

Ministry Unto The Lord

Election has a purpose. This purpose is not founded upon God's mercy to save the elect; that is an outcome of the purpose. The prior objective is the praise of God manifest through corporeal beings who love him. Some people find this abhorrent, just as they fail to understand the attributes of God. Since God is perfect holiness, perfect majesty, holy wisdom, the personification of love and beauty, and much more, then the best thing that God can do in a universe created by him is to fill it with his own glory. The purpose of election is to fill the universe with the majestic glory of God's perfect greatness. As a spiritual being, he chooses to fill a material universe with material beings who are his sons through redemption and union with Christ. Angels, as spirits, can't do this, but men can.

Thus Paul explains:

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace. Eph 1:4-6

We who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also *trusted ...* you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise ... to the praise of His glory. Eph 1:12-14

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Eph 2:7

The fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Eph 3:9-11

For all things *are* for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 2 Cor 4:15

That you may [be] ... filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Phil 1:10-11

Thus the overwhelming purpose of our redemption is to glorify God and serve him forever.

Though this is our eternal objective, our role in the future working out of this purpose is being determined now, by how we walk on earth. This is the reason behind the universal Biblical teaching on rewards; the rewards are functions of responsibility in heavenly ministry that are determined by our obedience and faith in this life today. We are equal in justification but vary in heavenly function. God is not so interested in our successes on Earth, but in our character; he is building for tomorrow, not for today; he is working for a heavenly city, not a worldly sham.

Thus it is fundamental to our pleasing God that we learn how to minister to him now, while we have opportunity in this life. A great deal is said about this in both testaments, but few understand it.

While most Christians would accept that we must please God, their ideas about how this is done vary enormously. Charismatics always tend towards an earthly manner of achieving this (despite their spiritual pretensions). Thus serving God is seen in fleshly exploits of various kinds. In terms of leadership strategy it is seen in gathering large numbers in big impressive buildings to impact a worldly region – with the larger objective of ruling the

world under apostles and prophets. In terms of the Gospel message it is based upon the will of the sinner responding to an emotional altar call or a sensual experience. In 'spiritual' power it is mock-healings and people falling over at the command of a mere man. In worship it is evidenced in having large numbers respond in a sensual manner to the impact of loud music and manipulative leading. This is no different from pagan cults who do exactly the same thing to be 'spiritual'. It is a far cry from Job or David who truly worshipped God in silence after receiving news of the death of children.

All these things are earthly, not heavenly; none of them are Biblical and none please God at all. The church is never called to change the world, make governments more moral, institute a 'Christian' society, preach human ability in salvation, manipulate people to behave sensually, or worship in pagan forms. This shows how far astray men can be led in thinking that they please God.

To gain a better understanding of ministering to the Lord we must examine what scripture really teaches us about ministry to the Lord. Where does this phrase occur?

Service in the Tabernacle / Temple

- To burn an offering: Exod 30:20.
- To minister as priests: Lev 7:35.
- To bear the Ark, to stand before the Lord and to bless his name: Deut 10:8, 18:5; 1 Chron 15:2.
- To be near to God: Deut 21:5.
- 'To minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel': 1 Chron 16:4, 37.
- To sanctify holy things, burn incense, serve the Lord and give him blessing: 1 Chron 23:13; 2 Chron 29:11.
- 'The priests who minister to the LORD are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites attend to their duties. And they burn to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense; they also set the showbread in order on the pure gold table, and the lampstand of gold with its lamps to burn every evening.' 2 Chron 13:10-11.

Service in the heavenly temple of Ezekiel's vision

- To have charge of the altar and minister to the Lord: Ezek 40:46, 43:19.
- To keep charge of the sanctuary; to keep God's charge (commands); to offer fat and blood Ezek 44:15-16.
- To minister in the sanctuary: Ezek 44:27.

Miscellaneous

- The duty of priests: Joel 1:9, 2:17.
- A practical illustration of ministry as service: Matt 25:44.

Thus we can see that ministry to the Lord is essentially the ministry of priests not prophets. A prophet is sent from God to speak the word of the Lord to the people, and this is usually a straying people. In Israel the ministry of prophets appears long after the work of a formal priesthood had been initiated, and then because their job was to teach and warn a corrupt nation apostatising from God. Prophets bring correction and explain the path to follow, but even obedient people need priests (in typological terms). Even when everything is working well the ministry of priests continues.

When the time comes that prophetic ministry is not needed and the New Covenant is consummated (1 Cor 13:8-10; Heb 8:11), priestly ministry is still vital because saints will always minister to the Lord.

