

Christian Identity: “Hi, I am (name), and I’m a DOULOS.”



People love job titles. One corporate executive revealed to me that to keep employees happy, her company is overly generous with titles. The title “vice president” is attached to many positions. The corporate brass knows that titles motivate people. And it is easy to give a title to someone who is willing to work longer and harder for a new business card.

You have attended dinner parties where the first question after you introduce yourself is, “So what do you do?” Perhaps you struck up a conversation with a stranger on an airplane or at a restaurant. If you are really proud of your title, you could not wait

to be asked, “What do you do?” If you want to end the conversation, just tell the person you are a pastor. Works for me every time. Many people love titles because they find their identity in their title. Their title is more than a description of what they do. In their minds their title is a description of who they are.

Since we find much of our identity in our title, we tend to drift toward titles that make us sound important. Fancy titles give us a greater sense of identity. They contribute to our sense of self-worth. What title should we be most proud to claim? What title did the early Christians claim as their own?

1. The REALITY: You are a SERVANT.

Philippians 1:1 = a statement of Christian identity. In the introduction in their letter to the Philippians, Paul and Timothy introduce themselves by their self-appointed title / identity. Their title is not one the world would expect them to proudly proclaim. Paul and Timothy, two of Christianity's earliest and greatest leaders, introduce themselves with a lowly title.

WHAT DOULOS MEAN? The word for bondservant in the original language is *doulos*, which literally means slave. A *doulos* is a slave who is willingly bound to another.

A little Redemptive backstory helps . . . In the ancient Jewish culture, someone who fell on hard times could choose to sell himself as a slave to someone. If a person was deep in debt, he could sell himself to the person to whom he owed money. It was often a wise and logical choice because your master was required to take care of your needs and treat you well.

This was not slavery as we have imagined slavery; masters treated their servants as family. Many viewed selling themselves as servants as a viable option to provide for their family and survive. God instituted a law among His people that the seventh year all debts would be completely forgiven. People who sold themselves to wealthy businessmen would be freed after six years of service. God gave instructions to His people detailing how to free servants who sold themselves into service. ***(Deut. 15: 12, 16-17 NIV)***

Servants were given the option to stay with their master, to continue in the service of the person who bought them. Many chose to stay because life with their master was so much better than life elsewhere. They loved the master and his family. They could not imagine living elsewhere. They could not imagine working for anyone else. So the servant could say, “I don't want to leave you. I want to stay.” At that point a special ceremony took place. The servant would place his ear against a door, and the master

would take an awl, which is a small piercing device, and pierce the earlobe of the servant. Through this special ceremony the master and the servant entered into a special relationship, a bond that lasted their entire life. The servant was marked for life as the willing and grateful servant of his master. The marking was important so that everyone who saw the servant and the master together would know that the servant chose to stay and serve. The servant was with his master out of love and gratitude, not obligation.

Like Paul and Timothy, you are a bondservant of Christ. Before Christ, spiritually, emotionally, relationally, psychologically, you were ruined, bankrupt, and without hope. Yet Christ in His mercy purchased you and made you His own. He bought you not with silver or gold but with His own blood (**1 Pet. 1: 18-19**). He gave you a new life, an eternal home with Him, and a reason to live. He marked you as His own. And you stay with your Master because you love Him.

One of the reasons bondservants chose to stay with their master was because life was so much better in the master's care. Perhaps sometimes bondservants would reflect on how life was before.... They could remember how miserable the nights were hoping someone would let them stay in their home. They could recall how painful it was watching their children miss another meal. They could still feel the hopelessness and the emptiness. They remembered the embarrassment of wandering the streets at night with no place to go. And life with their master, while not perfect, was so much better, so much more meaningful. Do you remember how empty life was away from your Master, apart from a relationship with God?

The Psalm 84:10 principle of service . . . David cried to God, “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked” (**Ps. 84: 10 NIV**). David is saying, I would rather be a doorkeeper, a bouncer in God's house, than live large in the tents of the wicked because ***true greatness comes from serving God***. Unfortunately we sometimes forget that true greatness is serving our Master. We often suffer from memory loss as Christians, forgetting where greatness is found and living confused and misdirected lives.

The FACT of the matters, you WILL serve SOMEBODY!

You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

Some people are all into serving themselves. When that happens, In essence, you are your own god. And ultimately, you're serving the devil. So serve yourself, live to BE served, you're serving an IDOL. . Jesus says the opposite.... If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all, and servant of all (**Mark 9: 35; Mark 10: 43-45**) *God's kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. In God's economy, true **greatness** comes from **servng**.*

The “Mohammed Ali” Syndrome and true greatness. During the meal the disciples argue about who is the greatest (**Luke 22: 24**). With the argument as background music, Jesus gets up from the

meal. He must have been disappointed because He constantly taught the disciples that true greatness comes from serving. Yet none of them stood up to do what needed to be done.

