

The Teacher as a Servant Leader

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN TEACHER?

Our Calling to Be Teachers

Paul, the great apostle, speaks about his own calling in terms of being a servant, a bond slave of Jesus Christ (Romans 1.1). He says he and his fellow ministers are to be regarded as servants of Christ those entrusted with the secret things of God (1 Corinthians 4.1). It seems to me that this is the particular attitude and understanding that ought to underline our relationships with each other. We are to see ourselves as fellow servants of Jesus Christ. In Paul's letter to the Philippians (chapters 1 to 3) he calls them my brothers, my joy and crown, dear friends, loyal yoke fellows. If we are to regard ourselves as servants to each other this will have implications for our relationships with other members of the community of which we as teachers are part. If, on the other hand, we regard ourselves primarily as professional teachers, trained to be "experts" on children, we may very well have quite different relationships. This concept of servanthood is therefore vital for the development of Biblical relationships.

The disciples did not like this concept and bitterly argued among themselves about who was the greatest. It will be helpful to trace this debate over the last weeks of Jesus' life when it seemed to the disciples that the Kingdom of God was about to be set up.

Jesus Teaches On Servant Leadership

Mark 9.33-36 Jesus asked questions to help the disciples clarify the issues. He taught that the person who would be first must put himself last and be the servant of all.

Matthew 18:1-4 He defined greatness in terms of childlikeness- a willingness to repent and become like a child. This is true humility.

Matt 18:15-20 True humility involves a willingness to handle relationships in the God given way.

Matt 18:21-35 Forgiveness is to be characteristic for us since we have been forgiven so much we must forgive our brother who is our fellow servant.

Mark 10:35-45 Leadership involves sacrifices - a servant's heart. Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve and to give himself a ransom for many.

Luke 22:24-30 When the disciples were still misunderstanding his teaching and quarrelling about who was to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, He taught them that authority is not to be exercised as the heathen do with concepts of power and position. Instead the greatest will be like the youngest the one who rules like the one who serves.

John 13:4-5,12-17 Jesus demonstrated to His disciples the humility they needed by His action in washing his disciples' feet. He showed them that if He who is their Lord and Master could perform such service to them then they could likewise be humble enough to similarly serve each other.

Paul's Teaching On Relationships

Paul shows he understands these relationships well and they are exemplified with his dealings with the Church. He does not try to commend himself (2 Corinthians 5:12), nor does he take pride in what is seen but are more concerned about what is in the heart. Despite his apostolic authority he urges and persuades and commends others to them rather than insisting and commanding. Like Paul our ministry is one of reconciliation not one of domineering or gaining kudos for ourselves (See 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and 2 Corinthians 6:4-10).

TEACHER AS A SERVANT LEADER

This paper looks specifically at the leading role of a teacher. Most teachers see themselves as "in charge of a class" their most important duties being to "control" the class and to instruct them in skills, attitudes, values and knowledge. This paper takes a different perspective and considers the teacher as a servant-leader, one who has been given gifts of leadership and has what Fowler (1990) refers to as the "office" of teaching. The teacher exercises that "office" within a Christian learning community

A Teacher One Called to Serve

In the Book of Ephesians, a circular letter Paul wrote to the Churches, Paul reveals in his brief greeting (Ephesians 1:1-2) a lot about his understanding of what it means to be a servant of God and a Christian. Paul introduces himself as one who is what he is through the instrumentality of God, through the will of God. He did not look at his life as being due to his own effort or because of his educational background and training, his keen mind, his knowledge of the Bible or his skill in oratory. Paul did not see himself as called because he believed his gifts fitted him for the task of leading the Church but rather because he knew he was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will and grace of God. We also need to be conscious that our calling is through the will of God. It is not on account of our gifting. Rather it is the other way around, gifts are given to enable us to fulfil our calling. We should ask the Father for the gifts we need to fulfil our calling. May God help us to see that we are called to be teachers in a Christian school according to the will of God and not for any other reason.

Paul addresses the people at Ephesus using two terms. Firstly he calls them the saints; those set apart for God to be as it were exclusively His. In just the same way as the people of Israel were regarded in that way so to are those who God has chosen to live a life acceptable to him and to rejoice in His favour and protection. Then he calls them the faithful, those who trust in Jesus Christ and who have shown themselves to be faithful in their living. Paul shows through this letter both God's work in saving us and our responsibility to live by faith a life pleasing to Him.