In the Old Covenant the work of the priests was largely a holding operation; they continually represented the people to God and established the way of worship by dealing with the issue of sin. Most of the priest's work was to remove obstacles to fellowship through the offering of a blood sacrifice; but this is not the whole work of a priest. When sin had not been fully dealt with in the time before the cross, and before the Spirit had been fully outpoured, priests were fully occupied maintaining the Tabernacle worship system and making men right before God.

The priesthood was a portion of the people (of the Levites) maintaining the worship of the whole nation; but after the cross all of God's people are priests (1 Pt 2:5-9). In the New Covenant everything symbolised in the OT types is now realised in spiritual terms: the temple is not a building but the elect (1 Pt 2:5; 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19); the priesthood is all the elect; the vestments speak of the virtues of Christ given to the saints; the sacrificial offerings are fulfilled in the cross and finished; the Mosaic Law is internalised as the Law of Christ maintained by his Spirit; the temple instruments are the harmonious praise of the saints, the temple incense is the prayers of the saints and so on. So we must understand what the priestly ministry to the Lord symbolises for us today.

Ministry to the Lord - as demonstrated in priestly service

Holiness

The very first principle of priestly service is holiness. The words, 'Holiness to the Lord' were boldly engraved on a gold plate and put on the High Priest's turban for all to see. Acceptance was by holiness (Ex 28:36-38); without holiness there was no acceptance. The righteousness symbolised in the linen garments of the priests was so necessary for service that anyone approaching the Tabernacle without them would die on the spot (Ex 28:42-43).

The OT priests were to establish holiness in the camp through the offerings, but were themselves set apart in holiness through a number of features. The ordination of the priests sanctified them for service through various rituals, so that they stood by virtue of the shed blood of a substitute and through washing and anointing. Clearly these stand for the atonement realised in Christ's work and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to implement that in the elect believer. The Christian is washed (1 Cor 6:11), anointed and sealed (Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 1:21), and forgiven through Christ's blood. As a result he is set apart for service. As the OT priest is then clothed with garments speaking of righteousness, so is the believer clothed in the righteousness of Christ in justification.

After ordination, nothing the priest does can be effectual without his own personal rituals of cleansing. Before presenting the offering of others, he must first present an offering for himself (Lev 9:8). The righteousness in which he stands as a priest must be continually made effectual in his life. The believer also must stand daily on the basis of the redemption he has received in Christ and act on that basis. He must put off his old nature and put on the new man. He must walk in the Spirit and put on Christ. Every day the believer must ensure that he is clean before God and walking righteously in practice.

We could expound many aspects of the Tabernacle system to illustrate all this but anyone can do that by reading Exodus and Leviticus for themselves, here we seek to draw some important lessons.

There is nothing more important than maintaining holiness; and this is why the apostles spoke so much about it, both in didactic and practical terms. No one can perform service to God if he is without holiness. Now antinomians act upon the basis that once the work of salvation has been effected in the believer, and he is credited with righteousness, then there is nothing else to be done and all is well. This is a grave error.

Firstly, the true holiness of genuine justification always works itself out in practical holiness; James teaches us that faith without works is dead (Jm 2:17ff.) and Jesus illustrated this by explaining that a good tree cannot bear bad fruit (Matt 7:15-20). There is no justification if there is no visible righteousness. Antinomian Charismatics who claim that the law is dead and that they are saved by their faith, who then behave in sinful ways, will stand condemned before God. Jesus and the apostles constantly warn about this. Even those who prophesy and do great works will be dismissed from God's presence, says Jesus, if they have no true holiness (Matt 7:22-23).

Holiness must be maintained and it is done by the continual renewing of the mind

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rm 12:1-2).

There is no service to God unless it is from a renewed mind; worship is rational not mindless ('reasonable' literally means rational). The true Christian is a new creature through union with Christ, and the work of such a person is achieved by constant transformation. The only service acceptable to God is that which arises from the mind of the new man not the old man. The old man only gets worse (Eph 4:22) and this is why so much church service is not only useless but sinful; it arises from the flesh. How can supposed Christian leaders be nasty, slander, defraud, act with arrogance and so on? It is because they are fleshly. Only the new man can produce genuine fruit because the Spirit generates it.

God tells us that true works come from him; he gives the motivation and the strength to do those works he predetermined his people to achieve to glorify him (Phil 2:13; Eph 2:10). These come from the new nature. Even a genuine believer, if he is living in the old nature, will fail to do any good work. Holiness is the essential foundation for genuine service to God.

This means that all those churches which deride holiness in practice will fail to do any good work. Now they won't admit this, but their actions and doctrine will reveal their true colours. Their wrongly taught people may still be saved, if they were genuinely converted, but their rewards will be wood, hay and stubble at the end; they will be saved like a man who escapes with nothing from a burning building (1 Cor 3:12-13). For instance, a church that encourages people to behave indecently in worship (such as by screaming, dancing, jumping, falling, laughing uncontrollably and so on) is a church that promotes unrighteousness. It doesn't understand the first thing about holy conduct. Church meetings are to be conducted rationally, with a mind submitted to God.

