

Genesis 39
11-18-18

Genesis 39 begins again the story of Joseph, now sold into slavery in Egypt. In this situation he rises as a servant in the house of Pharaoh's guard Potiphar. Potiphar's house is blessed by God because of this good service. Unfortunately, it also catches the attention of Potiphar's wife. While Joseph is the very example of virtue, she falsely accuses him of impropriety, and the chapter concludes with Joseph cast into prison, and yet even there working hard in his position.

There are a number of characteristics about Joseph that make him a model for Christian conduct. In this chapter we see two of his greater virtues displayed: his willingness to be a servant and his focus on personal purity. Both of these characteristics are core to being like Christ.

Joseph's role model as a servant is striking. Consider first of all that his situation might warrant bitterness and hatred for the one whom he serves. He has been sold into slavery immorally. He was once son of a rich man, who probably had men serve him. Now he is a slave to a godless man. Yet rather than seek to free himself or run away, Joseph sets his purpose to the service of the house of Potiphar.

Are we good servants? Being a Christian is probably best summarized in being a servant. We are called to serve God, to serve one another, and to serve others (Luke 22:26, John 12:26, Galatians 5:13). But consider too that we are called to serve those for whom we work as though we are serving God Himself (Colossians 3:22-23, 1 Peter 2:18). Christians need to consider the example of Joseph as the model of how a Christian composes himself for God in doing their job.

But perhaps Joseph is better known for his behavior with Potiphar's wife. We see two remarkable things; first, Joseph's absolute determination not to forsake his purity, which he says would be evil before God. Second, that Joseph suffers for this determination. This is especially striking in contrast to the behavior of Judah in the preceding chapter.

Again we see a NT principle in Action. We are told repeatedly to flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18-19, 2 Timothy 2:22). One wonders if the NT writers are thinking of Joseph when they describe to us how we are to behave around the opportunity of sexual immorality. We are not to test our self control or to stand to present the truth, but to flee, leaving behind whatever we must to escape. This image is exactly how we are to behave.