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The Servant of the Gospel, Part 1

Approximately two years into Christ's ministry a shift took place. Before the shift the disciples had simply been listeners and onlookers; they observed and learned as Christ did the teaching, preaching, and healing. Yet after the shift we find the disciples ministering, teaching, and doing the work of the ministry.¹ Now the verse that marks this transition is...

Matthew 9:36-38, "And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'"

This text gives us the basis for the change in the disciples' involvement: Christ's Compassion! Accordingly, the disciples were to become "workers of the harvest,"² And yet even before this, there was to be prayer, prayer that God would raise up and send out workers!

Now this raises some very important questions:

¹ Compare Matthew 10

² Compare Matthew 10

- Who are these “laborers” of God?
- What kind of people are they?
- What is their faith like?
- How are they to go about their service?
- What do they look like?

Our text answers these questions! Having just identified the gospel he preached,³ Paul now sets himself before his readers for their examination! With a warmth, affection, and sensitivity that permeates the entire letter, Paul assures the Christians at Rome of his genuine devotion to God and his love for them. Dr. John MacArthur said it this way:

“The letter to Rome reveals that Paul not only had the zeal of a prophet, the mind of a teacher, and the determination of an apostle, but also the heart of a shepherd.”⁴

In essence Paul is saying here, “Now that you know about the gospel I have been preaching, let me show you the preacher.” Thus from this text we are introduced to THE SERVANT OF THE GOSPEL.

We are going to begin with Romans 1:9. This verse is the key that unlocks the intent of this passage. In essence, it is the theme of this section. It tells us what this section is all about. And as the theme, it serves as the foundation for everything else that Paul says in this passage. Miss this verse and this section will be quite difficult to apply. Understand this verse and this section falls right into place. Let’s turn then to this verse where we learn of the nature of the Christian’s service. As Christians...

- What is the goal of our service in God’s kingdom?
- What are we to be working toward?
- What does the servant of the gospel do?

The Servant’s Service

Romans 1:9, “for God whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son...”

Though translated as “serve,” this does not properly convey the full meaning of the term. In the New Testament the word for “serve” is always used of religious service, and is therefore translated as “worship.”

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

Hebrews 10:2, “Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?”

Revelation 7:15, “For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve [worship] Him day and night in His temple...”

³ Compare Romans 1:1-7

⁴ Romans, MNTC, p. 33

This is the true flavor of the word. Accordingly from it we discover the true nature of Christian Service: It is Worship! ALL service rendered to and for God is worship! Everything that a Christian does can be summarized in a word: WORSHIP! And that is why Scripture identifies that the purpose of salvation is to secure a worshipping people.

1 Peter 2:4, 5, "And coming to Him... you also, as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Winning someone to Christ is an act of worship.

Romans 15:15, 16, "But I have written very boldly to you on some points... ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Holy living is considered to be an activity of worship.

Romans 12:1, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Giving money to meet the needs of the body is considered to be worship.

Philippians 4:18, "But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

- The Christian's life of godliness and honesty is the activity of worship, 1 Timothy 2:2-3.
- Loving the brethren is worship, Romans 14:18a.

In fact, ALL that we do is to be done as an offering of praise to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Worship is not just an activity of the believer; I hope you see that it is THE ONLY activity! In fact, worship is so much a part of who the Christian is that a synonym for the Christian in the Bible is "A Worshipper of God."

John 4:23, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth..."

Acts 18:7, "And he (Paul) departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue."

The Jews were saying,

Acts 18:13, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

Truly, everything you do as a child of God is worship!

Now it is so important that you and I see this for we tend to fall into two errors in our thinking.

Error #1: We wrongly identify WHO we are. We tend to fall into the trap of viewing ourselves through what we do in the kingdom.

- I'm a parent.
- I'm a husband/wife.
- I'm a student.
- I'm an employee.
- I'm an evangelist.
- I'm a teacher.

And yet this is wrong. We are none of these things! We are WORSHIPPERS OF THE LIVING GOD who have been given gifts, talents, ministries, responsibilities, and positions in order to fulfill our call to worship God!

Error #2: We wrongly divide our living. Many fall into the error of thinking that what we do at church is worship, and what we do everywhere else is non-worshipping activities. Yet Scripture won't allow us to make this distinction. EVERYTHING we do is an act of worship. Thus the issue that we are faced with is...

- NOT: "Will I worship the Lord?"
- BUT RATHER: "What kind of worship am I going to offer God?"

Is our daily worship the worship of...

- Obedience?
- Submission?
- Purity?
- Devotion?
- Self-control?
- Faith?
- Love?
- Dependence on God?

Or is our daily worship tainted by...

- The things we think?
- The movies we watch?
- The places we go?
- The things we desire?
- The unbridled passions of our heart?

The NATURE of everything we do as Christians is worship. In view of this, let us all strive, in the power of the Spirit, to present all that we do as a HOLY sacrifice to God! I dare say, there is not a more important endeavor!

