

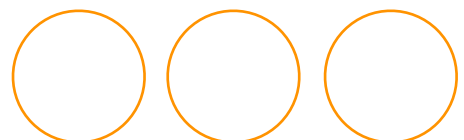
ST STEPHEN'S

Structures,

Eldership,

Leadership

& Servants



THE AUSTRALIAN ANGLICAN STRUCTURE¹

Diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia

There are 23 dioceses in the Anglican Church of Australia. These dioceses vary considerably in a number of respects. Some dioceses are incorporated. Others are unincorporated associations. Some dioceses operate under a consensual compact while others are constituted by state legislation.

All dioceses have:

- a diocesan bishop
- a synod
- a diocesan council (or standing committee)
- parishes
- a diocesan tribunal to deal with offences
- a body to deal with questions of fitness for office.

All diocesan synods pass laws (known as ordinances, acts or canons) to regulate their affairs. Usually, unlike General Synod legislation, there is no mechanism for, say, parishes to decline to adopt diocesan legislation. Whether or not diocesan legislation is legally binding depends on its character. Legislation relating to property is usually binding.

Diocesan legislation comes into force only when the bishop assents to it.

Subject to the 1961 Constitution, the dioceses are autonomous. No other body or person in the Church has power to intervene in the governance or management of a diocese.

¹ edited from formal report to general synod found <http://www.anglican.org.au/home/about/Documents/1391%20Outline%20of%20the%20Structure%20of%20the%20Anglican%20Church%20of%20Australia%20-%20Website%20Version%20020713.pdf>

Diocesan Bishops

Diocesan bishops exercise the primary leadership role in a diocese. That leadership is exercised both pastorally and temporally. The temporal leadership is usually defined in various ordinances of the diocese or constitutions of diocesan bodies. The diocesan bishop's functions include:

- chairing meetings of the Synod, the diocesan council and various other diocesan bodies;
- licensing clergy and laity to minister in parishes, as chaplains or in other roles;
- appointing persons to membership of various diocesan bodies;
- implementing recommendations of disciplinary bodies; and
- approval of liturgy.
- Diocesan bishops may withhold their assent to diocesan legislation.

Appointing diocesan bishops varies from diocese to diocese. There are two principal models. Under the first model the bishop is elected by the diocesan synod. That synod may be served by a nomination committee elected by the synod. The second model provides for a committee or board elected by the diocesan synod to appoint the diocesan bishop. There are various mechanisms for dealing with deadlocks in the appointment process.

Usually diocesan bishops retire at the age of sixty-five or seventy. Most dioceses provide for the office of diocesan bishop to become vacant upon physical or mental unfitness, bankruptcy, conviction for a relevant offence. Some dioceses have provisions to extend the bishop's tenure.

Parishes

Dioceses are comprised of parishes in numbers ranging from the low twenties to the high two hundreds.

Traditionally, parishes are defined geographically. However, in the last decade or so, dioceses have introduced the concept of congregations centring on special interests or established outside of traditional structures in order to reach out and minister to people not attracted to the traditional parish model.

A parish is traditionally organised in a manner paralleling a diocese, usually having:

- a priest (also known as a vicar, minister, pastor, senior pastor, presbyter or incumbent)
- churchwardens (also known as wardens)
- a parish council.
- Many parishes also employ staff

Parish Clergy

The traditional view at law is that parish clergy are holders of an office appointed by the diocesan bishop, not employees of either the diocesan bishop, the diocese or a parish.

The processes for appointing parish clergy vary from diocese to diocese but they may be described broadly as follows. The diocese and the parish appoint representatives to a board or committee to identify appropriate candidates. Agreed candidates are submitted to the diocesan bishop for approval. The diocesan bishop causes a request to be made for a report from the National Register to determine whether the National Register holds any Information concerning sexual misconduct or child abuse relevant to the appointment. If the diocesan bishop approves the appointment, they issue a license to the appointee to minister in the relevant parish. The duration of the appointment is not usually specified and, in some dioceses, the licence is expressed to be terminable by the diocesan bishop either at will or on giving a specified period of notice.

