

The Olivet Discourse Part 2a - Christendom: the Household Servant

by C.H. Mackintosh

The sermon emphasizes the divine source and nature of ministry, distinguishing it from human assumption and clericalism, and warning against the judgment of those who usurp authority.

Scripture: Matthew 24:45, Matthew 25:19, Matthew 25:45, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Ephesians 4:7

Topics: "True Ministry", "Church Leadership"

Description

C.H. Mackintosh preaches on the importance of true ministry in the Church of God, emphasizing that all ministry is divine in its source, nature, and principles, appointed by God alone. He contrasts genuine ministry, which aims to edify and bless the Church, with false clericalism that leads to corruption and self-indulgence. Mackintosh warns against human assumptions in ministry and highlights the necessity of gifts bestowed by Jesus Christ for true service. He stresses the impending judgment on those who misuse their positions in the Church, urging believers to discern between true ministry and clericalism.

Transcript

Matthew 24:45-51.

In our Lord's profound discourse on the mount of Olives, He deals with the subject of the Christian profession in three distinct parables: the household servant (Matthew 24:45-51); the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13); and the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). In each and all we have two things: the genuine and the spurious; the true and the false; the bright and the dark; that which is of Christ, and that which is of Satan; that which belongs to Heaven, and that which emanates from hell.

We shall glance at the three parables which embody, in their brief compass, a vast mine of most solemn and practical instruction.

Turn to Matthew 24:45-47. "Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods".

Here, then, we have at once the source and object of all ministry in the house of God. "Whom his lord hath made ruler" is the source. "To give them meat in due season" is the object.

These things are of the highest possible moment, and they are worthy of the reader's most profound thought. All ministry in the house of God, whether in Old or New Testament times, is of divine appointment. There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in appointing to the ministry. Neither is there such a thing as a self-constituted ministry. None but God can make or appoint a minister of any sort or description. ...

Ministry was, is, and ever shall be, divine - in its source, in its nature, and in its every feature and principle. "There are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of services, and the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God who operates all things in all" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). "God has set the members, each one of them in the body, according as it has pleased Him" (verse 18). "God has set certain in the assembly: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; then miraculous powers; then gifts of healings; helps; governments; kinds of tongues" (verse 28). "But to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He says, Having ascended up on high, He has led captivity captive, and has given gifts to men. ... And He has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7-13).

Here lies the grand source of all ministry in the Church of God, from first to last - from the foundation laid in grace, to the topstone, in glory. It is divine and heavenly, not human or earthly. It is not of man or by man, but of Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, and in the power of the Holy Ghost (see Galatians 1).

There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in any one branch of ministry in the Church. If it be a question of gift, it is emphatically stated to be "the gift of Christ". If it be a question of assigned position, we are, with equal clearness and emphasis, told that "God has set the members". If it be a question of local charge, whether elder or deacon, it was entirely of divine appointment, by apostolic hands or apostolic delegates.

All this is so clear, so distinct, so palpable, on the very surface of Scripture, that it is only necessary to say, "How readest thou"!

And the more we penetrate beneath the surface - the more we are conducted by the Eternal Spirit into the profound and precious depths of inspiration - the more thoroughly convinced we shall be that ministry, in its every department and every branch, is divine in its source, nature, and principles. The truth of this shines out in full-orbed brightness, in the Epistles; but we have the germ of it in the words of our Lord in Matthew 25:45, "Whom his lord hath made ruler over his household". The household belongs to the Lord, and He alone can appoint the servants, and this He does according to His own sovereign will.

Equally plain is the object of ministry, as stated in this parable, and elaborated in the Epistles. "To give them meat in due season". "For the edifying of the body of Christ" - "that the church may receive edifying". It is this that lies near the loving heart of Jesus. He would have His household perfected - His Church edified - His body nourished and cherished. For this end, He bestows gifts, and maintains them in the Church, and will maintain them until they shall be no longer needed.

But alas! there is a dark side of the picture. For this we must be prepared since we have the picture of Christendom before us. If there is a "faithful, wise, and blessed servant", there is also "an evil servant" who

"says in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming". Mark this. It is in the heart of the wicked servant that the thought originates as to the delay of the coming.

