

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF SERVANTHOOD IN PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11: IMPLICATIONS FOR ANGLICAN CLERGY AND CHURCH LEADERS

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Abstract

This paper presented a comprehensive analysis of the concept of servanthood as depicted in Philippians 2:5-11 within the New Testament framework. The study unravelled the exegetical dimension of the passage under consideration. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of servanthood for Christian living. This study, textual in nature, involved a combination of exegetical and lexical method to approach and explore key terms related to servanthood. This is done with a view to discovering its historical and literary contexts and conceptual roots in order to analyse and elucidate the theological significance of the text. The findings revealed that Philippians 2:5-11 presents Jesus Christ as the ultimate model of servanthood; exemplifying humility, obedience and self-sacrificial love. Through a careful analysis of the text, it is evident that servanthood is not merely a virtue to be admired but a fundamental aspect of Christian discipleship. It is a calling to church leaders to emulate Christ's attitude of humility and service towards others. Based on these findings, this paper recommended a renewed emphasis on servant hood within Christian communities and beyond, fostering a culture of selflessness, compassion and servant leadership.

Keywords: Servant hood; Servant Leadership; Servant; Leadership

Background

Servant hood refers to the state of being a servant. A servant is someone who works for another person to carry out specific tasks. While servitude is a type of bondage or slavery in which work is required and free will is absent, servant-hood can involve either freely offered or required service. A person's freedom of will is upheld when they choose to serve. A genuine servant gives without expecting anything in return and aids others in realizing their own potential as people. Be it bondage or slavery, servant-hood is an affirmation of freedom.

Philippians 2:5-11, often referred to as the "Christ Hymn" or "Kenosis Hymn" is a poetic and theological masterpiece penned by the Apostle Paul. It is fundamental to comprehending the Christian view of servant-hood. The passage exhorts Christians to

embrace the same perspective that Christ demonstrated during his earthly ministry. In the preceding verses, Paul exhorts the Philippian believers to be humble and united, to value the lives of others more than their own. He then reveals Jesus Christ to be the ultimate example of servant-hood. The passage describes the voluntary self-emptying, or "kenosis," of Christ, who did not view his equality with God as something to be taken advantage of despite existing in the form of God. Instead, Jesus humbled himself by assuming the role of a servant and showing obedience all the way to the cross, where he died. This biblical concept of servant-hood has resonated through the centuries, shaping the ethos of Christian communities and inspiring countless individuals to follow Christ's example in their relationships, communities, and broader society. In 1970, Robert K. Greenleaf defined a servant leader as someone who is a servant first, someone who starts with the instinctive desire to serve and then makes the conscious decision to aspire to lead. In his ultimate test of servant leadership, Greenleaf inquired as to whether the followers "became healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants while being served." Similar to this, Christ taught that a leader must first serve others (Luke 22:26). He also mentioned that, in Matthew 20:28, he came not to be served but to serve, and he urged his disciples to serve others by imitating him by washing their feet.

Summarizing this idea, Laub (1999) argued that servant leaders are defined by their character and by demonstrating their complete commitment to serve others. Ultimately, Christ taught his disciples to imitate his own servant leadership style and to learn from his example. Thus, as each follower emulates the servant leadership of their own leader, a cycle of servant leadership should be started in which the followers of servant leaders should grow and develop in their own servant-hood and start serving others in their growing servant leadership. Christ modelled servant leadership, and he both expected and encouraged his disciples to follow in his footsteps. According to Greenleaf (1970), servant leaders want to serve their followers and, in that service, to see their followers become servants themselves. Despite the importance of servant leadership, there are noticeable challenges that make it difficult to apply and practice effectively. These challenges include lack of understanding, ego and power struggle, reluctance to change etc. If these challenges are not resolved, the church and society may suffer from lack of unity, lack of spiritual growth and development and a decline in credibility among believers and non-believers. Therefore, if servant leadership can be derived from Philippians 2:5-11, there is a need to bring the story home by asking these simple questions: Is servant-hood lacking in the church today? What does Philippians 2:5-11, in the light of servant leadership mean to church leadership in particular and society in general?

