

## The Church: Her Service and Stewardship

### *A. Her Service Toward God*

Service is any work performed for the benefit of another. When this theme is traced through the Bible, a series of similarities and contrasts between the Old and New Testaments will be observed. Almost every doctrine of the New Testament is anticipated in the Old, and almost every doctrine of the Old Testament is incomplete until perfected in the New. The theme of service is no exception; its study will prove to be largely a recognition of the Old Testament type with the New Testament antitype.

Service which God appoints, whether of the Old or New Testament order, is committed primarily to a divinely fitted priesthood. In the Old Testament order the priesthood was a hierarchy over the nation, and in their service they were under the authority of the high priest. In the New Testament order every believer is a priest unto God (1 Pet. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:6). The whole ministering company of New Testament priests is under the authority of Christ, who is the true High Priest, of whom all other high priests were but types. Therefore, accord-

ing to the New Testament order, service is committed to all believers alike and on the ground of their priestly relation to God. In their priestly ministry, the priests of the New Testament, like the priests of the Old Testament, were appointed to serve both God and man.

As there was no evangel to be preached to the nations of the earth, service in the period covered by the Old Testament consisted only of the performance by the priests of the divinely appointed ritual in the Tabernacle or Temple. In contrast with this, the New Testament priestly ministry is much broader in its scope, including not only a service to God and fellow-believers, but to all men everywhere.

1. *The service of sacrifice is strikingly similar in both the Old and New Testaments.* The Old Testament priest was sanctified or set apart both by the fact that he was born into the priestly family of Levi and by the fact that he, with due ceremony, was inducted into the priestly office, which appointment continued so long as he lived. Likewise, at the beginning of his ministry he was ceremonially cleansed by a once-for-all bathing (Exod. 29:4).

In fulfilling the antitype, the believer priest is wholly and once for all cleansed at the moment he is saved (Col. 2:13; Titus 3:5) and, by virtue of his salvation, is set apart unto God. So also, he is set apart by the new birth into the family of God. In addition to all this, it is peculiarly required of the New Testament priest that he *willingly* dedicate himself to God.

Concerning his self-dedication we read: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The phrase, "the mercies of God," refers to the great facts of salvation which have been set forth in the preceding chapters of the Book of Romans, into which mercies every believer enters the moment he is saved; while the presentation of the body as a living sacrifice is the self-dedication to the will of God of all that the believer is and has. That which is thus yielded God accepts and places where He wills in the field of service (Eph. 2:10).

According to Scripture, this divine act of accepting and placing is consecration. Therefore, the believer priest may *dedicate himself*, but never *consecrates* himself, to God. In connection with the divine act of consecration, it should be observed that the present work of Christ as High Priest — receiving, directing, and administering the service of believers — fulfills what was

typified by the ministry of the Old Testament priest in the consecration of the sons of Levi.

Having yielded to God and being no longer conformed to this world, the believer-priest will experience a transformed life by the power of the indwelling Spirit, and by that power he will make full proof of "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

According to the New Testament order, priestly service in sacrifice toward God is fourfold: (a) the dedication of self which is declared to be a "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1), or more literally, a "spiritual worship." As Christ Himself was both the Sacrificer and the Sacrifice, so the believer may glorify God by the offering of his whole body as a living sacrifice to God; (b) the sacrifice of the lips which is the voice of praise and is to be offered continually (Heb. 13:15); (c) the sacrifice of substance (Phil. 4:18); (d) the sacrifice of good works (Heb. 13:16).

Referring to the cleansing of the priests, it should be noted again that the Old Testament priest upon entering his holy office was once-for-all cleansed by a *whole* bathing, which was administered by another (Exod. 29:4); afterward, however, though thus wholly bathed, he was required to be cleansed repeatedly by a *partial* bathing at the brazen laver, and this before undertaking any priestly service. In fulfilling the typical significance of this, the New Testament priest, though wholly cleansed and forgiven when saved, is at all times required to confess every known sin in order that he may be cleansed and qualified for fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). As the appointment of the Old Testament priest was for life, so the New Testament priest is a priest unto God forever.

2. *The service of worship, which will be presented at length in a later chapter, may here be considered as part of the service of every believer-priest in the present age, just as it was also a part of the worship and service of every priest in the Old Testament.* As the furnishings of the holy place symbolized the worship of the priest in the Old Testament order, and every feature and furnishing of that place spoke of Christ, so the believer's worship is by and through Christ alone.

Again, in service unto God, the believer's worship may be the offering of oneself to God (Rom. 12:1), the ascribing of praise and thanksgiving to God from the heart (Heb. 13:15), or the sacrificial gifts that are offered to Him.

In connection with the worship of the Old Testament priests,

there were two prohibitions recorded, and these also have typical meaning. No "strange" incense was to be borne (Exod. 30:9) — which speaks typically of mere formality in service toward God; and no "strange" fire was allowed (Lev. 10:1) — which symbolizes the substitution of fleshly emotions in our service for true devotion to Christ by the Spirit, or the love of lesser things to the exclusion of the love for Christ (1 Cor. 1:11-13; Col. 2:8, 16-19).