We could say much more but the point is made. The beginning of godly service is holiness. This is not just genuine salvation in a person but the continual maintenance of the salvation in walking by faith and righteousness.

A submissive attitude of obedience to God's word

The OT priests evidence a constant submissiveness to every tiny detail that God commanded Moses on the mount. Every possible aspect of the worship system was ordered according to a pattern set by God's revelation. Any divergence from this pattern led to death. From time to time people tested this, such as Nadab, Abihu & Korah, and they were killed in divine judgment. Over and over the warning sounds that disobedience will lead to being cut off from the people (i.e. killed, Job 6:9). Thus the priests carefully considered what they did in their daily rituals; every sacrifice had to be prepared according to divine instruction. They had to wear the right clothes, bathe the right way, use the right altar, use the correct coals of fire, use the right parts of the animal, remove the rubbish and put it in the right place, and so on. Forgetting this, many centuries later, David saw Uzzah instantly killed as a result of the failure to carry the Ark properly.

Divine instructions were absolutely fundamental to proper service. There was no shortage of them and there was no need of anything else. All that was necessary for establishing Israel's worship and for the priests to serve God righteously was provided in the law. All they had to do was submit to it.

Now the same is true for us today. God's word has given us all we need to establish true service to God:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

The basis of divine service, of ministering to the Lord, is the word of God. Ignorance is not an excuse; there is no service if it is not Biblical.

Now many churches today, especially Charismatic churches which major on subjective impressions at the expense of scripture, are failing to obey God's word. This means that there will be no effectual service; their works are futile. I repeat, it is of fundamental importance that all our works are Biblical. We must test what we do by the word of God and reject anything that is not in accordance with it.

This means that the Calvinistic regulative principle is crucial in establishing genuine church worship. This teaches that only that which is commanded in scripture is acceptable in the church. The opposing normative principle of other churches (anything is OK unless it is forbidden in the Bible) must be rejected as allowing almost anything. Thus in a church meeting we will allow singing, prayers, edifying participation, Bible readings, teaching etc.; but we will not allow instrumental music, dancing, uncontrolled behaviour, running round the room, drama, light shows, and so on.

The word of God must rule all our behaviour, both personally and in the gathered church. A sign of a true church will be the full acceptance of the authority of the Bible in all matters. Only Biblical Christians can serve the Lord, those who are dependent upon every word of God.

Praise and worship

It was the job of priests to stand before the Lord and to bless his name:

At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day. Deut 10:8

This Hebrew word for 'bless' (*barak*) also means 'to kneel'. Priests were a separated family (Levites) whose task was both to stand before the Lord and to kneel before the Lord. While standing to perform their various functions (carrying the Ark, trimming the lampstand wicks, placing the bread of the presence on the table, dealing with sacrifices etc.) they were also to be in an attitude of kneeling before God. Their responsibilities were to be conducted in an attitude of reverence and awe. 'Bless' also means 'praise'; their service in the Tabernacle was done with praise, with their hearts kneeling in submission.

Divine worship is submission. The very word essentially means this. The most important Greek word used for worship in the New Testament is *proskuneo*, which means 'to kiss the hand towards one'. In the Near East this is associated with kneeling, or even prostration, in reverence to a greater authority. Worship is thus homage, obeisance, and submission. The corresponding Hebrew word (*shachah*) means 'to bow down' or prostrate oneself before a superior. There is no Christian worship without a kneeling heart, utter submission and reverence. The modern Charismatic idea that worship is a party, including jumping around to loud music, laughing, shouting and so on is totally opposed to the Biblical concept of worship. This sort of activity is pagan and has always been associated with the rituals of heathens who worship demons.

Those who really knew God in the Bible worshipped God in simple, submissive ways, often when under great stress. Job worshipped God when all his children died (Job 1:20). David worshipped God when his son died (2 Sam 12:20). When Abraham's servant learned that God had provided a wife for Isaac, he worshipped by bowing himself to the ground (Gen 24:52). When Jacob was dying, he blessed the sons of Joseph while worshipping God leaning on his staff, since he was too frail to bow (Heb 11:21).

The prime attitude in worship is submission to God's sovereignty and thankful recognition of his dealings with you. Christian service to God must be conducted with a worshipful spirit; while standing before God in service, you must be kneeling in your heart. If there is not an attitude of reverence and fear of God, the result is merely fleshly activity that will be rejected as profane. This test nullifies a great deal of 'Christian' service and worship in these days.