Defining Servant Leadership

Servant Leadership is a style of leadership that emphasizes people (Heidari, Ghasemi, & Heidari, 2019), principles (Kiersch & Peters, 2017), and the "big picture." (Wang, Xu, & Liu, 2018).

Varieties of Servant Leadership

Osei-Mensah (1990) identified four different types of servant leaders needed in the churches today.

Leaders with vision: These types of servant leaders are those who are able to read the signs of the times of their day and therefore able to counsel their people in responding to God-given privileges and opportunities. Such leaders can say "this is what the Spirit is saying.

Inspirers of Cooperation: Along with those who have vision, servant leaders should be those who are able to inspire their brethren to cooperate in a spiritual way to do the work of Jesus Christ. This type has the responsibility of building bridges of trust among evangelicals, and amongst all other Christians who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in truth.

Disciples of Young Leaders: This type of servant leaders is those who disciple younger ones and bring them into the stream of work for Jesus Christ. They are able to disciple young leaders and prepare them, not just as leaders of tomorrow, but as God's servants to serve Him today. The idea that they will be tomorrow's leaders is not something that merely flatters young people. They have abundant energy to give to the Lord for service in His church today. Servant leaders are not to stand in their way.

Restorers of the fallen: These types of servant leaders are those who will not abandon those who fall from grace, but will restore them to full fellowship and service with other Christians. God's controversy with the appointed shepherds of his people, as reported in Ezekiel 34, was that they were very good at looking after themselves, but quite unconcerned about the welfare of his people in their care. They enjoyed the milk of the flock, used the wool for their clothes, and ate the meat. But they failed to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bandage the injured, restore the strayed and search for the lost. Instead, they abandoned the vulnerable and weak. And God was angry. Servant leaders under this category, are keepers of their brothers and sisters. When their brothers stumble and fall, they do not write them off. They try to restore them.

Exegetical Approach to Servanthood in Philippians 2:5-11

a. The Writer of Philippians

The authors of the letter to the Philippians are identified as “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus”. Timothy was not the author of the letter because Paul writes in the first-person singular throughout, even though Timothy was present when Paul wrote it and was connected to him through their mission at Philippi. Therefore, Paul alone can be identified as the author based on both internal and external evidence.

b. Location of Philippi

The city was located about 9 miles (14 kilometres) from the Aegean Sea. During the days of the New Testament, it was one of the chief cities in Macedonia. In addition, it was a Roman colony. That means that its citizens had the right to vote and also had a certain degree of self-government.

c. Philippian Church

The Church in Philippi was the first European church that was planted by Paul. However, Paul did not alter his methods. He continued to use the same basic strategies he had developed earlier. While in Philippi, Paul had three outstanding encounters.

1. He met and won Lydia, the seller of purple, to the Lord.
2. He cast demons out of a demon possessed girl.
3. He led the Philippian jailer to the Lord after spending a night in jail.

d. The Occasion, Date and Place of Writing Philippians

At the time of writing of this epistle, Paul was imprisoned in Rome. He apparently was not in a regular prison but rather in his own rented apartment under the supervision of Roman guards. Since he had apparently been in Rome for a while, this would suggest that the epistle was written in the latter part of his imprisonment. Therefore, the date would be about AD 60-62.

Verse by Verse Examination of the Servanthood of Christ

The structure of Philippians 2:5–11 was utilized for the purposes of this exercise:

1. Attitude of Jesus Christ

Philippians 2:5: ‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus’

The paragraph between Philippians 2:1–4 and the song in Philippians 2:6–11 is where Philippians 2:5 is located. Paul is admonishing the church in the Philippines to think and behave like Christ did; Christians or Christ-followers in the church should adopt Christ's mindset. “Let this mind be in you (Greek: *phroneite*—from *phroneo*), which was also in Christ Jesus” (v. 5). This verse acts as a link between what we think and what Christ

thought; connecting verses 1-4 and 6-8. *Phroneo* is concerned with our comprehension, attitudes, and mentality. *Phroneo* has to do with our understanding—our attitudes—our mindset. The attitude mentioned in Philippians 2:5, which Paul hoped that the Philippian church would possess, is the attitude exhibited by Christ as recorded in Philippians 2:6-8 (i.e., the attributes of followership, servanthood, humility and obedience).