Diocesan ordinances regulate the duties, powers and disciplinary regime applicable to parish clergy.

Typically, the powers of parish clergy include:

- overall leadership of the parish and responsibility for the spiritual health and pastoral care of parishioners;
- conduct and control of divine service;
- appointment of staff, with the concurrence of the churchwardens and/or parish council and the diocesan bishop;
- appointment of persons to ministries conducted within the parish; and
- appointment of one churchwarden and one or more parish councillors.

Churchwardens

The usual role of churchwardens includes responsibility for parish property, administration of finances and reporting to the diocesan bishop for any deviations from authorised liturgy.

Churchwardens often have informal roles as the parish priest's confidants.

There are usually three churchwardens, one appointed by the parish priest and two elected by parishioners.

Churchwardens are also members of the parish council.

Churchwardens' tenure is usually from one annual general meeting to the next.

Parish Council

The parish council commonly has at least a consultative role but may also have a deliberative role in relation to spiritual and temporal matters within a parish. This varies from diocese to diocese.

The number of parish councillors may vary but the usual pattern is for the parish priest to appoint one member for every two elected by the parishioners.

Parish councillors' tenure is usually from one annual general meeting to the next.

TOP DOWN DRIVEN MINISTRY

Whilst various attempts have been made to make sure that ministry is grass roots what we see throughout the broader Anglican church is a “professionally based” ministry develop.

There are some advantages with regards to this model in that it means the rector has the power to implement change and it should actually be easier to try new initiatives and follow the call of God’s Holy Spirit in areas that not everyone may initially be totally sure of.

The disadvantages of this “top down” ministry is that it can lead to the rector and staff doing a more than is possible expected. This causes burnout, a lack of ownership on behalf of the church family, but most of all it limits the spread of the Gospel as less people are involved.

So what is the solution?

Some appoint Parish Council to take responsibility for the various ministries, unfortunately this does not work as the Parish Council members are appointed annually and whilst they may be nice people, they may not have the prophetic, kingly or priestly gifting suitable to lead a ministry area.

Others ask individuals to run the ministries, it becomes much like a dummy pass and we expect people to develop those ministries without support or the respect for role that they have been given. This approach does often work although there are some downsides as these people are often appointed to the role without support, training, accountability, expectations or connections with the wider ministry team.

This is where “Dispersing” comes in.

Dispersing the Authority

Very early on in the life of the church we read that in response to the needs of a growing Christian community the Apostles state *“It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables”*. This is not to say that serving on tables was below the Apostles but rather the Apostles viewed it as their primary role to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, yet they recognised that a church centred on Grace will be transformed and moved to reach out to the community around them and to meet the needs where possible. What we see here is a “Dispersed Authority” with a **specific duties** and **responsibility** within the community that worked **in line with the vision and theology of the church** which were **held accountable** by the Apostles.

This approach meant that the early church was able to meet the needs of the community. we also read that *“the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith”*

ELDERSHIP

According to the New Testament, elders are responsible for the primary leadership and oversight of a church. The function and role of an elder is well summarised by Alexander Strauch in his book Biblical Eldership: "Elders lead the church [1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2], teach and preach the Word [1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9], protect the church from false teachers [Acts 20:17, 28-31], exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine [1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; Titus 1:9], visit the sick and pray [James 5:14; Acts 20:35], and judge doctrinal issues [Acts 15:16]. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church".²

ELDERS AT ST STEPHEN'S

From a Biblical point of view the Rector functions as an "overseeing Elder" who is responsible for the direction, teaching and leadership of the church and held accountable by the Wardens and the Regional Bishop and Diocesan Archbishop.

The Rector with advice from Pastoral staff and Wardens appoints the Elders who head up various areas of ministry.