Praise is the outward expression of a worshipful heart. It is the physical manifestation of a heart that is truly submitted to the Lord. There are many forms of praise described in scripture; they include: singing praise to God (Heb 2:12, 13:15), doing righteous works for God (Phil 1:10-11), and charitable giving to the poor and needy in God's name (Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16). Worship in the Old Testament included the bringing of offerings to the Levites to be sacrificed, and these were the best of the flock, the best bulls, the purest goats; it cost the worshipper. New Covenant acts of praise are not for the blessing of the worshipper, but the glorifying of God and the doing of good to someone in need as unto the Lord. Churches whose praise meetings are full of self-gratification, self-excitement, and which involve giving money to leaders with an affluent lifestyle, is a mockery of true praise.

The Lord Jesus also affirmed that giving to the poor and needy was an act of praise:

And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. Matt 10:42

For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. Mk 9:41

Giving is specifically stated to receive a reward from God. God rewards those who glorify him, who praise him, since giving is a means of glorifying God. The difference between these two verses is the name in which the giving is done and whom the recipient is. Those who give to the Lord's people in Jesus' name are rewarded; equally those who give to the needy, especially needy children, because they are a disciple of Christ will also be rewarded. God is praised by charitable giving. So much so-called modern praise is mere froth and bubble that excites the flesh, requiring music, emotional manipulation and a large meeting. There is no reward for this other than judgment. However, giving to the poor and needy, meeting the needs of saints and bearing other's burdens have real spiritual value and are not only received by God as praise, but are rewarded for glorifying him.

It is important to see that worship and praise, need no music, no excitement, no corporate meeting, no enthusiasm, and not even any particularly joyful feelings. It is a submissive commitment to God's will and a determination to honour him so that he is glorified.

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. 1 Pt 2:9

Thanksgiving

He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel. ... Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! 1 Chron 16:4, 8-10

Heman and Jeduthun and the rest who were chosen, who were designated by name, to give thanks to the LORD, because His mercy *endures* forever. 1 Chron 16:42

To stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at evening; and at every presentation of a burnt offering to the LORD on the Sabbaths and on the New Moons and on the set feasts, by number according to the ordinance governing them, regularly before the LORD. 1 Chron 23:30-31

As the flesh of the morning and evening sacrifice was consumed in the fire on the brass altar, so the Levites (relieved from carrying the Tabernacle now the temple was complete) were to give thanks to the Lord. The sacrifice was always accompanied by thanksgiving. The prime reason for believers giving thanks is for the great sacrifice of Christ who gave his blood to atone for our sin. Thanksgiving is a vital part of church meetings, but also is also a key feature of our own daily prayers. The enduring mercy of God is a spur for continual thanksgiving that 'he saved a wretch like me'.

But God is to be thanked for so many other things. We should be thankful for the food we eat daily that comes from his providential provision. This is not a mere formal prayer, but genuine thanks that God preserves us. We should be thankful for the creation around us that constantly speaks of God's mercies and wonderful sovereignty. We should be thankful for his great deeds and our many deliverances. As we talk of his wondrous works, we are automatically led to thanksgiving.

There is too little thanksgiving in the church today, and this should be remedied by those that love God. Too often we are focused on our own needs and problems, but these should drive us to give thanks, not moan. In the greatest suffering we can still give thanks, even for the suffering, since it comes from the hand of a loving Father for a good reason and to work good. God is for us; we should be thankful.

Our ministry to the Lord will always be full of thanksgiving.

Prayer

Priests were called to offer up prayers and sacrifices for those they represented (Jer 37:3; Heb 5:1). The culmination of this in the religious year was when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies to sacrifice and pray for the sins of the nation. This was the only time this sacred meeting place was entered, and the only time the uncovered Ark was seen. The High Priest did not enter with his garments of glory and beauty but only with linen (Lev 16:4), symbolising that he stood there clothed only in the righteousness of Christ. Prayer involves humility and trust in God's provision.

The only other thing that the High Priest took into the Holiest was incense, and this was placed on the fire of a censer and the cloud of scented smoke covered the mercy seat (Lev 16:12-13). Incense is symbolic of prayer rising upwards to the Lord (Rev 5:8, 8:3-4). This symbol of the prayer ministry of priests accompanies direct teaching that priests are mediators between men and God, representing men in prayer and interceding on their behalf.

A foundational aspect of our ministry to the Lord is the intercession of saints for the Lord's people. God's people are a praying people because they are priests. Every single saint is a priest before God and is able to make supplication for others to God his Father. This needs no extensive exposition since all believers are aware of this.

Teaching

That you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses. Lev 10:10-11

They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel your law. Deut 33:10

For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and *people* should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. Mal 2:7

Most people are aware that priestly ministry involves prayer and mediatorial intercession, but few seem to realise that the priests and Levites were also the teachers of Israel. Widespread prophetic ministry appeared much later when the work of recovery was necessary after apostasy.