3. *The service of intercession, also to be considered in a later chapter, is an important function of the believer-priest.* As the prophet is God's representative to the people, so the priest is the people's representative to God. As the priesthood is a divine appointment, the necessary access to God is always provided; however, no priest of the old dispensation was permitted to enter the holy of holies other than the high priest, and he but once a year on the ground of sacrificial blood (Heb. 9:7).

In this dispensation Christ as High Priest has through His own blood now entered into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4:14-16; 9:24; 10:19-22) and is interceding for His own who are in the world (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). When Christ died, the veil of the temple was rent — which signifies that the way into the holiest is now open, not to the world, but to all who come unto God on the ground of the shed blood of Christ (Heb. 10:19-22).

Having unhindered access to God because of the blood of Christ, the New Testament priest is thus privileged to minister in intercession (Rom. 8:26-27; Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Tim. 2:1; Col. 4:12).

## *B. Service Toward Man*

There is a divine arrangement in the order of the truth as found in Romans 12:1-8. Here, as in all Scripture, Christian service is not mentioned until the great issues of dedication and consecration are presented. Immediately following the message concerning these fundamental issues, the subject of divinely bestowed gifts for service is introduced, and in this connection it is important to observe the wide difference between the biblical use of the word "gift" and that meaning given to it in common speech. A gift is generally understood to refer to some native ability, received by birth, enabling one to do special things. According to the scriptural use of the word, a gift is a

ministry of the indwelling Spirit. It is the Spirit performing a service and using the believer as an instrument. In no sense is it something which is wrought by the believer alone, or even by the believer when assisted by the Spirit. Christian service is said to be a "manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:7), just as Christian character is a "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Though every believer possesses some divinely bestowed gift (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7), there is a diversity of gifts (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11). Christians are not all appointed to do the same thing. In this there is a contrast with the priestly office in which *all* believers sacrifice, worship, and intercede. Though certain representative gifts which are general are named in Scripture (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-11; Eph. 4:11) and though some of these have evidently ceased (1 Cor. 13:8), it is probable that the ministry of the Spirit through the believers is as varied as the circumstances in which they are called to serve.

Gifts are bestowed that the servant of God may be "profitable" (1 Cor. 12:7), and it is therefore implied that service which is wrought in the energy of the flesh is not profitable. The Spirit's manifestation in the exercise of a gift is as "rivers of living water" (John 7:37-39) and is the realization of those "good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Without being urged, Spirit-filled believers are constantly active in the exercise of their gifts. Carnal believers, though possessing a gift, are not active in its exercise, nor do they respond to human exhortations. However, when they become adjusted to God by confession of sin, yieldedness of life, and a walk in dependence on the indwelling Spirit, immediately they are Spirit-filled and as a result they *desire* to do the will of God and by His sufficient power working in them become profitable in that service to which they have been before ordained of God. Christians are not Spirit-filled because they are active in service; they are active in service because they are Spirit-filled. Likewise, it is sometimes the will of God that all activity cease and that the weary servant rest. It was Christ who said, "Come ye apart . . . and rest."

### *C. Her Stewardship*

The Christian's responsibility in stewardship may be considered under three phases: (1) earning money, (2) possessing money,

(3) giving money. Since money earned by toil is human life in concrete form, and since money however gained is a vital factor in both spiritual and material progress, the child of God must face his responsibility as a steward for which he will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12). Too often money is acquired, held, or given by the child of God without due recognition of that fundamental relationship which he sustains to God.

1. *The earning of money for a Christian must be in a manner worthy of a Christian's relationship to God.* As the command admonishes us, "whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). It is divinely arranged that all shall engage in toil (Gen. 3:19; 2 Thess. 3:10), and the Christian is not excepted. However, to the spiritual, instructed believer, labor is more than merely earning a living; it is doing the will of God. Every employment, be it ever so menial, should be accepted by the child of God as a specific appointment from God, and to be done *for* Him, else not done at all.

The incidental fact that God is pleased to give His child food and raiment through daily labor should not obscure the greater truth that God in infinite love is committed to the care of His children, and this without reference to their earning power (Phil. 4:19; Heb. 13:5). The saying "God provides for those only who cannot provide for themselves" is untrue. He cares for His own at all times, since all that they have is from Him (1 Sam. 2:7).

In relationships among men there are agreements and salaries to be recognized, for "the labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7); but in relation to his Father, the Christian's highest ideal concerning his toil is that whatever he does, he does at the appointment of his Father, for His sake, and as an expression of devotion to Him. Likewise, whatever is received is not *earned*, but is rather the expression of the Father's loving care. Such an attitude is not sentimental or impractical; it is the only basis upon which the believer can sanctify all his toil by doing it for the glory of God, or be able to "rejoice evermore" (1 Thess. 5:16) in the midst of the burdens of life.