Expectations for an Elder:

- To have taken part in a Christianity Explored course
- To support and endorse the vision of St Stephen's Coorparoo
- To Adhere to the Leadership Expectations of St Stephen's Coorparoo
- To have read and studied 1 & 2 Timothy
- To Read "Evangelical Truth" by John Stott
- To Read "Growing in Christ" by J.I Packer

The Elder is responsible for:

- Leading their area of ministry
- Recruiting and caring for their team members
- Actioning their areas of ministry and Reporting/Advising Rector and Parish Council in "Best Practices" for their areas of responsibility

The Elder is supported, encouraged and held accountable primarily by the Rector in consultation with the Wardens and Parish Council.

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-role-of-an-elder>

STEWARD LEADER: A BIBLICAL MODEL OF LEADERSHIP³

Fears and concerns with this approach to leadership

There is no such thing as a “perfect” leadership structure as for a matter of fact there is no such thing as a “perfect” leader because all of us have that sinful nature at play within us. There is only one perfect High Priest and that is Jesus Christ, our head, lead pastor, atoning sacrifice, Lord and Saviour.

Can this model become corrupt and be abused? Yes of course and that is where strong accountability structures need to be maintained and strong communications between Elders, Rector and Parish Council.

Could this become a power grab by the rector? Yes, but the more power is centralised in one person, the less we will be able to achieve for the glory of God.

In the Bible is a model of Leadership that I believe we are called to aspire to, imitate and compare ourselves to. If we do this we will avoid many of the trappings of bad leadership. Pastor Timothy Keller from Redeemer Presbyterian in New York has written an excellent paper titled “Steward Leader”. The approach to leadership outlined in this paper is what we as Elders will aspire to.

³<http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/steward-leader-biblical-model-leadership-qa>

this Paper was written and delivered by Dr. Timothy Keller to Redeemer Presbyterian in New York

Many Christians don't think of themselves as leaders. Others may know that they have been assigned roles as leaders, but they aren't clear on what that means. No wonder. Contemporary models and images of leadership usually include a dynamism and charisma that many of us just don't feel we have. How does the Bible define leadership?

I believe the main biblical model for leadership is the "steward leader." The "steward" was both a ruler and a slave, and this model provides us with a unique way to think out what it means to lead others.

The Biblical Metaphor of the Leader as Steward

CREATION, LEADERSHIP, AND STEWARDSHIP

God commissioned Adam and Eve to "have dominion" (Gen. 1:26 KJV)—they were called to "rule over... every living creature" (Gen. 1:26, 28). That is a call to leadership, but also to stewardship. God made Adam and Eve rulers "over the works" of God's hands (Ps. 8:6), and yet, "The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1). In other words, Adam and Eve had authority over the world's resources, but not ownership. They were to manage them, but only according to God's will and for his glory, not theirs.

Therefore, godly leadership is essentially the *accountable* (rather than autonomous) *cultivation* (rather than exploitation) of resources. Sinful leadership is using a particular resource *selfishly* (rather than for the benefit of others) and, therefore, *exploitatively* (harming rather than cultivating and honoring the resource itself).

DIMENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP AND STEWARDSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The theme of stewardship is further developed in the New Testament. The steward in ancient times was the household manager of a large estate, but ordinarily was also himself a slave. The steward had authority over the estate, but only within the boundaries of the will of the lord of the estate.

In the parables of Jesus, we see how stewards operated. In Luke 12:42–48, Jesus speaks of the steward, or manager (Greek *oikonomos*, meaning literally, "ruler of the house"), who has complete authority over the whole estate—all its workers and resources. But Jesus also calls him a *doulos* (vv. 43, 45–47), a word that means not just a domestic servant or hired hand but a slave, someone who belongs to the master.

Who then is the faithful and wise manager [oikonomos], whom the master puts in charge of his servants?... Suppose that slave [doulos, also referring to the manager] says to himself, "My master is taking a long time in coming," and he begins to beat the

menservants and the maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him... and cut him to pieces.
(Luke 12:42–46)

What is steward leadership in the New Testament? First, a steward is a slave who is wholly and unconditionally accountable to his master. None of his ruling authority is for his own benefit. It is solely for his lord's benefit, which is why he can represent his master and stand in his place. Only the humble, obedient servant can be entrusted to rule.