And what is the result? "He shall begin to smite his fellows servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken". How awfully this has been exemplified in the history of Christendom, we need not say. Instead of true ministry flowing from the risen and glorified Head in the heavens, and promoting the edification of the body, the blessing of souls, and the prosperity of the household, we have a false clerical authority, arbitrary rule, a lording it over God's heritage, a grasping after this world's wealth and power, fleshly ease, self-indulgence, and personal aggrandizement, priestly domination in its nameless and numberless forms and practical consequences.

The reader will do well to apply his heart to understand these things. He will need to seize, with clearness and power, the distinction between clericalism and ministry. The one is a thoroughly human assumption; the other, a purely divine institution. The former has its source in man's evil heart; the latter has its source in a risen and exalted Savior, who, being raised from the dead, received gifts for men, and sheds them forth upon His Church, according to His own will. That is a positive scourge and curse; this, a divine blessing to men. ...

All this is most solemn, and it should exert a mighty influence upon our souls. There is a day coming when the Lord Christ will deal, in summary justice, with that which man has dared to set up in His house. We speak not of individuals - though surely it is a most serious and terrible thing for any one to put his hand unto, or have aught to do with, that on which such awful judgment is about to be executed - but we speak of a positive system - a great principle which runs, in a deep and dark current, through the length and breadth of the professing Church - we speak of clericalism and priestcraft, in all its forms and in all its ramifications.*

Against this dreadful thing we solemnly warn our readers. No human language can possibly depict the evil of it, nor can human language adequately set forth the deep blessedness of all true ministry in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus not only bestows ministerial gifts, but, in His marvelous grace, He will abundantly reward the faithful and diligent exercise of those gifts. But as to that which man has set up, we read its destiny in those burning words, "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth".

May the gracious Lord deliver His servants and His people from all participation in this great wickedness which is perpetrated in the very bosom of that which calls itself the church of God. And, on the other hand, may He lead them to understand, to appreciate, and to exercise that true, precious, divine ministry which emanates from Himself, and is designed, in His infinite love, for the true blessing and growth of that Church which is so dear to His heart. We are in great danger, while seeking (as we surely should) to keep clear of the evil of clericalism - of rushing into the opposite extreme of despising ministry.

* Editor's note: The articles in Showers of Blessing number 45 - January/February 2000 - (1) review the meanings and Biblical uses of the Greek words *kleros* and *laos*, (2) show that the concept of a clerical class as distinct from the laity is unscriptural, (3) trace how this distinction gradually developed in the post-apostolic era, and (4) demonstrate evidence of bias in the King James translation of the Bible toward persons being humanly ordained and having "office", whether it be of a bishop, a deacon, or even the priesthood.

This must be carefully guarded against. We have ever to bear in mind that ministry in the Church is of God. Its source is divine. Its nature is heavenly and spiritual. Its object is to call out and build up the Church of God. Our Lord Christ imparts the varied gifts, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He holds the great reservoir of spiritual gifts. He has never given it up, and He never will. Despite all that Satan has wrought in the professing Church; despite all the actings of "that evil servant"; despite all man's daring assumption of authority which in no wise belongs to him; despite all these things, our risen and glorified Lord "holds the seven stars". He possesses all ministerial gifts, power, and authority, and He alone can make any one a minister. Unless He impart a gift there can be no true ministry. There may be hollow assumption - guilty usurpation - empty affectation - worthless talking; but not one atom of true, loving, divine ministry can there be unless where our sovereign Lord is pleased to bestow the gift. And even where He does bestow the gift that gift must be "stirred up", and diligently cultivated, else "the profiting" will not "appear unto all". The gift must be exercised in the power of the Holy Ghost, else it will not promote the divinely appointed end.

But we are rather anticipating what is yet to come before us in the parable of the talents, so we shall close here by simply reminding the reader that the weighty subject on which we have been dwelling has direct reference to the coming of our Lord, inasmuch as all true ministry is carried on in view of that great and glorious event. And not only so, but the counterfeit, the corrupt, the evil thing will be judicially dealt with when the Lord Christ shall appear in His glory.

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