Recall Eli. I consider him the poster child of a neglected ministry. Eli was a servant of the Lord strategically placed by God in Israel to...

- Preserve the service and ministry of the nation.
- Oversee its worship.
- Present the people of God to the Lord as a spotless vessel.

All of this and more was involved in his service as a priest before God. Yet on what did he spend his life? Himself! Rather than laboring as a faithful priest over the house of God, Eli grew fat. The Kingdom of God had long ceased to be about "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Rather it was the means to Eli's happiness, wants, and desires.

And so we read of his undoing. Because over the course of his life he sowed to the flesh, at the end of his life he reaped its awful consequences. In his lifetime the worship of Yahweh had become nothing more than a means of placating a guilty consciences and providing for the needs of an unholy priesthood. Eli's selfish boys led God's people unto corruption and apostasy. The ark of God had become little more than a good luck charm.

So we read in 1 Samuel 4 of an unholy battle, fought by unholy people, led by an unholy priesthood, who fought with an unholy strategy. And when Eli heard not just of the demise of God's people, the lost battle, and the death of his sons, BUT the fate of the ark, he literally was undone.

1 Samuel 4:18, "And it came about when [the messenger] mentioned the ark of God that Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy."

As you know the word for "heavy" is a double entendre here. It no doubt referenced the fact that Eli was over-weight; he lived a life of excess and ease. But it also is the word in Scripture for "glory" and so speaks of the fact that Eli's choice to live for his own glory and not that of God's was truly his undoing.

Do we have any reason to believe that Eli was damned on account of his life of sin? Absolutely not! In fact the first 4 chapters of 1 Samuel would indicate that he was a genuine servant of God who upon his death entered into the joy of the Lord. No! We derive from Eli's example the awful consequences of working out one's salvation for self.

Brothers and sisters, Eli's story could very well be our story unless we wake up and see that we like him have been charged with the high and holy calling of...

- Servant of God!
- Priest!
- Worshipper of God Most High!

In contrast to Eli, may God give us the conviction that propelled Paul in all that he did: he was a Priest/worshipper of God. Such is our identity today! Now when it is understood that Worship is what we are all about it is obvious that Christian ministry calls for total and unreserved commitment. Thus, Paul qualifies what he has said with a very important phrase.

How the Servant of the Gospel Does It

Romans 1:9, “for God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel* of His Son, is my witness.”

“God, whom I serve... with my whole heart,” or “from the deep desires of the soul.” Paul was one who served/worshipped God from his heart! His service was not characterized by hypocrisy or formalism. What he did flowed from a heart which was devoted to the Lord! What an important characteristic when it comes to the worship we offer the Lord.

Do you remember Christ’s words to the Samaritan woman?

- When Christ was perceived to be a prophet by the Samaritan woman, the focus of the conversation shifted to an age old dispute between the Samaritans and the Jews: The proper place of worship (John 4:19-22).
- From this we see a fundamental error into which the Samaritans and the Jews fell: Focusing on the WHERE at the neglect of the HOW! See Samaritan worship neglected the truth (John 4:22a). They only accepted the Pentateuch as coming from God. Thus their knowledge was limited. They had enough to know some of the truths about God, but not enough to have the full salvation revelation. They were worshipping, but they didn’t know the fullness of what they were worshipping. As such, their worship was enthusiastic, but it lacked content.
- Jewish Worship neglected the spirit (John 4:22b). The Jews were just the opposite of the Samaritans. They accepted all 39 books of the OT, and had the whole revelation of the teaching of salvation (Romans 2:17-20; 9:4-5). Yet, they lacked spirit/heart/integrity! Accordingly, Jewish worship at the time of Christ was cold, legalistic, and hypocritical: though they went through the motions, their heart was far from God (cf. Matthew 6:1-8; 15:1-9; 23:23)! And so the Jewish focus on the WHERE to worship neglected an aspect of the HOW.
- Christ’s response was to rebuke them *BOTH*- the Samaritans for their neglect of the truth; the Jews for their neglect of the heart/integrity...

John 4:23-24, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

It is this balance- worshipping according to the truth of God’s word with integrity- that characterized Paul’s service as a priest! He was motivated by a genuine, inner desire to serve the Lord. He was a man whose heart was given to God, not just on Sunday, but every day of the week. And therefore all that he did was an offering of worship acceptable to God!

From this we see that the Nature of genuine Christian service flows from a heart devoted to God! Truly, genuine service is nothing less than whole-hearted Worship! Stephen Charnock put it this way:

“Without the heart it is not worship; it is stage play; an acting a part without being that person really... a hypocrite... We may truly be said to worship God- though we lack perfection; but we cannot be said to worship Him if we lack sincerity...”⁵

In contrast to the worship throughout redemptive history as a shadow of the things to come, the Old Testament Priesthood prefigured what we are in Christ today! Accordingly, to gaze upon the errors associated with the priesthood is to gaze upon many of the pitfalls into which you and I easily fall as ones who love Christ.

What was one of their greatest problems? Heartless worship!