Second, the steward is a ruler, with real authority to grow and prosper the resources under him. He may not shrink back from making vigorous use of the power given to him. The fearful steward who buries the entrusted resources instead of managing them is called a wicked and lazy slave (Matt. 25:26).

If a steward uses his power selfishly or exploitatively, the master will remove his authority in the most forceful way. The startling "cut him to pieces" shows that Jesus will not countenance abusive and domineering leaders. To the contemporary mind, slavery and authority are opposites, but in the steward model, it is only the humble slave living wholly for his or her master who should receive authority.

Paul explicitly uses the steward as the model for all Christian leaders. He describes his own ministry as a "stewardship" (*oikonomian* appears in 1 Cor. 9:17). He also refers to the elder/bishop, an "overseer" (*episkopon*), as the "steward" (*oikonomon*) of God" (Titus 1:7).

And what resources are Christian leaders given by God to steward? We are given God's truth ("ministers of Christ, and stewards [*oikonomous*] of the mysteries of God" in 1 Cor. 4:1 KJV) and spiritual gifts ("Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God" in 1 Peter 4:10 NRSV).

The ultimate steward is the incarnate Jesus himself, the Lord and the Servant of the covenant. We live in a binding covenant relationship with God and are obligated to serve him. Because Jesus is both divine and human, he is our covenant Lord, and yet he also takes on the Servant's yoke of God's covenant requirements and fulfills them completely in our stead. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.

Here we see the ultimate example of the ruler who is a servant, and who therefore can be entrusted with authority. Jesus made himself nothing and took the form of a slave (*doulou*); "Therefore" he has been highly exalted and has been given the name above every name

(Phil. 2:6–10). In the same way, Christian leaders can be entrusted with authority only if they are humble slaves of Christ (Rom. 1:1) and of others (2 Cor. 4:5).

The spirit of the steward is born in all people who understand the gospel of free grace. The gospel means that a Christian believer is *simul iustus et peccator*—simultaneously justified and accepted, and yet with sin still operating. We have confidence in God’s full acceptance now, and yet we still have a sin nature. This reality is the ultimate spiritual resource for a leader, who must be both a servant and a ruler, both gentle and fearless.

The Biblical Metaphor of the Leader as the “Slave of Christ”

At this point, some of us are feeling uneasy at all this talk of slavery. I know I am! For that reason, we have to consider how and why the Bible—and Paul in particular—can use the concept of slavery to convey in part what it means to be a Christian. My source for much of the following is Murray J. Harris in *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*.⁴

In the “steward leader” model of Christian leadership, a leader is a slave who is in a position of humble accountability, and a ruler who is the cultivator of resources. How Christian leaders discharge their responsibility to cultivate and grow the resources they have—the Word of God, their own gifts of the Spirit, their social location, the gifts and graces of the people they are leading, and so on—is explored elsewhere. This paper looks at the first and foundational aspect of Christian leadership—namely, that leaders are, spiritually speaking, “slaves of Christ.” This term is confusing and even troubling to modern ears, so we have to look in some depth at what the Bible means by this.

THE NEW TESTAMENT METAPHOR OF SLAVERY CONVEYS SPIRITUAL MEANINGS

The word *doulos* meant “slave” in distinction from servants or hired men. It is constantly used to describe the Christian life. Mary says, “Here I am, a slave of the Lord. Let it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38). Paul calls himself a slave of God (Titus 1:1), as does James (James 1:1). Paul also refers to himself as a slave of Christ, and so do Peter and Jude (Phil. 1:1; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; 2 Peter 1:1; and Jude 1).

In addition, Christians are all said to be slaves of Christ (1 Cor. 7:22), of other Christians (2 Cor. 4:5; see also Gal. 5:13), and even of all people, including non-Christians (1 Cor. 9:19).

⁴ 1. Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1999).

This is the case in spite of Paul's seemingly paradoxical injunction to believers: "do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:23).

