

Things We Must Not Love: Power and Preeminence

Ponder: What makes a person truly great?

Scripture: “They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’” (Matthew 23:6, 7, NKJV).

Today we would call it sitting at the head table. It’s where the guest of honor sits, along with those closely associated with him or her. I could count on one hand the times I’ve sat at the head table (and I’d have fingers left over)! Frankly, it wasn’t that important to me. But the Pharisees craved such honors and indications of power and influence.

Evidently, even the Synagogue had its preferred seating. (Would the back row be considered best today? Never mind – don’t get me started!) The very idea of certain seats being reserved for more “important” attendees offends the senses of anyone who has adopted the spirit of Christ. James’ readers sinned by showing such partiality toward the rich and powerful even in their assembly (James 2:1-4).

The apostle John had to deal with a church tyrant named Diotrephes, who loved “to have the preeminence” (3 John 9). Diotrephes bad-mouthed John and other faithful Christians, and had anyone who didn’t toe his line removed from the church (v. 10). We could wish that church politics and power struggles no longer existed; but the sad reality is otherwise.

Jesus taught that true greatness comes not by running rough-shod over other people and demanding their subjection to your will, but by humbly serving them. Even His apostles struggled with rivalry over which of them would be the greatest. “And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority are called benefactors. But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves’” (Luke 22:25, 26).

Jesus practiced what He preached. “I am among you as the One who serves” (v. 27).

Go and do likewise!