The priests lived in 48 cities around Israel so that they could reach everyone and explain God's law, in between their turns at ministerial duties in the Jerusalem temple. Teaching is the activity of a messenger of God and it focuses on instructing God's people in what is clean and what is unclean. The point of teaching is to affirm what is good and profitable (Heb 5:14), but today many Christians do not know how to discern good from evil.

The failure of morals is due to the lack of proper teaching. Doctrinal instruction is the necessary foundation to ensure good ethics. Without it people will be uncertain and foolishly follow any wind of teaching. Centring teaching on practical matters without doctrinal instruction will guarantee moral collapse. Vague, 'blessed' thoughts tenuously based on some verse will do no good. Even scriptural exposition week-by-week will be of

little value unless it is accompanied by practical application and the doctrinal implications explained.

Teachers must explain doctrine so that people know what is holy and what is not. For this reason teaching must include warnings about what constitutes heresy. Heretics should be named and their lies exposed. Without this clarity the sheep will wander and fall into error. Teachers who fail to do this will be accountable before God for the damage done to his people. This is why teachers are judged with greater strictness (Jm 3:1).

Whilst there is the formal gift of teaching in the church, all God's people are called to teach in some capacity. Fathers must teach children; mothers must train young girls. Widows should teach young wives how to please their husbands and run the home, and even young folk can teach a sinner the error of his ways by sharing the Gospel.

Ministry to the Lord includes teaching his children how to discern good from evil.

A constant focus on the cross

The overwhelming occupation of OT priests was to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God. On certain feast days there were literally thousands of animals being slaughtered and butchered. At the dedication of the temple, Jerusalem would have run red with the blood of tens of thousands of animals, to say nothing of the smell of gore and the smoke of burning flesh. This was necessary, in typological terms, to indicate the vast worth of the suffering and death of Christ in performing the work of atonement.

Much of the priest's life would have been repetitive and arduous, cutting up dead bulls, goats and sheep according to precise instructions in order to deal with the specific sin and nature of the offering. The priest's life was centred upon dealing with sin and gaining the satisfaction of God from the necessary offering for iniquity. A priest is focused upon the cross.

The same is true of the believer; there is never a time when the cross is not at the forefront of our experience because we are constantly reminded of our sin and the need of redemption at the cost of the great sacrifice of Christ. We are commanded daily to seek forgiveness of our sins, and this forgiveness only arises from the cross. Daily we welcome the opportunity to give thanks for the atonement provided by God's gift of his Son.

Because this is so central, the Lord ensured that every church meeting on Sunday is based upon the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). We gather to edify one another to be sure, but the central feature of that gathering is breaking bread together and giving thanks for what it symbolises. Thus churches that do not break bread weekly fail to obey God's word and incur judgment. The apostles came together in churches to break bread and teach that the Supper is the crucial part of our meeting (1 Cor 11:17ff.). How can we pretend to be Biblical and obedient to God if we fail to celebrate something so simple? How can we claim to serve the Lord if we can't obey in such an important matter as this?

Testimony

The Levites bore the Ark of the Covenant through the wilderness, which also called the Ark of the Testimony. Covered in animal skins, no passing tribesman could have seen the actual golden object or had any understanding of the items inside; it was a mystery to outsiders. In the same way we are stewards of the mystery (2 Cor 4:1) and bear the ministry of reconciliation. It is believers who have the good news of God's salvation; it is our job to testify to outsiders the commands of God to believe and repent. God reaches out to sinners through the preaching of believers.

But the whole Christian life is a testimony, and this testimony has to be borne properly. The Ark had to be lifted up on poles and carried on the shoulders of Levites; no animal was allowed to bear this burden, only the people of God. God's witness in this world is carried on the shoulders of the elect and we should take great care that we bear this burden properly. Everything we do either has a positive or negative testimony, and we will one day give an account of every idle word we speak. Our objective is that every word, every thought, every action is worthy of the Lord. This means that we need to gain wisdom on how to behave in every circumstance. The only way we will gain this wisdom is to study God's word and understand God's will.

On the final day, when we give an account of our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ as Judge, it will be of no use to say that the erroneous things we did were due to the wrong teaching that we had from mistaken leaders. Every believer is expected to check what he hears and what he decides to accept (Acts 17:11; 1 Jn 4) We must test and prove all things as a metallurgist proves the real value of metal ore (1 Thess 5:21). My behaviour must be shaped by what God says, not by what some powerful leader tells me. The behaviour that is considered acceptable in certain churches is just plain sin; and all this will be made clear on the Last Day. For me to have a good testimony before God and the world I must walk in the Spirit and obey the words inspired by the Spirit. Spiritual power based upon truth is what counts, not mere empty, lifeless dogma on the one hand, nor 'spiritual' excitement with no Biblical basis on the other.

