

Renovation

Service & Submission

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pt 4:10). "Be filled with the Spirit...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:18, 21).

Service and submission are essential ingredients that make all of the "one another" passages in the New Testament work. They enable and inspire genuine community. Proverbs reminds us that "one who waters will himself be watered" (**Pr 11:25**). At the intersection of every human relationship is a kind of reciprocity that molds us and makes us into the kind of persons that we become. Service and submission help us keep in mind that we will reap from others what we sow into their lives.

Service

In service we actively and willingly employ our gifts and resources to meet the needs of others so we might train ourselves in the selflessness of Christ. As a Discipline, we serve others not merely because it will meet another's need, but because it promotes Christlikeness in us.

1. *Service strengthens the weak and frees us from resentment.* Those who participate in service that is relatively unnoticed know the value of their efforts because every act is an act of "serving the Lord Christ" (**Col 3:23-24**; see also **Deut 13:4**). At the end of the day we serve an audience of "One." Mundane tasks, therefore, become our greatest endeavors because we serve others as if serving Christ himself. And so, when we "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (**Col 3:17**) there's no chance for resentment to creep in, since what we do is for Christ and not merely for others.
2. *Service weakens the strong and frees us from arrogance.* Anyone of us, and especially those in positions of leadership and authority, can easily view our status as more important than it really is, or tacitly permit others to do so. Jesus challenges "greatness" by showing us that the way up is really the way down (**Mt 20:25-28**). "Greatness" in Jesus' kingdom is measured by selfless service. Ironically, the terms "minister" or "pastor" originally meant "helper" or "shepherd", but have come to be seen as a badge of honor or prestige. Yet Jesus cries, "It shall not be so among you!" To be "great" is to live as a servant and vice versa. There's no room for superiority or conceit among God's children because there's only room for one King in the kingdom.
3. *Service frees us from the pitfalls of pretense and performance traps.* With our singular orientation toward Christ, we serve at the feet of others (**Jn 13:14-15**) where the only quality that matters is humility. With service we refuse the call to honor or notable recognition (**Pr 15:33**). Instead, we are free to count others better than ourselves, eager for their success rather than pursuing our own (**Philip 2:3-4**).
4. *Service helps us maintain objectivity and find our "fit" in the Body of Christ* (**Rom 12:3-8**; **1 Cor 12:12-31**). In one sense, all of the spiritual gifts are gifts of service, so we no longer need to be in control because "each of us needs all the others" in the Body (**Rom 12:5**, NLT).

Renovation

Service & Submission

Submission

We naturally want things our way. Our culture insists that getting what we want is most important. Therefore, the idea of submission is neither a cultural norm nor an accepted virtue. However, Scripture tells us that we live in a kingdom “not of this world” (**Jn 18:36**) that is set into motion by Jesus’ example of submission. He willingly submitted to flogging, public humiliation, and death, all of which are part of a greater submission to his Father’s will (**Mt 26:42**). *The Discipline of submission is the willing alignment of one’s own will under the will of another for the sake of living after the manner of Christ.*

1. *First, submission necessarily assumes the presence of other believers and is, therefore, a “social” discipline.* Consequently, how we view our relationship to other brothers and sisters in Christ is critical in exercising the Discipline of submission. No subject in God’s kingdom has permission for grand standing or upstaging, regardless of their “recognized” authority, position, gender, or perceived maturity. Instead, as every subject allows submission to rule, we consciously reject the notion that we’re *above* others. We accept that we are all “one in Christ Jesus” (**1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11**), “submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ” (**Eph 5:21**). All believers are called to be “slaves to one another [*δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις*]” (**Gal 5:13**). Thus, the Discipline of submission is always mutual in God’s kingdom because:
 - a. *The Gospel equalizes all relationships under the authority of Christ.* Whether male to female, parent to child, or slave to master, all human structures, whether cultural or divinely mandated, have only *relative* authority in relation to Christ (cf., **Jn 19:11a; Rom 13:1** on relative authority).
 - b. *Every “one another” injunction in the New Testament assumes parity in relationships for their proper operation.* All “one another” passages imply the notion of ‘without distinction on the basis of social status or personal preference.’ Christians are enjoined to accept one another (**Rom 15:7**), be hospitable to one another (**1 Pt 4:9**), be devoted to and honor one another (**Rom 12:10**), live in harmony with one another (**Rom 12:16; 1 Pt 3:8**), bear with one another (**Eph 4:2; Col 3:13**), be kind and compassionate to one another (**Eph 4:32**), carry one another’s burdens (**Gal 6:2**), forgive one another (**Eph 4:32; Col 3:13**), build up one another (**1 Thess 5:11**), admonish one another (**Col 3:16**), and encourage one another (**1 Thess 4:18; 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:25**).
 - c. *Every believer is called to self-denial, submission, and service to others.* Since this call is equally applicable to all believers, it logically applies to every believer without regard to social status, economic ability, gender, title, church office position, education level, economic ability, et al.
2. *This is not to say there is no order in this other-worldly kingdom.* **Heb 13:17** and **1 Pt 5:2-5** clearly says there is. Although **Heb 13:17** is addressed to those who follow their leaders, the text says more about leaders’ responsibilities than about the followers’. In addition, **1 Pt 5:2** is a call to service, not status or posturing above others. Moreover, on the heels of this call to service is a call for everyone (“all of you”) to express humility “toward one another” (**1 Pt 5:5, 6**). Clearly this new kingdom is governed by mutual submission and honor to all. Any order that does exist arises from a natural recognition of the spiritual maturity gained only by time in the faith and an abiding walk with Christ. There is no hint of superiority or authoritarian rule among the subjects of Jesus’ kingdom.

Renovation

Service & Submission

3. *In submission we cry for help from those whose depth of experience in Christ can direct us toward spiritual formation.* The weight of authority comes not from individuals who speak the truth but from the Giver of truth as we submit to the God of truth under the prayerful and loving direction of those who have a deep and abiding walk with Jesus.

Reflection/Direction/Decision

- Precisely how have you served or will you serve the Body of Christ with your giftedness?
- Since submission is meant to be mutual, how does it look exactly in your congregation, particularly among your leaders, pastors, and elders? Are there signs of their submission?
- Check your motives and ask God to reveal to you any pretense in your service to others.
- Do you see signs of humility among the recognized leaders in your church?
- Choose one relationship with a more mature believer than you and actively and intentionally submit to that person for one month.