying to run the Kingdom of God like the kingdom of men, bringing Adamic principles and rules into the Christ society. Inevitably, such efforts meet with resistance, and we rebuke the devil since he seems to be hindering our attempts to bring success to the Kingdom of God. We suspect, however, that it is not the devil, but rather the resistance of our Lord and His ultimate truth, for He will not have in His Kingdom "anything that does offend."

Let us look at the occasion when our Lord specified the difference between the two orders of self-seeking and servitude. It was on one of those occasions when there was some

maneuvering for position among the disciples. On this occasion "Jesus called them to Himself, and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 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 your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'" (Matt. 20:25-28, NAS). Here our Lord makes it crystal clear that the Kingdom of God is not as the kingdom of the Gentiles and the manner in which Gentiles conduct themselves is not acceptable in the Kingdom of God. Among the Gentiles, or in the Adamic society, it is a vying for position with those who are in power, proudly and many times oppressively exercising their authority. Jesus said this must not be in the Kingdom of God: "It is not so among you."

CRITERION FOR KINGDOM LIVING

Then Jesus lays down the new criterion for the Kingdom: "Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your *slave*." This is certainly a new order. Here there is no jostling and jockeying for position. Here is no bribing and lobbying. Here is no attempt at taking dishonest and improper advantage. Here is self-humiliation, a desire to serve others, acknowledgement that there is a higher motivation than human greed. Here is recognition of God's oversight of humanity, and His redemptive, sanctifying oversight of the redeemed community. It is He who raises up and puts down. The one who exalts himself shall be abased; but the one who, with right motive and attitude, serves his brothers in love taking the posture of a slave, shall be noted by the Lord of the Kingdom and shall find his "greatness," not in those things that mark greatness in the Adamic society, but in the moral and spiritual releases of loving and joyful service, which have no comparables in the realm of unregenerate competition. There is

probably no Christian reading this article who has not known the supreme and inexpressible joy of having served another out of sheer love for Christ, and for the one being served. It is like nothing else that one has ever known. Should there ever be a hint of resentment, or the least suggestion in our spirit that we are being taken advantage of, our Lord reminds us that we must take another look at Him who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." He becomes the supreme example of a love slave. Until we have gone as far as He has gone in submission to the demands of love, we cannot hold a resentment or bear a grudge, or refuse to gird ourselves with a towel and wash the feet of a brother who has picked up the contamination of the road of life.

This may sound idealistic and unworkable, and so it is, if it is held only as a theory, and divorced from the new life in Christ. One will look with wistful longing for its realization, while continuing a life of self-gratification, eating the bread of frustration, and putting money in a bag filled with holes. The answer is not just "believing" what is being said here, but participating in the life of Him who rose from the dead and shed forth His Spirit. It is in "communion [the common sharing] of the Holy Spirit," that one finds the dynamic and desire to be a love slave. It is impossible to enjoy freedom from sin and guilt and all the other things that freedom spells in the beautiful word of the Gospel, if in the "Christian experience" we do not know the on-going life of love. Such participation cannot be realized by mere intellectual acquiescence to a creedal formula. Paul makes this very clear by telling us that it is only as "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost that is given unto us" that we can enter into the life here described.

In writing to the Galatians he warns against a false kind of Christian freedom when he says, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love

serve [slave for] one another" (Gal. 5:13, NAS). Does not this, lack of love-service account for much of the widespread unhappiness and sense of failure so manifest among Christians? It would almost seem there is a third area, although we suggest it with some diffidence: Is it possible to experience the release from sin and guilt that comes through responding to the Gospel, and yet, by failing to move into positive Kingdom life, to find ourselves living in a kind of gray zone, a no-man's land, where we are neither fish nor fowl, in or out? Actually it is not possible to be a Christian in the fullest, experiential sense, if we have not become involved in the life of love slavery, where serving Christ by serving one another brings to us the highest sense of fulfillment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A LOVE SLAVE

We want to list a few characteristics of the Christian love slave. The list is not exhaustive, but we trust it will give us some guidelines, and perhaps lead some of us out of the "intermediate state" which has left us with feelings of frustration and disappointment.

(1) *LOVE*: Our Lord, in speaking of man's relationship to authority, unequivocally declares that "no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24, NAS). Here our Lord declares that it is not possible to be a slave to two masters successfully. That one slave would be in the service of two masters in our Lord's day has been documented historically. It was usually worked out on a percentage basis. The slave would serve one master a certain amount of time, and another master a certain amount. However, Jesus said, this just does not work. It is impossible, man being what he is, for the slave to not have a greater love for one master than the other.