2. Form of God, servanthood, humility, and obedience

Form of God

Philippians 2:6: 'Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God'

“Thought it not robbery to be equal (isos) with God. This Greek word *isos* is also found in John 5:18, where the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus because he was calling God his father—and thereby “making himself equal (*ison*) with God” i.e., seeking divine rank and power for himself. Although Christ has been there before in the form of God, He never stood in competition with God the Father, but in affirmation that He has been sent by God the Father. Thus, Christ was already God before incarnation, as Koenig (1985) understands the phrases in ‘the form of God’ and ‘equality with God’. Thus, the statement emphasizes how special and exalted Christ was before His incarnation. ‘The form of God’ means the image or glory or power that comes from God through Christ to humans. Christ's equality with God is functional, as He is the perfect revelation of the divine. ‘He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation’ (Col 1:15). According to Fee (1995), what Christ has done is in contrast to what Adam has done because he considered equality to God something to be grasped. Christ did the opposite, and never considered equality with God, though He had an opportunity.

Servanthood

Philippians 2:7: 'But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men'

The word ‘slave’ used in the Greek New Testament has already been described as ‘a person of low degree’. The Greek word “*doulos*” denotes servant or slave. *Diakonos* is a softer Greek term that signifies servant rather than slave. The English word deacon is derived from the Greek word *diakonos*. Paul described himself and Apollos as *diakonoi*, servants through whom you believed” (1 Corinthians 3:5). The idea is that a *diakonos* (servant) had much higher rank than a *doulos* (servant or slave).

If a person was enslaved by his master, he or she was expected to perform menial tasks for the master. It also meant that the slave is owned by his master. Thus, slaves cannot take control of themselves as he/she is already under the control of the master. According to Macleod (2001), the word ‘slave’ graphically describes what it meant for

Christ Jesus to pour out himself. Slavery in the Roman Empire meant the extreme deprivation of rights. A slave was a piece of property to be bought and sold. Slavery denied a person the right to anything; even his own life. A slave had no inherent rights, in contrast to other people. Christ was like a slave in that he stripped Himself of all rights and securities. It emphasizes that Christ entered the stream of human life as a slave, a person without advantage, with no rights or privileges of His own; the express purpose of placing completely at the service of all humankind. Christ gave up His heavenly position in order to pour out of Himself. He gave up His wealth, departed from the throne of his Father above, and left the splendors of heaven behind. Jesus Christ was not a title-oriented leader. Renouncing all titles, he willingly assumed the role of a servant. Rather than being imposed upon or manipulated, it was a willingness to deprive oneself of rights and benefits. Thus, Christ's allusion to slavery occurs when He descends from the heavenly throne to serve humanity. He left a top class in divinity to join the lowest class in humanity. This is further illustrated by Koenig (1985) when he states that the form of a servant probably refers not to Christ's humanity, but rather to His voluntary enslavement under the principalities and powers which He later defeated. Here, as phrase 'form of God', one ought to think of something other than total identity.

Humility

Philippians 2:8a: 'And being found in a fashion as a man, he humbled himself'

Now in verse 8a, we have the verb "humbled" (*tapeinoo*). In this context, it means that Christ brought himself low i.e., reduced himself to lowly circumstances - took a lower place than he could rightly have occupied.

Heath (2010) argues that having humility is not thinking less of oneself. It is more about thinking of yourself less. It's about igniting dialogues that force people to face reality head-on rather than deftly sidestepping it. Characteristics of humble leaders are:

When they know they are not right, they concede.

They are open about their faults to others.

They are ready to 'roll up their sleeves' with the rest.

They don't allow their viewpoint to override that of others.

They behave with grace when someone is praised more than them.