2. *The possessing of money becomes a great responsibility for any sincere Christian.* In view of the appalling need on every hand and the unmeasured good that money may accomplish, every spiritual Christian must face the practical question relative to retaining property in his own possession. It is doubtless often the will of God that property shall be kept in store; but the yielded Christian will not *assume* this. His property should be

held only as God directs, and it should be subject to His control. The motives which actuate men both rich and poor — the desire to be rich (1 Tim. 6:8-9, 17-18; James 1:11; Heb. 13:5; Phil. 4:11), the desire to provide against a day of need (Matt. 6:25-34), and the desire to provide for others — are commendable only as they fulfill the specifically revealed will of God in each individual's life.

3. *The giving of money which a Christian has earned becomes an important aspect of any believer's service for God.* Self and money are alike the roots of much evil, and in the dispensing of money, as in its acquisition and possession, the Christian is expected to stand upon a grace relationship to God. This relationship presupposes that he has first given himself to God in unqualified dedication (2 Cor. 8:5); and a true dedication of self to God includes all that one is and has (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18-19) — his life, his time, his strength, his ability, his ideals, and his property.

In matters pertaining to the giving of money, the grace principle involves the believer's recognition of God's sovereign authority over all that the Christian is and has, and contrasts with the Old Testament legal system of tithing which was in force as a part of the law until the law was done away with (John 1:16-17; Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:1-18; Gal. 3:19-25; 5:18; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). Though certain principles of the law were carried forward and restated under grace, tithing, like sabbath observance, is never imposed on the believer in this dispensation. Since the Lord's Day superseded the legal sabbath and is adapted to the principles of grace as the sabbath could not be, so tithing has been superseded by a new system of giving which is adapted to the teachings of grace as tithing could not be.

Christian giving under grace, as illustrated in the experience of the saints at Corinth, is summarized in 2 Corinthians 8:1 — 9:15. In this passage we discover

(a) Christ was their pattern. The Lord's giving of Himself (2 Cor. 8:9) is the pattern of all giving under grace. He did not give a tenth; He gave all.

(b) Their giving was even out of great poverty. A striking combination of phrases is employed to describe what the Corinthians experienced in their giving (2 Cor. 8:2): "in a great trial of affliction," "the abundance of their joy," "their deep poverty abounded," "the riches of their liberality." Likewise, concerning liberality in spite of great poverty, it should be remembered

that "the widow's mite" (Luke 21:1-4), which drew the commendation of the Lord Jesus, was not a part, but "all that she had."

(c) Their giving was not by commandment, nor of necessity. Under the law, a tenth was *commanded* and its payment was a *necessity*; under grace, God is not seeking the gift, but an expression of devotion from the giver. Under grace no law is imposed, and no proportion to be given is stipulated; and, while it is true that God works in the yielded heart both to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), He finds pleasure only in that gift which is given cheerfully, or more literally, "hilariously" (2 Cor. 9:7).

If a law existed stipulating the amount to be given, there are those, doubtless, who would seek to fulfill it, even against their own wishes. Thus their gift would be made "grudgingly" and "of necessity." If it be said that to support the work of the Gospel we must have money whether given hilariously or not, it may also be said that it is not *the amount* which is given, but rather the divine blessing upon the gift that accomplishes the desired end.

Christ fed five thousand from five loaves and two fishes. There is abundant evidence to prove that wherever the children of God have fulfilled their privilege in giving under grace, their liberality has resulted in "all sufficiency in all things" which has made them "abound to every good work," for God is able to make even the grace of giving to "abound" to every believer (2 Cor. 9:8).

(d) The early Christians, first of all, gave themselves. Acceptable giving is preceded by a complete giving of oneself (2 Cor. 8:5). This suggests the important truth that giving under grace, like giving under the law, is limited to a certain class of people. Tithing was never imposed by God on any other than the nation Israel. So, Christian giving is limited to believers and is most acceptable when given by believers who have yielded their lives to God.

(e) Christians in the early church also gave systematically. Like tithing, there is suggested systematic regularity in giving under grace. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1 Cor. 16:2). This injunction is addressed to "every man" (every Christian man), and thus excuses none; and giving is to be from that which is already "in store."

(f) God sustains the giver. God will sustain grace-giving with

limitless temporal resources (2 Cor. 9:8-10; Luke 6:38). In this connection it may be seen that those who give as much as a tenth are usually prospered in temporal things; but since the believer can have no relation to the law (Gal. 5:1), it is evident that this prosperity is the fulfillment of the promise under grace, rather than the fulfillment of promises under the law. No blessings are thus dependent on the exact tithing.

The blessings are bestowed because a heart has expressed itself through a gift. It is manifest that no gift will be made to God from the heart which He will not graciously acknowledge. There is no opportunity here for designing people to become rich. The giving must be from the *heart*, and God's response will be according to His perfect will for His child. He may respond by bestowing spiritual riches, or in temporal blessings as He shall choose.

(g) True riches are from God. The Corinthian Christians were made rich with heavenly riches. There is such a thing as being rich in this world's goods and yet not rich toward God (Luke 12:21). All such are invited to buy of Him that gold which is tried in the fire (Rev. 3:18). Through the absolute poverty of Christ in His death, all may be made rich (2 Cor. 8:9). It is possible to be rich in faith (James 2:5) and rich in good works (1 Tim. 6:18); but in Christ Jesus the believer receives "the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7), and "the riches of his glory" (Eph. 3:16).