The metaphor is often used even when the word "slave" is not directly used. In 1 Peter 5:5, Peter writes, "In your relations with one another, put on humility as an apron" (translation derived from the Greek). The verb here is very specific and picturesque. It refers to an apron with just one sleeve—the apron a slave wore to do work. Peter is telling Christians to humbly serve others—whether they profit from it or not—like slaves. He is urging us to follow Christ, who washed his disciples' feet (John 13). When Jesus removed his outer clothes and wrapped a towel around his waist in preparation for service, he was deliberately imitating the behavior of a slave (see John 12:3). Indeed, Jesus called his disciples "slaves" when he told them that they must do the same thing for each other, because a slave (*doulos*) is not above his master (John 13:16).

WHY CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE HAVE DIFFICULTY APPRECIATING THIS IMPORTANT METAPHOR

Harris points out that six other New Testament Greek words besides *doulos* refer to servants or hired workers in distinction from slaves.² Consequently, when the word *doulos* is used, the writer means a slave, someone owned by a master. Even so, almost every major English Bible translation translates *doulos* as "servant," deliberately muting the sharp meaning of the word. Translations that avoid the term "slave" for "servant" will obscure this. What is the reason for the English translations' avoidance of this term?

There are good and understandable reasons for our squeamishness about the word "slave." Harris points out the obvious. The race-based African slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century (and its remnants in parts of the world today) completely controls our understanding of the word "slavery" now.

The slavery described in the New Testament was that of the Greco-Roman empire. It was a harsher institution than Old Testament indentured servanthood, in which Jewish slaves were not owned in toto by their masters, but it was a very complex phenomenon. Consider these facts: Slaves were not distinguishable from others by race, speech, or clothing. They looked and lived like almost everyone else and were not segregated from the rest of society in any way. Slaves were often more educated than their owners and many times held very high managerial positions. From a financial standpoint, slaves made the same wages as free laborers, and therefore were not usually poor. People could sell themselves into slavery (for some, becoming a slave of a wealthy family was a way to improve one's condition economically). Also, slaves could accrue enough personal capital to buy themselves out. Some slaves owned other slaves. Very few slaves were slaves for life. Most could

reasonably hope to be manumitted within ten to fifteen years, or by their late thirties at the latest.⁵

By contrast, New World slavery was much more systematically and homogeneously brutal. It was race-based, so all slaves were easily identifiable. Its default mode was slavery-for-life, unlike that of first century slavery. Also, the entire African slave trade was begun and resourced through kidnapping. The New Testament writers, while never actively endorsing slavery, treat the broad, complex reality of first century slavery as a fact of life, but the Bible unconditionally condemns kidnapping people for slavery and trafficking in slaves (1 Tim. 1:9–11; see also Deut. 24:7). This is one of the reasons that, while the early Christians did not go on a campaign to abolish first century slavery completely, later Christians led the fight to have New World-style slavery abolished, since it could not be squared in any way with biblical teaching.

Even in the first century context, the New Testament teaching on the equality of all people in Christ created an environment in which, at least within the church, slavery could only wither and die. Paul regularly told Christian slave owners that their slaves were equal to them in the sight of God and had to be treated as brothers (1 Cor. 7:22-23; the entire book of Philemon). This undermined and weakened the institution of slavery among Christians very quickly.

Despite the complexities of this subject, it is important for Christians today to think this out. Many critics of Christianity simply assume that the Bible wrongly endorsed slavery, so it may be wrong about other things it teaches. However, as we have seen, the Bible uses slavery as an illustration, so it is important to understand what it meant at the time.

THE MEANING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT METAPHOR

Since first century slavery was diverse within itself and also differed from modern slavery, what common core is there to the word “slave”? What is the fundamental definition of a slave?

A servant or hired person is free, and therefore gives service to another as long as it is of some benefit to him or her. Free people have the right and ability to withdraw service. They can refuse an employer’s request or quit, usually without any consequences other than the loss of income or the job itself.

⁵ For additional details, see Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 44 and 70. Prisoners of war or criminals could be sentenced to be galley slaves, and they lived literally under the lash in terrible conditions of grinding physical labor and prison-like conditions, often for life. However, this only represents the lot of a relatively small number of slaves in the first century.

