

# Major Bible Themes

BY

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## CHAPTER XLI

### SERVICE

Service is any work performed for the benefit of another. When tracing this theme through the Bible a series of similarities and contrasts between the Old and New Testament orders will be observed. Almost every doctrine of the New Testament is anticipated in the Old Testament and almost every doctrine of the Old Testament is incomplete until perfected in the New Testament. The theme of service is no exception; for 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 only 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) and 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, according 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.

## **I. SERVICE TOWARD GOD**

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 in the performance by the priests of the divinely appointed ritual in the tabernacle or temple. In contrast to 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.**

At this point there is a striking similarity to be observed. 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 shall 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 the Scriptures, 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 that which 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 transfigured 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 three-fold: (a) The dedication of self which is declared to be a "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1), or more literally, "a spiritual worship." As Christ was Himself both a Sacrificer and a 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. 13:5). (c) The sacrifice of substance (Phil. 4:18).

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 bathing was administered to him by another (Exod. 29:4); however, afterwards, though thus wholly bathed, he was required to be cleansed repeatedly by a partial bathing at the brazen laver, and this before undertaking any and every 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.

As worship was a part of the service of every priest of the old order, so every believer is now appointed to worship. In like manner, 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 one's self 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, are of typical meaning. No "strange" incense was to be burned (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.

As the prophet is God's representative to the people, so the priest is the people's representative to God, and priesthood, being 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, in addition to the fact that Christ as High Priest has with His own blood now entered into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4:14-16; 9:24; 10:19-22) and is now 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 on the ground 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).

## II. 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 the Scriptures, 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 which is 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, or 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 wherein all believers sacrifice, worship, and intercede. Though certain representative gifts which are general are named in the Scriptures (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; while 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 shall cease and that the weary servant shall rest. It was Christ who said, "Come ye apart ... and rest."

## QUESTIONS

1. a. What is service?
  - b. Name two general classes of service.
2. To what extent was the Old Testament service restricted?
3. Who are the priests of the New Testament?

4. Name three forms of service toward God which are committed to the New Testament priest.
5. Name three ways in which the Old Testament priest was sanctified, or set apart, which had typical meaning concerning the New Testament priest.
6. Indicate how these three types are fulfilled in the believer and give Scripture for each.
7. What distinction should be recognized between self-dedication and consecration?
8. Name three aspects of priestly service in sacrifice toward God.
9. State the typical meaning of the whole bathing and partial bathing of the Old Testament priest in the experience of the believer.
10. a. In what ways may the service of worship be offered to God?
  - b. State the typical meaning of the two things prohibited in Old Testament worship.
11. On what ground is there access to God in intercession?
12. Define the word gift as used in the New Testament.
13. Distinguish between the exercise of gifts, and priestly service.
14. a. To what purpose are gifts bestowed?
  - b. How may the manifestation of a gift be realized?