



The Christian's Service to God

Every Christian is a servant of the Lord. We serve our heavenly Master and also serve one another. When you become a Christian you accept Jesus as your Saviour and put your trust in Him. But you also accept Him as Lord. You must accept Him as a person — the whole Christ. He becomes your Prophet, Priest and King. Like Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road you ask, '*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*' (Acts 9:6). This is a mark of the genuine Christian. We wish to please Him.

Some talk of 'carnal Christians' and mean by that those who accept Jesus as Saviour but not as Lord. With some kind of 'second blessing' or special decision or dedication experience they may reach a new level of Christian experience. Now they are holy, with Christ ruling in their hearts. But Jesus says: '*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*' (Mt. 7:21). Only those who in reality accept Christ as Lord will enter heaven. 'Carnal Christians' are not Christians at all. There can be no true acceptance of Christ as Saviour without also accepting Him as Master. We are enemies of Christ by nature and will not have this man to rule over us (Lk. 19:14). But we are made willing in a day of His power. Conversion involves repentance and without repentance, whatever decision is made, or experience enjoyed, the individual is still dead in trespasses and sins. We must repent of our self-will and bow in submission to the Lord.

The Motive – Love

The motive for obedience and service is love. '*If ye love me, keep my commandments*' (John 14:15). If we love Christ it is because He first loved us. '*We love him, because he first loved us*' (1 Jn. 4:19). He won us with His love. That love which we have for Him becomes the great motive in our hearts to cause us to serve Him. When you love someone you wish to please them. Because we love Him we love His worship, His name and honour, His day, His church and His work. Paul was the hardest working of all the apostles. He planted many churches and cared for them. He suffered much persecution and also hardship for the benefit of the church. He explains what the motive was for his amazing life: '*For the love of Christ constraineth us*' (2 Cor. 5:14). The compelling force and encouragement in striving for holiness is love. It is also the motive for serving others and doing good works.

The Rule – Scripture

Christ, who is our Master, has given us the Bible. He guides us through His Word. Everything we need to know is there. There is a sufficiency in Scripture for salvation and the Christian life. The Bible is the rule to direct us how we are to glorify and enjoy Him. Christ is called the Logos or Word because He reveals the Father to us and tells us what we are to believe. The Word also directs us in Christian service. This is why we should always be reading and studying the Scriptures and asking God to help us to apply them in our lives. Pray for guidance and search the Scriptures because '*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*' (Ps. 119:105).

The Attitude – Humility

In everything we do our attitude must be humility. This is hard for us because pride is very easy and natural. We love to show off or at least somehow to impress our fellow men. Wrongly we seek the praise of men when we should be concerned rather what God thinks of us. In this we have to

be careful too because self-righteousness arises easily — the idea that we are earning God's favour by what we do. No, rather our faith must be in the good works of Christ. Our own good works are simply an expression of our thankfulness and indebtedness to God. John Knox was the great Reformer of Scotland in the 16th Century. When he was dying he was heard to groan in his unconsciousness. When he woke he was asked was something troubling him. 'Yes', he replied, *'the devil had been tempting me to believe that I had done some great work for the church of God in Scotland'*. Pride spoils our Christian service. Salvation is all of grace. All glory must go to God. *'Freely ye have received, freely give'* (Mt. 10:8).

An Example

Jesus sets a great example before His church in John 13. It was the last proper Passover and the one at which the Lord's Supper would be instituted. Jesus and His disciples came to the upper room to keep the feast. Generally it was the lowest servant who would wash the dusty feet when people entered the house. But none of the disciples wished to take that place. They began to eat while their feet were still dirty, sweaty and uncomfortable. At last Jesus got up, took a basin of water and a towel, and began to wash His disciples' feet. Peter was horrified. He exclaimed, *'Thou shalt never wash my feet'*. Then we read *'Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit'* (Jn. 13:8-10). Having completed the task Jesus sat down and said, *'Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you'* (vv. 12-15). What a tremendous example! We should be prepared to do the lowest jobs for one another. Humility and an attitude of service are vital to real Christianity.

Worship

Our greatest and most necessary service to God is worship. We were created to glorify Him. We worship Him because He created us but especially because, following our sin and rebellion, He redeemed us. Worship is to be performed on our own in private, in the family and also in the church. Our worship has to be regulated by God's Word. The Second Commandment states plainly that we are not to worship with idols or images or pictures. This excludes crosses, rosary beads, or anything like that. *'God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'* (Jn. 4:24). Our worship is to be regulated by God's Word. It is dangerous to come to God with worship which he has not commanded. Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1ff) took censers and offered strange fire and God killed them. This was worship not commanded by God. He has laid down the pattern of worship which had to be followed. Uzzah was struck down dead when he tried to be helpful and support the ark of the covenant when the oxen were shaking the cart on which it was carried. God had ordained that only the Levites were to carry the ark. *'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God'* (2 Sam. 6:7). And God has not changed. He is still a consuming fire who must be worshipped with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:29).

Many things might appear fine to us. We enjoy worshipping God in a certain way. But the question is not what do we enjoy but what does God enjoy? Does God approve of it? *'Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship'* (Col. 2:23), but that is not good enough. Will worship is worshipping as we will. No, we must listen to God's Word and worship Him only as He requires. Lutherans and Anglicans argue that it is all right to worship in any way which God has not forbidden. Rather we are to worship Him only as He specifies. The golden calves of Jeroboam were an abomination to the Lord (1 Kings 12:29- 30). *'God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'* (Jn. 4:24). Worship is to be spiritual. It is to be in the Holy Spirit and according to His Word.