They do not equate possessions with worth.

Obedience

Philippians 2:8b: 'And became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'

In simple terms, obedience (*mechri*) means to do what one is told to do. In other words, there is no use in doing it, if it is not going to be done according to the command and the correct pattern. God instructed the king of Israel, Saul, to go and utterly destroy everything in Amalek. But Saul, instead of destroying everything, spared some of the animals that impressed him (1 Sam 15:1-9). God judged Saul through Samuel by removing him from the throne. 1 Samuel 15:35 says that God repented that He had made Saul king over Israel. Saul was not removed because God had a preferred candidate, but because of disobedience, 'To obey is better than sacrifices and to listen than the fat of rams' (1 Sam 15:22).

3. Exaltation, honor and authority

Exaltation

Philippians 2:9: 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name'

The Greek words *hyper* (high) and *hupsos* (exalt) are combined to form the word *hyperupsos*. Thus, *hyperupsosen*, a Greek word, is translated as "highly exalted" by two English words. To 'exalt' means to 'lift up' to a higher rank, this triumphant word therefore introduces a final upward swing in the salvation drama of the hymn (Phil 2:9, Koenig, 1985). Christ's obedience unto death in service to God brings forth a world-shaking response: God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him a name which is above every name. The two words highly exalted are expressed by one Greek word; it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and means 'rise to the loftiest height'. This unusual language suggests that Christ's position, following His resurrection and ascension was even more exalted than His prior equality with God. The exalted state must be seen primarily in terms of Christ's work rather than His essence. The new height and the new name converge in the title Lord. Wilkes (1998) states that the key phrase in Philippians 2:9 is 'God exalted him'. Exalt is the same word Jesus used in His illustration at the banquet. God exalted His son after Jesus humbled Himself in obedience to a death on the cross. The word 'exalt' in the dictionary of faith means God lifts up those who have humbled themselves before Him and His purposes. It speaks about promotion and elevation. Servant leaders after becoming faithful receive promotion. Many times, it does not come from east or west, but it comes from the Lord. Many leaders expect promotion from their followers or peers. This explains why a lot of people use manipulation to rise to the top. If people become responsible for the promotion of their leader, they stand an opportunity to demote him/her. So, rather than being in a constant state of need of advancement or promotion, servant leaders are driven to help others. Therefore, promotion for the servant leader is just a bonus, not a necessity.

For ambitious traditional bosses and power-hungry individuals, this is different. Silva (1992) puts it in this way: The Christ-hymn implies a correspondence between Christ's experience and the believer's sanctification leading to glorification, not between Christ's exaltation and the sinner's justification. Surely, believers are exhorted to persevere in their Christian race so that they may receive the prize.

Honour

Philippians 2:10: 'That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth and things under the earth'

This is a title of respect given most of the time to judges or people of respect in the country. It speaks of deep respect and reverence. It refers to praise and worship for a person of high status. Jesus Christ has been saying to the crowds, his disciples and teachers of the law 'honour belongs to the one who sent me'. He never wanted to be bowed to and worshipped. But at His exaltation, God places His name to be honoured by everyone. God addresses every universal territory to honour the name Jesus (i.e., things in heaven, on earth and under the earth). Jesus never asked anyone to stand as He enters the room or clap when He ascends the stage. He never said that people should bow down on their knees and worship Him. Servant leaders do not ask for honour; in fact, they give honour to the one who sent them. When people wanted to praise Jesus, He reverted back the praises to His God. A servant leader releases honour in order to receive honour. And he/she does not despair when such does not come. The goal is not to be praised, but to serve others. People who always expect a 'pat on back' do not serve. Servants serve regardless of the recognition. As formulated by Henry, 'the whole creation must be put in submission to him: things in heaven, and things on earth and things under the earth, the inhabitants of heaven and earth, the living and the dead. At the name of Jesus all would give solemn homage' (Henry 2010).

Authority

Philippians 2:11: 'And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father'.