On the other hand, slaves (in all forms of slavery) have no right or ability to refuse service, because they belong to the master. Slaves cannot “quit.” Their relationship to the master is not contractual. The obedience of the slave is unconditional.

Now it becomes clear why the New Testament metaphor of slavery is so important. In a very balanced, brief passage in 1 Corinthians 7:21–23, Paul says,

Are you a slave? Don't let it discourage you. But if you are able to become free, do it! For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was freed when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price, so don't become slaves to men.

Here Paul teaches two rather paradoxical but wonderfully true things about Christians.

First, we are freed *from* slavery. According to Paul, slavery to other human beings is a bad condition to be in. Any slave who has the ability to get free should do so. No one should be a slave to others, so Paul does not endorse or embrace the institution of slavery at all. He knows the harshness of the institution; and yet, he counsels them that if they can't get free from other human beings, they should not despair. Why? He comforts them by telling them that they are free in Christ—they are the Lord's freedmen, because they were bought with a price. Speaking to literal slaves, this is powerful stuff! Jesus' death on the cross has bought their freedom. Paul is using the legal language of manumission (emancipation) to describe the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

In what way has the cross of Christ purchased our freedom? In Christ we are free *from guilt, condemnation, and eternal death*. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

We are free *from slavery to sin*. “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34, 36; see also Rom. 6:14–23). “Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do... God did by sending his own Son... [that] the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:2–4).

Christ brings freedom *from fear of death*. “By his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death— that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb. 2:14–15).

In Christ we are free *from slavery to the world*. The world no longer controls us. “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

Christ also frees us *from slavery to people-pleasing*. “Am I [Paul] now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant [slave] of Christ” (Gal. 1:10; see also 1 Cor. 7:23).

Moreover, in Christ we find freedom *from slavery to selfishness*. “And he [Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Cor. 5:15).

Paul is saying that as bad as human slavery is, there is an even deeper kind of slavery—but all Christians, slave or free, are freed from it. The real slave masters—which grind, dehumanize, and exploit us, and which rob us utterly of everything we have—are sin, hopelessness, guilt, and death. Jesus has freed us from them, and even from the fear of them.

Second, we are freed *for* the only liberating slavery. We Western people think the alternative to human slavery—to living for someone else—is to be free to live for ourselves. But Paul points out (2 Cor. 5:15) that we need to be freed from that, too! To live for oneself, in the biblical view, is one more form of slavery. Why?

A person living for his or her own ego—who needs to earn self-esteem—is a driven person. Such persons must decide how they are going to prove themselves to others (and to themselves). Whatever they choose as the vehicle for their self-esteem immediately becomes an idol—a slave master. The person who seeks self-worth by way of human approval is a slave to what people think. The person who seeks self-worth by way of accomplishment or success is a slave to work. The person who seeks self-worth by being totally independent of anyone else’s approval or acclaim is a slave to independence. As Rebecca Manley Pippert says “whatever controls us really is our god.”⁴ By contrast,

Jesus’ ownership of our lives is not a control that manipulates us or takes away our dignity...He governs our lives the right way: by being who he is without compromise and by insisting we become all that we are meant to be. And he tells us this can occur only through following him, obeying him and maintaining a living, passionate kinship to him....God created us for himself. If we are living with any center other than Jesus, we

will be living incompletely...[H]e is the only one in the universe who can control us without destroying us. No one will ever love you like Jesus.⁶

The message of the Christian faith is that *everyone* is a slave to something. Romans 6 says we are slaves to sin (to self, to ego, to idols, and to the devil) or slaves to righteousness (to God). There is no third alternative. We are either a slave to Christ—and are therefore unafraid of and uncontrolled by any created thing—or we are a slave to something else. You have a lord and master that, deep in your heart, *you feel you have no ability or right to refuse*. If you are living for your career, for example, it is your idol slave-master. It cannot die for you or forgive you. If you fail it, it will just punish you all your life. The Bible says Christ is the only master who will not abuse you if you embrace him, and who, if you fail to obey him, forgives you because he has died for you.