We are not talking about human sentimentality, but rather that impartation of the very love nature of God that comes by the Holy Spirit, which

overrides even the resurgence of past selfish behavior patterns, and reaches out to embrace the brotherhood in the service of love. It requires, of course, that one live in constant and close proximity to his Master, beholding the beautiful portrait of His love and life as we have it in the Word of God, and drinking deeply into His life as it is provided for us in the Holy Spirit. As we behold Him, and long to be like Him, we need no longer be frustrated, for He has provided His very own Spirit to enable us through our redeemed faculties, to become even as He, our great Example, was. Love is the motivating power and dynamic to make Kingdom life real. It is the same kind of love that took our Lord to Calvary. It is communicated to us in the Holy Spirit, and finds us enjoying our service of love to others. The incomparable reward of being a Kingdom slave cannot be compared with the temporal, transitory, and perishable rewards meted out among the Gentiles for favors given and received.

(2) *SINGLE DEVOTION AND OBEDIENCE*: Although this is involved in our first characteristic, *love*, we feel that it is one of the dimensions of love that needs to be stressed. We could cite many scriptures, but we prefer to look simply at the story of the centurion which gives us such a clear example of the meaning of authority. Coming to the Master he appealed to him on behalf of his servant who was lying at home suffering with paralysis. Jesus offered to come and heal him. "But the centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not qualified for you to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, "Go!" and he goes, "Come!" and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this!" and he does it' " (Matt. 8:8,9, NAS). Our Lord was so impressed by the declaration of this soldier that, "He marveled, and said to those who were following, 'truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.' " (Matt. 8:10, NAS).

A necessary characteristic in a slave

is obedience to authority, which requires the recognition of those placed in authority over us. When one recognizes the need for this kind of single devotion and obedience, there comes a whole new dimension of realization and fulfillment. God is restoring in this hour spiritual authority. Many people are afraid of it and feel that their freedom somehow is being threatened. We can well understand this as we think of how the ways of the Gentiles have invaded the Kingdom of God. It is not an ungrounded fear for people to wonder about authority in the Christian community. But we must not let the violations and distortions that have characterized some areas of Christianity turn us away from the true structure of spiritual authority as revealed in the Scriptures. God has given us to one another, and He has put within each of us a measure of life and ministry. He has located and placed us in His Body. As we submit to one another where we find one another, and receive others in submission without any false modesty, recognizing that we have life and ministry to share with them, we will start to realize the joy of God's order. Gone will be the anarchy, the frustration, the distortion, the disturbance, and the inner uncertainty. When we find ourselves in right relationship with one another, and with those whom God has put in authority over us, and we walk by the Spirit of God in love and in service to one another, then and only then will we start to realize the fulfillments within our lives that have not been realized due to the humanly structured Christianity of which we have been a part. Let us not be afraid of authority, for remember that he who has or exercises authority over us is in turn under authority to someone else. Let us remember that the one who is in authority over all of us is our Lord Jesus Christ, and as we submit in faith and love one to the other in all of the scripturally-defined and spiritually-underscored relationships of the Kingdom of God, we are going to discover many of the Kingdom blessings that have escaped us for so long.

(3) *RESPONSIBILITY*: If we have left the impression that the Kingdom of God consists of a lot of sloppy, sentimental relationships, we would correct that impression quickly. The love that characterizes the Kingdom is not a love that condones, but affectionately corrects. It is not a love that allows destructive freedoms, but a love that takes the sword of authority and puts to death those things that would harm and destroy. It is not a love that sits back passively and indifferently, but a love that lays down its life . . . a love that goes out in the battle at great risk for that which is redemptive and right. We are not left to do as we like. There is law in the Kingdom of God. There are principles that one cannot violate without doing much hurt to himself and to others.

Our Lord has made an investment of His love, grace, and gifts in us that we might employ them well, and bring a return to Him from His investment. One of the metaphors that is used to describe our Lord is that of a noble man, who gives his slaves money to be invested. He then goes away for a time, and upon returning, calls His slaves to give an account of their stewardship. Those who invested well are recipients of His approval; but the one who has failed to use that which was given him is dealt with severely. In fact, what was given him was taken from him, and given to one of the other slaves who had made use of what had been given him.

Let us not erroneously conclude that the grace and love of Christ gives us room to act irresponsibly with those things which He has given us for the blessing of others, and for the development of our own redeemed humanity. He requires from us responsible action, and will not condone irresponsibility in His people. It is on this basis that, as the age grows late and the old Adam order, "deluded by its lusts, is sinking towards death" (Eph. 4:22, NEB), we are sensing a divine pressure upon us as Kingdom citizens and slaves, to use responsibly those gifts which have been given us for investment, and for which we will have to give an accounting in that day.

(See Luke 19:13; Matt. 24:25; Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 12:37.)

(4) *HUMILITY*: Probably one of the best defenses against becoming involved in the caste systems of the Gentiles, is to consider the matter of who we are, and the reason for us being where we are, in the Kingdom of God. We must not forget that no matter how great the gift or enablement given to us in the Spirit, it is never an occasion for self-aggrandizement or boasting. For what do we have, that we didn't receive? Our Lord deals with this very specifically in a story concerning a slave. He says "But which of you, having a *slave* plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterwards you will eat and drink'? He does not thank the *slave* because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'we are unworthy *slaves*; we have done only that which we ought to have done'" (Luke 17:7-10, NAS).