LEADING

The pastor-teacher is a leader of his/her students. His/her particular task is to guide, lead, unfold and enable and to structure learning so that the students grow to be responsible disciples (Van Brummelen 1988 pages 28- 30). Jesus taught that leading for his disciples involved being a servant first person and not exercising authority over others (See Mark 10:42-45, Matthew 20:20-28 and John 13:13-15). The teacher thus is to be a servant leader to the students. This maybe a fairly revolutionary thought for most teachers, but it is a thought that is in line with New Testament thinking.

The Servant Relationship

The servant is a person who is *among* not *over* those whom he leads. (Richards 1975 P 132) He goes on to say, "There are many interpersonal implications of this relationship. One who is *over* us (an employer, an officer over enlisted men in the service) is normally perceived as "different from" us. The *over* relationship, makes it easy for directives and cognitive kinds of data to be passed and processed, but very difficult for personal, affective kinds of data. (How many of us share our problems and feelings with our boss?) The *over* relationship, also means that communications are normally through one-way channels. That is, the one *over* normally communicates directive-type data down, the one *under* normally communicates response-type data up.

On the other hand, an *among* relationship, places persons on the same level. When we see another person as on our level, we normally perceive of him as "like" us. This makes it easier for all kinds of data to flow: we can share ideas, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, etc., knowing that we stand equal with the other and have his respect. Communication channels are now open to two-way flow. Either party can initiate, either respond. Either party can share. ... An *among* relationship means that each person perceives the other as like him, and that each freely shares in the give and take of self-revelation and mutual ministry."

The following table summarises these ideas

IF YOU ARE OVER

You are perceived as different from

You give directions down

Cognitive data is easier to pass on

The ministry is perceived as belonging to the leader

IF YOU ARE AMONG

You are perceived as on the same level

Data can flow both ways

Affective data feelings ideas, attitudes can be passed on more easily

Ministry is seen as mutual

This idea may appear to create some difficulty for a teacher student relationship but this is not so. The teacher has delegated authority from parents; the students are thus responsible to obey and honour him/her (Ephesians 6:1-4). The teacher needs to lead, not by exercising power but with authority as a servant leader. As a leader he must manage and lead his team but that is different from a more authoritarian sense of control. Jesus spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper about these matters of relationships between him and them. *"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:13-15).* The point is that we are teacher of our students but we are not their Lord. They have only one Master and you are all brothers (Mat 23:8 NIV).

The Servant Task

For a Christian, the servant's task is serving others in that which is important to God. The purpose given to us by the Holy Spirit from the Lord Jesus is to be conformed to the image of Christ, growing up into Him who is the Head of the Body and serving Him by serving others. The Christian leader, called to serve as Jesus served, enters into this transforming purpose and gives himself to build others as disciples. His primary concern and ministry is the building up of the Body and its members.(Richards 1975 page 133)

The Servant Method

The secular leader tells but a servant leader does because that is what being as servant is all about. We are not called to lord it over others but to do for them what is needed so that they will grow as disciples. This is not a lack of authority it is a different kind of authority. See 1 Peter 5:1-5, Matthew 20:20-28 and John 13:13-17

The servant's method of leadership is involves providing an example, and by virtue of example leaders bear a powerful authority. As models leaders, leaders are used by God to move others to be like them (Richards 1975 page 134).

The inward Freedom to Function as Leader

The freedom to function as a leader comes from knowing ourselves as forgiven, understanding that what we are, is totally of God's grace, and comes from being people of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not really know ourselves we will tend to blame others for our problems. Often when sin in our lives is not dealt with, it becomes a block to our service because it stops us properly accepting ourselves and interferes with our relationship to God and our fellows. We cover up our sin even to ourselves.

A Teacher of the Kingdom

In the Book of Matthew Jesus gives us a parable to tell us the nature of the Christian teacher. He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." (Matthew 13:52)

As a Christian teacher you are to be the scribe of the kingdom. This means you are a person whom God has called to a specific task. The scribes were the schoolteachers of their day. A Christian teacher is also "a scribe of the kingdom" and needs to teach by taking out from his or her own treasure house treasures old and new. The scribes of

Jesus day only relied on the law (Old treasure). The scribe of the kingdom was one who received new understanding out of his following Jesus. If we are to effectively teach we need to be daily receiving new treasures in our own walk with the Lord and our fellowship with his people. In this way he or she will teach differently as Jesus did with "authority" (Matthew 7:28-29) with an authority that comes from a relationship with God.

Bibliography

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