Place of women in the church

God lays down the different roles of men and women in worshipping Him: *'Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church'* (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Paul gives a fuller treatment in his First Epistle to Timothy:

'I will therefore that men (the Greek word is males) pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.'

1 Timothy 2:8-15

The qualifications for eldership specify clearly that it is an office only for men (1 Tim. 3:1ff). It is very plain that God has set down that men are to preach in the church and to lead in the worship. Only men should be ordained as elders and ministers.

Whom we serve

As Christians we are to serve one another and indeed the world around us. But the world is not our master. We are servants of the Lord, serving our heavenly Master in this world. We might be wealthier, better educated or more powerful in society than other Christians but in the church we are essentially equal. Indeed a worker may be an elder while his boss is simply a member. *'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'* (Gal. 3:28). Now the office-bearers in the church are appointed by the church (ordained) in the name of Christ — pastors, elders and deacons. They have rule and are to be respected. But they are also ministers and servants and must remember that. Jesus lays down the law:

'There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.'

Luke 22:24-26

Let us, pastors and elders, be servants in the church looking for every opportunity to serve, to help and to do good. Let us count no task too menial. Yes, church members are to respect their pastors and elders, but the humbler the office-bearers are, the more they should be respected and the easier it should be to do that. Peter warns the elders to whom he writes: *'Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock'* (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Ministers should shepherd the flock not for money, or because they are pressurised into it, but out of love. They must not be proud or arrogant, lording it over others, but gentle. Individual members too are servants within the church and so must seek opportunities to serve one another.

Serving in the world

However it is not simply in the church that service is to be rendered. We are to be looking for opportunities to do good to all, to show kindness and love to all with whom we come in contact. Christ went about doing good and we are to follow His example. He showed love and care to the poor and the sick. From the gifts He received for His support (the bag) He gave donations to the poor. He comforted the sorrowing. We too should care for the sick and suffering, visiting them and

doing what we can to alleviate their discomfort. We should be known by those around as people who care.

Good Works and the Christian

Paul seems at times very negative about good works. Over and over again it is stressed that works will not save. The reason for this is that it is natural for a man to think that his good deeds will balance out the bad. But Jesus warns against trusting in works for salvation and acceptance with God. He says that when you have done all you are to call yourself an unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10). Sadly, even the best works we do are spoiled by sinful attitudes. We need the blood of Christ to be applied to them to purify them and make them acceptable to God.

Yet good works are precious as an expression of our thankfulness to God for having saved us. When Paul received a gift from the Philippian church while he was in prison he said:

'Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God'.

Philippians 4:17-18

He appreciated the gift particularly as an evidence of grace in their lives. He counsels Titus: *'And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful'* (Titus 3:14). Good works will not save but they are an evidence of us being in a state of grace. If we have no good works how can we say that we have been converted? New men and women will do new deeds. James tells us, *'For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also'* (James 2:26).

Service in the home

In their home, husbands and wives should be a team working together, helping each other. We are to show love by the kind deeds we do for each other. Similarly children are to be loving helpers. If a husband or wife is unconverted they can be won by the loving helpfulness and kindness of the Christian spouse. Loving, caring parents are a great witness to the children. If children see unkindness and selfishness it can easily turn them off the gospel for life.

Service in the Church

I have some in my congregation in Glasgow who are always looking for ways to help. They do not need anyone to tell them to do this or that. They are always seeking opportunities for service. Much is done and no one is told about it. It is done for the Lord. Some, for example, do a cleaning job or a repairing of the church building without seeking praise. Also when new people come to church some show great friendliness to them and welcome them and make them feel as comfortable as possible. If they see any of the members of the church needy they will visit them and help them. This, surely, is what we are to aim at as Christians.

Service to Society

We all live in neighbourhoods. There are people around us. They may follow a false religion. How are we to reach them with the gospel? One thing we can do is try to help them when they are in any need. If we do help them they are more likely to listen when we tell them about Christ and what He has done for us. Witnessing is important. Jesus said: *'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'* (Mt. 5:16). By seeing your good works and your kind and helpful lives they will be led to conversion and to glorify God whom up till then they hated. Witnessing is so important! Our deeds should be accompanied by our words. *'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel'* (Mk. 16:15). Be like a city set on a hill. Be like a candle on a candlestick. Do not hide your light under a bed.

The Reward

The Bible states that there are rewards for good works. In one sense we deserve nothing and feel as Christians that we do nothing of any value. It is all of grace and without God's help we would achieve nothing. Yet one day Christ will say to some, *'Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord'* (Matt. 25:23). From the parable of the talents we learn that the more we do the greater will be our reward. We are to be judged according to our works:

'Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire'.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15

This should encourage us to labour away for the Lord. We feel ashamed of how little we do, yet He sees and values every feeble attempt.

The Rest of Heaven

We are to keep on going as servants in the world, and to encourage us we are told that there is a wonderful and eternal rest awaiting us (Heb. 4). We are to run the race and we will obtain the prize. We are to fight the good fight and will inherit the kingdom. We are to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven: *'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal'* (Mt. 6:19-20). Jesus said *'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work'* (John 9:4). Here He sets an example before us. Our short lives will soon be over. Let us diligently prepare for death and eternity.

What a wonderful future lies before us! We will live with God: *'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away'* (Rev. 21:3-4). In the last chapter of Revelation we have a fuller description of heaven: *'And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever'* (Rev. 22:3-5). How wonderful that there will be no more sin! Pride will never tempt us again.

Make sure you get to heaven. Many will be disappointed on the last day. They were never born again. They never truly repented of their sin. They spent their lives in self-serving rather than serving God. Whatever faith they had it was dead because it did not express itself in service. They did not persevere unto the end along the Christian road.

William Macleod

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