Serving the Lord Biblically always involves the matter of testimony. If we do not have a Biblical testimony, then we cannot be serving the Lord.

Ministry to the Lord - as demonstrated in the Cherubim

Ministering to the Lord, especially in praise, is so important that there is never a time when heaven is not resounding to the praise of God. Well, I must qualify that; there was only one time when heaven's praise stopped for a short time and that was when Christ suffered and died on the cross. Revelation tells us that heaven was silent for 'half an hour' (Rev 8:1), symbolic of the period of the Lord's extreme suffering. Heaven was shocked at the reality of seeing the very Son of God die for created men. But this was soon overcome by the greater praise that erupted when this suffering was complete and the fulness of God's eternal purpose was realised in the resurrection and ascension of the Lord (Heb 2:9, 12, 12:2).

The normal state of heaven is one of continual praise to God for his great works. Now we have stated that this praise is intended to be sung by the body of Christ; the eternal purpose of God is that the elect are the bearers of God's glory and praise. However, that is not fulfilled until the full consummation of the Lord's people is complete at the Last Day when Jesus returns and transforms our feeble material bodies, into spiritual bodies like his (1 Jn 3:2).

Angels cannot sing, their praise is always spoken. They can't sing because they know nothing of redemption; angels are either elect or fallen (demons) and there was no rescue plan for fallen angels, only condemnation. Angels praise God for what they see of redemption in the church, which is why the church is called to testify of the greatness of redemption in the gatherings (Eph 3:10); but their praise is not sung. Only redeemed men sing God's praises:

They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. Rev 14:3

So does this mean that there has been a limitation in heaven of the proper praise of God by non-angelic beings who bear his glory, before the transformation of the elect?

The idea that this could be so is impossible. God must be fully glorified all the time by those who bear his glory and share in his throne. Heaven must be filled with due praise. For this reason God created the Cherubim; this is the job that Cherubim fulfil until the church is complete and ready to take their place.

Cherubim are not angels. They are never called angels and their symbolic form is nothing like angels. Indeed, their form represents earth not heaven and they are called 'living creatures' (Rev 4:6). They are pictured, in the few times they are described, as having the form of all creation in Ezek:5-10:

- The likeness of a man in general, and the hands of a man.
- They had wings.
- Calf's feet.
- The wings of a bird.
- The face of a man at the front.
- The face of a lion on the right side. (Representing wild animals.)
- The face of an ox on the left side. (Representing domestic animals.)
- The face of an eagle. (Representing birds.)

They are also associated with a rainbow (Ezek 1:28), which speaks of God's covenant with the elect through Christ.

In Rev 4:6-11 this same typology is represented by four creatures:

- They are before God's throne.
- They are full of eyes.
- The creatures are like a man, lion, calf and eagle.
- They each had six wings.
- They constantly praised God.

God communed, in typological form, from the Cherubim; they are the means of his self-expression, just as the church is (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89). They feature extensively in the Tabernacle and the Temple; both symbolic of God's dwelling place among his elect people. They are always associated with God's glorious testimony, as the church; and those figured on the Ark are called 'the Cherubim of glory' (Heb 9:5). These were anointed with oil, symbolic of the ministry of the Spirit, just as the church is. God is even said to dwell between the Cherubim (1 Sam 4:4; Ps 80:1, 99:1; Isa 37:16; Ezek 1:26, 28) or ride upon a Cherub (Ps 18:10), something that is explained in Biblical doctrine as the function of the church. They are also associated with God's throne (Ezek 10:1)

What do the Cherubim represent? They speak of the whole redeemed creation, which will glorify God forever in the restored new world. Chief of this creation, and the crown of God's testimony, is redeemed man; hence the main emphasis in the Cherubim is a man. Thus the main lesson of the Cherubim is the testimony of God through redemption, and especially redeemed mankind. The Cherubim are holding the place of the redeemed in heaven until God's purposes on earth are fulfilled, the earth restored and the elect glorified. Then heaven will fill with sung praise.

Having established this, we can learn a great deal from the Cherubim regarding what believers' ministry to the Lord is.

The first job of the Cherubim is to thank and praise God.

And they do not rest day or night, saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!' ... the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever. Rev 4:6, 9

The prime responsibility of both Cherubim and believers is to worship God; that is our chief purpose of existence. If we want to minister to the Lord, it will first mean that we must be true worshippers, constantly giving thanks to God for his great mercies and for who he is.

The Cherubim are associated with God's throne

And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of the likeness of a throne. Ezek 10:1

Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. Rev 4:6

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures. Rev 5:6

Before the throne, before the four living creatures. Rev 14:3

The elect and the Cherubim are associated with God's throne. The throne is a figure of speech for rule, dominion, and kingly authority. Believers are to act on behalf of God in expressing his authority and this has many ramifications.