In the Old Testament, God's name was YHWH—Yahweh. The Jewish people, to avoid violating the commandment against using God's name wrongfully (Exodus 20:7), used instead the word Adonai (Hebrew: *adonay*), which means "the Lord." When the Jewish people translated their Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language (the translation known as the Septuagint), they translated the Hebrew word, *adonay*, into the Greek word, *kyrios* — which can also refer to human authorities, was therefore commonly used to refer to God by Jews.

When referring to Yahweh, the New Testament frequently uses the word *kyrios* (Matthew 1:20, 22, 24; 2:13, 15; Mark 13:20; Luke 1:6; Romans 11:34, etc.).

According to Macleod (2001), Paul's Christ-hymn now reaches its climax in confession of the entire cosmos, 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. The term 'Lord' is the culminating point of the passage. The expression 'Jesus Christ is Lord' was the characteristic confession of the early church. The name 'Lord' means having 'power' or 'authority', when used as an adjective. This confession that Jesus Christ is Lord means that God has bestowed on Jesus Christ the rarest of all honours. All the power that accompanies His elevated status was also bestowed upon Him. He has a new rank (Lordship) with all the authority of deity.

Resolving the Leadership Challenges in the Servant hood of Christ

By implication, leadership begins as a follower of your superior before becoming a leader of your subordinates. One cannot be in authority without first being subjected to it. The centurion whose servant was ill (Mt 8:5-13) clearly recognized this point. After he informed Jesus about his sick servant, Jesus immediately wanted to come and heal him, but instead the centurion said to Jesus: 'I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me and I say to this one go and he goes and to the other come and he comes and to my servant do this and he does'. The centurion said this, knowing that Christ stood under some authority, and that at His word, the centurion's servant would be healed. And indeed, the servant who was not present at their conversation was healed at that very self-same hour.

In a twenty-first century church, especially the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, all church leaders must learn to follow if they want to successfully lead (Smith (1997). Leaders, at all levels and in all situations, must pay close attention to situations in which their most effective option is to follow, not because the hierarchy demands that they "obey," but only because their performance depends on other people's abilities and wisdom. This is what Jesus Christ did, according to Philippians 2:6. He was prepared to follow the Father although He was found in the same form as the Father. Leadership starts when a leader submits under the authority over and above him – just as Christ knew and understood that His leadership was incumbent upon Him following the Father's mandate.

According to Maxwell (2005), the quality of servanthood is embodied when the true servant leader:

1. *Prioritizes others' needs over his own*
it entails making a conscious effort to understand other people's needs, being willing to assist them when needed, and accepting their wishes as significant.
2. *Possesses the confidence to serve*
Only secure leaders give power to others. It is also true that only secure people exhibit servant-hood.

3. *Initiates service to others*

Great leaders identify the necessity, grasp the chance, and provide service without anticipating anything in return.

4. *Is not position conscious?*

Servant leaders do not focus on rank or position.

5. *Serves out of love*

Servant hood is not motivated by manipulation or self-promotion. It is fueled by love. In this instance, love is central to service, one cannot serve the one he does not love. God gave out of love (Jn 3:16). Servant leaders understand that it is through love that they are able to become servants.

Conclusion

Servant leadership needs to be modeled among ministers and leaders in our contemporary society. There is a need for more servant leaders like Greenleaf, who pioneered this concept and leadership style. Greenleaf defines servant leadership as being solely concerned with service. And throughout his life, he breathed and lived service. In the Anglican Communion and Nigeria, there is a lot we can learn from servant leadership. Even though the models cannot be compared to Jesus Christ because He is incomparable, there are few of His principles that can be assimilated to our models. The more the nation and churches produce servant leaders, the more people lives are going to be changed.

Recommendations

From the key findings in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need to encourage individuals within the church community, from leaders to members, to prioritize humility in their interactions and decision-making processes.
2. Develop and implement training programs, workshops, or study groups that focus on the biblical concept of humility as exemplified in Philippians 2:5-11.
3. Provide resources and mentorship opportunities for current and emerging leaders to enhance their understanding and practice of servant hood, especially incorporating it in the curriculum of our Theological Colleges.

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