

Box 80A

THE KEY TO HUMAN LIVING

"I am among you as he who serves"

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"The Protestant Faith"

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In the upper room on the eve of Jesus' death his disciples were arguing about which of them was the most important. Jesus explained that God's yardstick for measuring importance was the service done to others, and he concluded by putting his own example before them, "I am among you as he who serves".

It was not the first time that Jesus had had to underline the same truth; for example in Matthew 20 when the disciples were annoyed at James and John's desire to sit on either side of Jesus in his coming kingdom, Jesus pointed out again that service is the test for greatness and set his own example before them, "the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many". This is the acme of service, to give your life for others. John in Chapter 13 records how at the last supper Jesus set an example to his disciples by washing their feet, and when he had finished, he said "If I who are your Lord and teacher wash your feet you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you an example."

When we reflect on who Jesus was, the significance of this consistent emphasis on service becomes clear. In Jesus, God was present, for he was the one foretold by Isaiah whose name would be "Almighty God, Everlasting Father", "Emanuel, God with us". In view of this, the life of Jesus becomes the key for understanding human life, because it was the life lived by the creator of human life. So from Jesus' affirmation "I am among you as one who serves" we see that the key to life as God has created it, is service.

All our actions with regard to others should be motivated by their good, that is, we should be serving them. This is true in the way in which we use our money, our property, our investments, our time and our energy. Since service is the key to human life, the object of business as well as every other human activity should be to serve one another. This concept is consistently reaffirmed in the rest of the New Testament, for example, Galatians 5 "through love be servants of one another".

The contrast to service is self-centredness. This is the natural tendency of fallen humanity (even christian humanity unless it is deliberately submissive to the word of Christ). This self-centredness and self-importance becomes clear at the top of the tree. The great ones of the earth exercise authority, take titles of honour to themselves and generally seek to be served by those about them. But Jesus added, "it shall not be so among you." (Mark 10:42-43)

God has created us to be related to one another by serving one another just as he served us in our need by taking our nature and giving himself a ransom for us. Self-centredness isolates us from our fellows, and those at the top are more isolated than any. Self-centredness isolates but service relates us to one another.

How are we to follow the example of Christ and consciously adopt and practise this key to human life as God has created it, serving one another rather than serving ourselves? One of the problems is fear that we will miss out unless we look after number one first. If however, we all served one another we would get as much as if we all served ourselves! and we would get it in relationship with the joys that this provides rather than the isolation of self-centredness when we seek our own interests first. This is what God has created us for and this is how it will be in heaven. Meanwhile on earth we are to practise what Christ shows is the true way of life. But in this fallen world, where most people are serving themselves and not us, we will only be able to persevere in serving them, following Christ's example, if we have a strong faith in God. He is the one to whom we are to look to provide our needs. We are not to think of how much we get but of how much we can give in service, monetarily or energy wise. Nor are we to compare ourselves with others in salaries, in opportunities, in grants, or in housing or whatever it may be. Rather we are to trust God that his promise will be true that the righteous will not be forsaken nor will their seed become destitute. (Psalm 37 especially verse 25). We must fix our eyes on God and his

promise, and particularly on his promised inheritance, for we will dwell with him forever.

The life of service may receive no thanks from our fellow man in this life, as Jesus' life of service received no thanks but only rejection and a cruel death at their hands. Yet he was able to fulfil this life of service to the end because his eyes were fixed on God and on his heavenly crown, so that as the writer of the Hebrews said, "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross despising the shame and is now set down on God's right hand." (Hebrews 12:2). If we are to adopt our Lord's motto, "I am among you as he who serves", we must lay aside our clothing of self-importance and our hope for material things and, like Jesus be conscious that we go to God, so that looking to him for the strength of his Spirit we may reflect in our lives his character of serving one another.

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