In the church the elect are to manifest God's order according to his word, with the corollary of exercising discipline against those who blaspheme or demean God's word. Jesus explained this in Matt 16:19 and Matt 18:19. The authoritative word of the church is an authorisation from heaven. As representatives of God's authority, it is crucial that churches (and especially leaders) are absolutely Biblical in their judgments. It is a great sin for churches to act in an authoritative manner in a way that contradicts God's word. Thus the church is called to manifest, not only the power of God, but also the character of God. The way believers behave is as important as the things a believer does.

While the local / universal church is the kingdom of God on earth, the place where God is obeyed and served as king, the individual components of the church are equally the kingdom. Thus a believing family is a part of the kingdom, a place where God is owned as Lord; therefore, husbands are to love wives as Christ loved the church. When a Christian family obeys the Lord, it manifests certain aspects of the kingdom and carries a glorious testimony to the King. Again, great damage is done to the testimony if a believing family disobeys God in the way that it behaves. Husbands/fathers will carry the responsibility for this.

So the church and Christian families minister to the Lord by acting according to God's word and manifesting the witness of God's kingly authority.

The Cherubim did God's bidding

Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, *because* there the spirit went. Ezek 1:20

He rode upon a cherub, and flew. Ps 18:10

A prime responsibility of the believer is to walk in the Spirit of Christ. As the believer puts on the new nature, obeys God's word, lives by faith and is renewed in the spirit of his mind,

he walks in the Spirit. As such he can bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is the physical expression of the character of Christ in human form.

A key part of walking in the Spirit is to understand what the will of the Lord is. Those who walk right will do what God wants and achieve his will. As we deny ourselves and put off the old man, we allow ourselves to be renewed mentally, to begin to think according to the mind of Christ. This is then the basis of doing the right things, obeying what the Spirit teaches us. It is impossible to walk in the Spirit if we are living in the flesh.

The Christian life is not a closeted affair, hiding away in a holy huddle; it is to be in the world and bearing witness to God by the strength of a righteous character. It is to be light in the world, reproofing evil and demonstrating truth. It is to be like salt, changing the taste of things we encounter by bringing the scent of God to a situation. It is to manifest the life of Christ. Even the death of the Christian is a means of bearing witness to God.

Righteousness is the way the believer walks, and this requires the power of the Spirit and being submitted to the truth. We do God's will and take God's witness with us when we walk in the Spirit. Our ministry unto the Lord must be energised by God (Phil 2:12-13) and this is by the activity of the Spirit.

The Cherubim are associated with the voice of God

From between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him. Num 7:8

I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which *are* on the ark of the Testimony. Exod 25:22

The word of God is Christ, and the revelation of Christ in written form is the Bible, the word of God. Today God speaks from scripture, and through believers who are submitted to scripture. The Gospel is the preaching of God's word to explain God's requirements of man and the need of obedience. As Christians preach this word they act as the voice of God to this generation.

To sinners this preaching regards the revelation of Christ as the crucified Saviour, the only Mediator and Redeemer. It is a call to obey the Gospel by believing and repenting (Acts 17:20; Mk 1:15). To believers the explanation of the Gospel as the whole counsel of God is didactic instruction to ensure spiritual growth and protection from error. The nurturing of believers is by continual exposure to doctrinal truth to change thinking – understanding God's word. We serve God by being utterly centred upon what God says. Ministry to the Lord always involves a focus on truth, because the truth is Christ.

The Cherubim guard access to God's purposes

He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. Gen 3:24

The only way to Eden was through an armed Cherub. This is symbolic for the protection of God's purposes on earth by his chosen delegates, those who are close to his throne. The way to life in God is through the church; no one else has the words of eternal life.

The way is also in the east. This is symbolic of entrance into eternal life and divine things through resurrection, where the sun rises. The entrance is always in the east (Ezek 40:6); always by resurrection, new birth. An east wind dried up the waters of the Red Sea and Israel passed through, figuratively being baptised in death to new life in the promised land. The door of the Tabernacle faced east; the laver and bronze altar were on the eastern side, as was the court gate. 'The glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east ... the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east.' (Ezek 43:2, 4).

The believer is a resurrected being, a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) and divine ministry is always by resurrection power. This is what Paul sought more than anything else (Phil 3:10) because it is the only way a believer can be effective. Anything less than resurrection life in Christ is useless. The key to gaining this power is through suffering; God's grace is made effective in our suffering (2 Cor 12:9). As we die to ourselves in weakness, God enables us in resurrection life through the Spirit. Thus the sign of a genuine minister, like Paul, is suffering and weakness, not the great power and razzmatazz we see in many modern church leaders.