Amos 5

In Amos 5:21-24 we read of God’s rejection of Israelite worship. God rejected Israelite worship because while God’s people flocked to the sanctuaries and offered many sacrifices, notice it was nothing less than a show. It was much the same as in the days of the wilderness wanderings.

Amos 5:25-26, “Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.”

Amazing! For a large part of Israel’s sojourning in the wilderness, God’s people excelled in the worship of God. They offered sacrifices and grain offerings in exile! From all appearances we would have concluded that this was a devoted people of God! But if we could go into their inner rooms we would have been shocked to discover where their heart really lay. For

- In his pocket was the image of a star- an emblem to a pagan god.
- In his suit case was Sikkuth.
- In her bag an image of Kiyyun.
- And yet these were just a few of the thousands of images, idols, trinkets, and good luck charms which God’s people made while in the wilderness.

Is it possible to worship God sincerely and yet as an insurance policy worship Allah?... Buddha?... Baal?
YET SUCH WAS THE WORSHIP OF GOD’S PEOPLE IN THE WILDERNESS!

The worship offered by Judah’s priests 1,000 years later was no different.

Isaiah 1:11, 13, 16, “‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed cattle. And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats... Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies- I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly... [Why was God so repulsed by the worship of Judah? Because it was heartless!...] Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil.”

⁵ John MacArthur’s study guide on *True Worship*, p. 97.

Thus the Divine commentary on Judah's worship is found in Isaiah.

Isaiah 29:13, "...this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote."

Once again, we must NOT take these examples and conclude that if we are so guilty we stand condemned before God. RATHER, as children of God in whom He takes delight, we must allow these examples to motivate us and so inspire us that we might not follow their example in the words of Paul:

1 Corinthians 10:11, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

Yet I fear that as a generation of priests, we- and again I'm speaking as a member of the broad evangelical church as it exists in the US today- are ignoring the example of Paul who worshipped God from his heart, and are running headlong into the path of our brethren who wandered in the wilderness!

Look around the church and you will find Christians who have in their possession images, idols, and icons of Sikkuth and Kiyun. As such, they are serving the Lord...

- Out of LEGALISTIC EFFORT- as a means of earning the favor of God.
- For FEAR that, if they do not, they will incur God's disfavor and perhaps even lose their salvation.
- On account of the PRESTIGE and ESTEEM that a "position" often brings (3 John 9).
- For APPEARANCE SAKE, in order to be considered righteous by fellow church members and by the world.
- On account of the PRESSURE TO CONFORM to certain human standards of religion and moral behavior.
- As a means to MANIPULATE GOD unto blessing.

If our Old Testament brethren trusting Christ offered such a sacrifice and were rejected, is it possible that our generation will fare any better? No matter how orthodox or helpful to other people your service might be, unless it is done out of a heart devoted to God- a heart clinging to the cross and nothing else- it is improper worship.⁶ Truly the service/worship that is acceptable to God is that which flows from a heart which is wholly devoted to God! And yet, what is this? To answer this, consider with me a couple verses. Do you realize that the culmination of Redemptive History/World History was the cross of Christ?

- It was promised as far back as Genesis 3:15.
- It was prefigured by the greatest act of redemption in the OT- the Exodus.
- It came to pass now 2,000 years ago on a mountain in Palestine...

Ephesians 3:3, 8-12, "...by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief ["the mystery" is nothing less than the reconciliation of mankind to God through the cross, cf. vv. 4-7]... To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the

⁶ Compare 1 Corinthians 10:31

unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.”

From this verse we conclude that God has been Christ-centered in the outworking of Redemptive/World History! Accordingly, how does the cross figure in our calling as servants of God Most High- as priests of God?

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died [this is the cross; it is a love for this cross thought ought to control us...]; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

Behold THE key to acceptable worship: serving God out of love on account of the cross! Any service that lacks this as the driving motive is an offering up of a strange smoke unto God. And thus we read, not surprisingly this;

Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

The worship that is acceptable to God is the worship which flows from distrust of self and so a life wholly dependent upon Christ.

Hebrews 12:28-29, “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.”

Isn't this what we see emulated by Paul in our text this morning? He was one who “...worshipped God from the innermost part of his being...” (Romans 1:9b). When we read this of Paul we must ask based on the rest of his writings, what possibly could he have meant here? What is it that moved him as he worshipped God?

Galatians 6:14, “But may it never be that I should boast [in the Bible, “boasting” speaks of one’s deepest commitment], except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Is it possible that the one whose greatest boast was Christ could have meant anything other than this when he said, “...for God whom I worship from the inner most part of my being”?

Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Is it possible that one whose existence revolved around Christ could have meant anything other than this when he said, “...for God whom I worship from the inner most part of my being”?

1 Corinthians 2:2, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him

crucified.”

Again, is it possible that one whose ministry focus was Christ could have meant anything other than this when he said, “...for God whom I worship from the inner most part of my being”? Truly the heart of all service is serving God from a heart impelled out of love and devotion to Christ! Such is the calling that rests upon each and every one of us this day!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly. It is distributed via the internet.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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