Here our Lord makes it quite clear that we are slaves, bought out of bondage, and we must not forget it, no matter how far we may advance in the ranks of our Master's service. Even though, as in ancient Greek and Roman homes, we may be taken into the intimate circle of the family, we must remember at all times that we are slaves purchased and owned by our Master. And when we are given a work to do by Him, and do it well, there is no ground for us to expect an automatic promotion to some privileged category. Having done all that is asked of us, we will be saved from pride and arrogance, and from authoritarian attitudes, if we will constantly keep in mind who we are, and from whence we came. One of the things that will keep us from falling prey to pride and self-congratulation, is to recall that we once stood naked in the public slave market under the ownership of a cruel tyrannical master, when One of great

tenderness and compassion came along and paid a high price for us; even the price of His own life's blood. We were bought dearly, and should have no problem offering our Lord a life of humble and grateful servitude without feeling we ought to be specially singled out for praise. Let us hasten to add that while this is so, and we believe that our Lord told this story that we may know the modifying influence of humility, it is nevertheless true that even though we are slaves, and must walk in humility, our Lord again and again, as we are able to receive it, lets us know of His love and appreciation. But lest we take advantage of this, He uses this story to remind us that we must ever hold in our minds the fact that we are slaves.

Do we not see in the apostle Paul one who closely approximates the ideal picture of a Christian slave? We are not suggesting that he was without imperfections. However, of all men in the New Testament record, he seems to be the one who most adequately fulfilled the picture of a slave. In the tender and touching farewell meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus, we hear him giving an account of his life and ministry as he says, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, *servicing [slaving for]* the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews" (Acts 20:18,19, NAS). Certainly this man had much to boast of in terms of gift and ministry. However, he never seemed to have lost the sense of wonder, that he who was a persecutor of the Church should be counted worthy to be put into the ministry. This seemed to constantly hold him steady and make him walk humbly. He knew that he was a slave who had been bought in the slave market, and given a high place in the household of his Master. He never ceased to marvel at the grace of God in his life, and certainly never sought to take one iota of praise to himself for that which the Lord accomplished through him. In this way he serves as an inspiring example of what can be done in the

life of a man who embraces all of the ingredients that are required to make the kind of slave that glorifies his Lord and blesses the Kingdom of God.

(5) **FREEDOM:** Again we are faced with a paradox as we speak of freedom and slavery. How can one be a slave and yet be free? The answer is not to be found in the realm of unredeemed human experience. It is to be found only where one is set free from bondage to sin and Satan, to be brought under the loving bondage of Jesus Christ and all His redemptive and restructuring oversight. Therefore, the freer we are from the masters of the old Adamic order, the more we come into the bondage of Christ and the principles of true life. This releases us to the highest fulfillment. Our real freedom is to be found in deliverance "from," and in submission "to." Herein lies the paradox. Peter describes it when he says, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as *bond-slaves* of God" (1 Pet. 2:16, NAS). Here is the paradox spelled out. Act as

free men, such freedom being bondage to God, His love and His Word.

(6) **KINGDOM RELATED:** This last point may seem redundant, but running the risk of repetition, we ask you to listen to Paul as he says, "For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way *serves [slaves for]* Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men" (Rom. 14:17,18, NAS). The Christian's love slavery applies to those things which constitute the Kingdom of God. If we have been brought into righteousness both in our standing before God through Christ, and in the inculcation of righteous principles in our living; if we are enjoying the "peace with God" that comes from faith in His blood, and the "peace of God" that comes by having a "conscience void of offense towards God and man"; and if we have entered into the joy that the Holy Spirit ministers to us as the fruit of righteousness and peace; then we have the atmosphere, the motivation, and the dynamic for

the kind of service that "is acceptable to God and is approved by men."

As we study these principles, and seek to be adjusted by them, we shall be brought into the place of restful activity and active restfulness that is the nature of Kingdom living. May we know the fulfillment that can be ours through recognizing the joy of being a love slave to Christ and to one another! In this hour, when the world is threadbare and running out of options, it is time for the citizens of the Kingdom to provide a way of life which will be not only acceptable to God, but attractive to men. For too long the Kingdom has been marred by mixture, and it seems the time has come that He is starting to remove "those things which do offend." As spiritual authority is being restored, and men across the world are finding joy in serving one another, we hear a new sound of hope for the fulfillment of the prayer that has issued from the hearts of multiplied thousands down through the Christian centuries: "Thy Kingdom come." ♣

BEHOLD THE MAN

(continued from page 6)

present tense. *Jesus is still Man.* There is a Man enthroned at God's right hand, to whom has been granted all authority in heaven and in earth, and to whom are subject all angels, principalities and powers. (See Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:20-21, 1 Pet. 3:22.)

Viewing with prophetic foresight this mystery of the God-Man exalted to God's right hand, the psalmist David cries out in wonder:

"What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands . . ." (Ps. 8:4-6).

Contemplating the mystery of Jesus the God-Man exalted to God's right hand, who can offer a full or final answer to the question, "What is man?" ♣

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