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:9-10

Stewards of the mystery

The Cherubim are stewards; they minister in the true heavenly temple before God's throne. Priests were stewards; they ministered in the copy of the heavenly sanctuary, a symbol of heaven and of God's dwelling place on earth. The elect are stewards; the church is the true temple as it appears on Earth, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit, the body of Christ. Ministry unto the Lord will include serving the Lord's purposes as he directs; doing the works of God just as Jesus did.

All these minister to God in the sanctuary. However, the true servant of God is Christ alone (Isa 42:1). Only he perfectly does God's will. We find our place serving God as we are in Christ, serving by his Spirit. Ministry to the Lord is only accomplished as we live in the good of our union with Christ, as we put on the new man, as we walk in the Spirit and as we live in resurrection life. This leads us to examine the matter of the mystery of the Gospel – Christ in us.

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 1 Cor 4:1

Believers are stewards of the mystery; we serve God as we fulfil his purposes on Earth. What is this mystery? It is the fulness of the decrees of God to form a people united with Christ that will serve him.

The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Col 1:26-27

The mystery is that the church is the complete expression of Christ as Christ is the fulness of God. The church is the visible and material manifestation of God because it is in Christ. The mystery is that redeemed man represents God as his ambassador. Ministry unto the Lord is also serving his purposes on Earth, not some vague mystical and emotional reverie.

The Lord Jesus on Earth ministered to God as the perfect High Priest; but in doing this he also served God's purposes as God's final prophet. The church fulfils its calling to divine stewardship by trusting in the sufficiency of Christ and denying the flesh and all natural abilities. Paul explains a great deal about this in 2 Corinthians.

We have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, who also made us sufficient as

ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:4-6

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 2 Cor 3:18-4:2

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 2 Cor 4:7

Divine stewardship requires the sufficiency of Christ and nothing else. Only the power of God mediated through Christ to a resurrected people can enable a man to represent him. No natural gifts, no natural power, no natural qualifications are of any spiritual worth if there is no divine sufficiency. God may well use tamed natural abilities in a meek man, but these are not the basis of his ministry, only divine power can energise that. This is why all the body of Christ is able to minister to God, however weak they may be. The Spirit gives the power to minister to God in those who are truly in Christ and walking in the new man. The transformation of character involves the continual going into death to learn to deny our natural strength and to trust Christ instead. The earthen vessel must be broken for the light to shine out, just as the vessels of Gideon were crushed to reveal the torches that routed the enemy. The manifestation of Christ in one's life will always also be a manifestation of truth. Where there is no truth, there is no life.

Here are some ways in which we act as stewards of the mystery:

By preaching the Gospel in power:

Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ. 2 Cor 2:14-17

For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Cor 4:5-6

True Gospel preaching is diffusing the knowledge of God and bringing a fragrance of Christ and the light of God in Christ. It is not reciting a set formula of instructions or any other human method; it is representing Christ in power. This always achieves one of two ends: 1) it enlightens an elect person with the truth; 2) it hardens a reprobate person into resisting God; an aroma of death or life. We are not sufficient to do this, but God in us is. Anything less than this is not preaching the Gospel but peddling some perversion of it. Major perversions are the lies of Arminianism (man's free-will enables him to co-operate with God; anyone can choose God) or Amyraldism (God loves everyone and offers Christ for everyone, but still only saves the elect).

By building up the church:

You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart. ... who also made us sufficient as ministers of

the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2
Cor 3:2-3, 6

True pastoral ministry changes people for the better and produces a testimony that outsiders can see. It is the ministry of Christ mediated through his gifted men and applied by the Spirit.

True ministry requires suffering:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. ... Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor 4:7-12, 16-17.

The flesh needs to be completely tamed and this is painful. Only a broken man can find all his sufficiency in Christ. The greatest servants of God in history were all sufferers, whether one looks at famous men like John Calvin, Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, or less well-known figures like Ezekiel Hopkins and Alexander Peden. The best ministry arises from suffering as the man learns to deny himself and trust in the sufficiency of Christ through affliction.

Conclusion

Much more could be said and a whole book written on the duties of priests in the Tabernacle alone, but we have covered sufficient ground to make our point. Ministry unto the Lord is much more down to earth than people realise; it comprises the duties and responsibilities of the believer explained in many places. There are no surprises. It encompasses walking in holiness, being a true worshipper, expressing true praise, constantly giving thanks, praying, giving, speaking for God, teaching God's law, obeying God's word, preaching the Gospel, bearing a true testimony in our daily life, and especially focusing upon the cross of Christ, always centring in him.

We must beware the modern mystical notions about worship and ministering to God; these are old pagan ideas revamped to deceive a modern audience. God is not served by mystical delusions and pagan worship based upon the senses, but only by those who obey his word in practical ways. Let us seek to serve God with all our heart and being, according to his own instructions and not our sensual feelings.

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