The New Testament metaphor of slavery teaches that it is absolutely inappropriate and abusive for a human being to be the unconditional slave of any other human being, but if we are going to experience real freedom, it is absolutely imperative to be unconditional slaves of Jesus. He purchased our freedom with his blood, and as a mark of his ownership has given us the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:18–20).

It is always crucial to remember that the Bible uses scores of metaphors to convey our relationship to God (sheep to shepherd, children to father, slave to master, citizens to king, etc.). Each metaphor shows one aspect of our relationship with Christ—but no metaphor should be taken in the entirety of its characteristics, so that it excludes the applicability of others. When we say, “The moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie,” for instance, we mean that the moon is round like a pizza, but not that it was created by human beings like a pizza.⁷

Saying we are “slaves” of Christ cannot be taken to an extreme that applies to it all the features of human slavery (such as coercion, fear-based compliance, etc.) For example, Jesus tells his disciples they are his friends, not his slaves (John 15:15), but Jesus elsewhere *does* refer to his disciples as slaves (Luke 17:10; John 13:13). The two metaphors (being both friends and slaves) mean even though Jesus is our intimate friend, we still must serve him unconditionally; and even though Jesus is our Master, he does not regard us or control us with fear, but with love. He does not use us exploitatively, but wants us to flourish and become all he made us to be (Gal. 4:7, similarly tells us we are no longer “slaves” but “sons” and “heirs”).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 53–54.

⁷ Lyrics from “That’s Amore,” written by Jack Brooks and Harry Warren and performed by Dean Martin.

Applying the Metaphor

Murray Harris sums up the teaching of the New Testament in striking terms: “freedom leads to slavery and slavery leads to freedom.”⁸ That is, freedom from God is not really freedom, but slavery to some other master; slavery to God is not really slavery, but profound liberation. To quote the old Anglican prayer book, serving God [slavery] “is perfect freedom.”⁹ In a very striking phrase, James speaks of God’s law as the “law that gives freedom” (1:25; 2:12). James is saying only when we are completely submitted to God’s will (expressed in obedience to God’s law) are we truly free, because we are living in service to God, as we were designed to do.

We contemporary Western Christians, who tend to negotiate our relationships, are offended by the idea of being “slaves of Christ,” but we may need the metaphor even more than people have in the past! Why?

Economic relationships between vendors and consumers have always been highly conditional and contractual. A consumer keeps a relationship with a vendor only as long as the vendor gives the consumer some product of an acceptable quality at an acceptably low cost. If it doesn’t, the customer goes elsewhere.

Historically, however, social relationships were different. Relationships to family members, friends, and neighbors were *covenantal*, not contractual. That is, you continued the relationship out of faithfulness and loyalty, even if it was not meeting your needs. The irony is that such relationships could often be quite costly, but life was not fulfilling without these ties and friendships, which were lasting and not so conditional. Social theorists have pointed out, however, that in Western culture *all* relationships are increasingly being conducted on a highly conditional consumer-vendor basis.

This most definitely spills over into our spiritual relationships. When Western people become Christians, they often do so (usually unconsciously) very conditionally. They expect that God will meet their needs, fulfill them spiritually, and protect them from troubles and difficulties. If this doesn’t happen on their terms, they often cool off very quickly or abandon their profession of faith altogether. The same thing happens in their relationships with Christians. Believers often switch churches and change Christian communities the moment they find themselves uncomfortable or unhappy—or even just bored and uninspired—in any of their relationships. The call to be slaves of Christ and of one another confronts our Western mindset in the most powerful way.

⁸ Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 153.

⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, “A Collect for Peace” in “The Order for Morning Prayer.”

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Consider this exhortation by Paul to Corinthian believers: “Flee from sexual immorality [*porneia*—any sex outside marriage]... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:18–20).

Notice that Paul does *not* say, “If you have sex outside of marriage, God won’t bless you,” or “If you have sex outside of marriage, you won’t go to heaven.” That kind of reasoning assumes a works-righteousness, earn-your-own salvation, consumer-vendor relationship—as if you are a consumer who pays a certain price to get something from God, the vendor. God then is a boss, a partner, an “employer,” as it were, and as long as he is doing his part you need to do yours.