Jesus takes off His outer robe and wraps the servant's towel around His waist. He kneels before His disciples and washes their feet. The hands that created the world washes feet. The hands that fashioned humanity rubs dirt off grungy and nasty feet. God is on His knees cleaning the feet of His twelve disciples. Including Judas. Jesus washes the feet of the person who would betray Him in a few hours. And Jesus knew it. Yet Jesus kneels before Judas and rubs the dirt off his toes. When He finishes washing their feet, He puts on His clothes and returns to His place and says:

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13: 12-17 NIV, emphasis added) The apostle John recorded the account of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet. John's Gospel is the only Gospel that does not record any of Jesus' parables. To John, all of Jesus' life was a parable, a teachable moment. And God washing feet was the ultimate parable on serving.

As a follower of Christ, you are challenged to wash feet. Not literally, but figuratively. Christ asks you to serve others, to embrace your identity as a servant. He has handed you a towel and has given you a basin. Servants serve. A non-serving Christian is an oxymoron just like jumbo shrimp, black light, tall midget, fast turtle, and rap music. You are a servant. So serve. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

WHAT IS THE SERVANT “HIGH”?

Playing brings a greater high than watching. In the same way, serving always provides a greater blessing than sitting. Unfortunately many Christians forsake the serving high to sit and observe. Statistics tell us that the majority of “Christians” never get in the game. Instead they choose to be spectators to the work of God.

WHAT DOES SITTING INSTEAD OF SERVING TURN YOU INTO? A CONSUMER, a CRITIC, & a CYNIC.

2. The RESPONSE: Here’s how you SERVE.

➔ **SERVE THE MASTER'S FAMILY** The bond servant chose to stay with his master because he loved him. He wanted to express his love continually through his service because service is the full extent of love. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He was “show[ing] them the full extent of his love” (John 13: 1 NIV).

The servant's service to the master was often manifested in service to the master's family. Bond servants only stayed if they loved not only the master but his family as well (Deut. 15: 16). Servants would provide care for the master's children and protect the family. Perhaps they would help the kids get ready for school in the morning, assist them with their homework, and check the security of the home each night. Perhaps the bond servant would play games with the family each evening, pray with the family, and celebrate holidays with the family.

While God desires for you to serve the world around you, the Master also asks you to serve His family. And the church is God's family. By “church,” I mean God's people, not a building, denomination, creed, confession, or organization. The church is the gathering of the Master's family in specific locations all around the world.

What SERVING people in the church does NOT look like: [I remember being scolded by a gaudily dressed woman with bad breath at a church because I painted the youth room for the teenagers. She informed me that the building and grounds committee was upset because I corrupted their beautiful white walls. I complained that if church people's greatest mission was to keep their walls clean, then they missed the entire point of the gospel.]

THE IMAGE AND THE REALITY . . . God chooses the image of marriage to describe His love for the church. I realized that loving Jesus but not His church would be like someone coming to me and saying , “I like you, but I cannot stand your wife.” Insisting the church was ridiculous and not worthy of my service would be like someone ridiculing my wife and expecting me to be OK with it. I am not saying the church is perfect. I know my church is not perfect because I am a part of it. However, I am saying that the church is the bride of Christ, that the church is the family of the Master. And the Master asks us to serve His family. God has given you a spiritual gift, and one of the reasons for your gifting is so that God's family will benefit from your contribution. The family suffers if you choose not to serve. The family suffers if you forget you are a marked servant.

→ **MANAGE GOD'S GRACE** Or, BY His GRACE, God has GIVEN you EVIDENCES of His Grace to manage IN SERVICE TO GOD AND TO OTHERS. In the Jewish culture, the master would entrust specific responsibilities to his servant. The servant may be responsible for managing some aspect of the master's business or administering a portion of the family land. The servant would be honored to manage the resources or possessions of the master. Serving is management of God's grace. The Scripture reads, *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4: 10 NIV, emphasis added).*

Administering God's grace? Since we are God's servants, He has entrusted us with His resources. We are His stewards, His managers, His administrators. Not only do we manage God's finances, creation, and time; but we also manage His grace. God has entrusted His grace to you for you to manage. When you serve, you administer God's grace to other people. As you serve others, you dispense God's love and compassion.

→ **ENJOY YOUR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION** As God's bond servant, your service is unique. Your contribution to the Master's kingdom and family is uniquely customized to your calling, personality, gifting, and stage of life. In other words, you administer God's grace through your unique gifting. *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one*

speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4: 10-11 NIV, emphasis added).

While God's grace is administered through His servants, His grace is administered in various forms. Because we are different, with unique spiritual gifts, God's mercy is expressed in a variety of ways.

CHECK YOUR MARK!!

The marking proves that the servant is with the master willingly, serving out of love and not mere obligation. The master served the servant by adopting him as a family member. The expression of love forever marked the servant. The servant agreed to be marked externally because he was already marked internally through the relationship to his master. In the same way the foundation of Christ's command for us to serve others is that He has served us. He told His disciples, ***“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet” (John 13: 14).*** That is our MARK: SERVING OTHERS.