But Paul doesn’t go there at all. The gospel is that we are saved by sheer grace through the infinitely costly (for him!) sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This means we *belong* to God. We do not have the right to live as we want. To do so would not only be counterproductive to us but horribly unjust and wrong. Unconditional obedience to God is what we were built for, and it is also what God went to unfathomable lengths in his love to secure from us.

In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” An employer gives you directions that you can choose to follow or not, since you retain authority over your own life. But the gospel of sheer grace means giving up that authority over your life to Jesus and taking all conditions off your obedience to him. If you *ever* say, “I’ll obey the Lord *if* I get X,” it means you have some allegiance (X) higher than God. Conditional obedience is the sign there has been no allegiance transfer yet.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS

Paul says some rather paradoxical-sounding things about our relationship to others. In 1 Corinthians 7:23, he says “do not become slaves of men.” He also tells the Corinthians that he is a slave to them “for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5) and writes, “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (1 Cor. 9:19).

Is Paul contradicting himself? No. In 1 Corinthians 9 he explains what he means.

To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not

free from God's law...). To the weak I became weak, to win the weak... I do all this for the sake of the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:20–23)

Paul is saying that even though within his own heart the gospel has set him free from the need for human approval, from earning righteousness through law-keeping, and from cultural narrowness, he nonetheless freely gives himself to a kind of self-imposed slavery. He limits and accommodates himself to people's sensitivities and sensibilities as a way of befriending them and communicating with them.

New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce sums this up in a remarkable way: "So completely was he [Paul] emancipated from spiritual bondage that he was not even in bondage to his emancipation."⁹ Paul is not enslaved to being "free!" He could give up his independence when it benefited others for him to do so. Thus he was truly free.

Paul is telling us here that a Christian who is a slave of Christ is a voluntary slave to other Christians and even non-Christians. How so? We are not to enter into relationships like a consumer, remaining in them only as long as they profit us and meet our needs. We are to ask ourselves (especially about our Christian brothers and sisters) *not* "Are these cool people? Nice people? People whom I want to be around?" but "How can I serve? How can I help them grow? How can I help make them into better people?" Our model, of course, is Jesus.

Summary

To treat Jesus as Master and serve him as his steward means obeying him unconditionally, submitting to him unconditionally, relying on him totally, and trusting in him totally.

OBEYING

To obey is to comply with God's commands in his Word unconditionally. An example of failing to obey unconditionally is Jonah. He could not see how preaching to Nineveh would help him or his nation. If Jesus is Master and Lord, however, you must obey even if you don't understand all the reasons why. The evaluation question to ask is: *"Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this life-area, no matter how I feel about it?"*

SUBMITTING

To submit is to accept whatever comes into your life as part of God's plan. An example of failing to submit to God's will is Job. He thought God was unfair and that nothing good could come out of his suffering. If Jesus is Master and Lord, you must submit to the things he sends. The evaluation question to ask is: *"Am I willing to thank God for whatever*

happens in this area, whether I understand it or not?" This is not the same as to believe that God is happy to send tragedy. Rather, it is to believe that God in his overall purposes for your life is always acting wisely and redemptively.

RELYING

If Jesus is Master and Lord, he is not simply someone you comply with. You must depend wholly on him. He should hold title to your heart's deepest allegiance, loyalty, trust, and love. An example of failing to rely on God is Abraham, who had come to rely more on Isaac than on God for his joy and meaning in life. The evaluation question is this: *"Am I relying on something in this area more than I'm relying on God for my hope and meaning in life?"*

EXPECTING

If Jesus is Master and Lord, he has great power and resources. He would not call you without supporting you and "backing" you in what he asks of you. An example of failing to expect great things is Moses. When he was called (Ex. 3), his sense of incompetence prevented him from immediately embracing God's charge. Ask this evaluation question: "Do I think there are problems or limitations in my life that are too big for God to remove?"

The most fundamental definition of a steward leader is one who has power and authority to cultivate and develop resources entrusted by God. But the essence of Christian leadership is to humbly develop those resources for God's glory, not for our own.

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