

Christian Service From God's Standpoint

by T. Austin-Sparks

The work of the Lord is contributing to the fullness of Christ and ministering to that fullness, and the most important thing in serving the Lord is the servant themselves.

Scripture: 2 Kings 17:9-23, Matthew 5:16, John 15:5, Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:12, Philippians 2:13, Colossians 1:17, 1 Timothy 6:11-12, 2 Timothy 3:17

Topics: "Christian Service", "The Fullness of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that Christian service from God's perspective is about contributing to the fullness of Christ, rather than merely performing specific roles or functions within the church. He argues that every believer, regardless of their visible role, is called to minister to Christ and His body, and that true service is rooted in the character and state of the servant rather than their qualifications. Sparks highlights that God desires servants who reflect Christ and possess a deep personal relationship with Him, as this is what truly qualifies them for service. He reminds us that the essence of ministry is not in public recognition but in the hidden life of faith and obedience to God. Ultimately, the focus should be on what we are contributing to the body of Christ and how we are reflecting His fullness in our lives.

Transcript

What is the work of the Lord? What is Christian service from God's standpoint? It is contributing to the fullness of Christ. It is in the measure of each several part (of His Body) ministering to that end, that all things shall be summed up in Christ and that He shall be the fullness of all things.

That great Divine goal has many ways and many means of attainment, and it is not a matter of whether you or I are serving the Lord in the same way as someone else. That is not the point at all. We standardize and departmentalize Christian work, and we think of the activities of ministers and missionaries and such like functions and call that the work of the Lord; we think of that when we speak of going into Christian service. But while I do not say that that is not the work of the Lord, it is a very narrow and a very artificial way of viewing things.

The work of the Lord is, and can be, no more than contributing to the fullness of Christ and ministering of that fullness to Him and from Him. How you do it is a matter of Divine appointment, but that is the work of the Lord. So it is not necessarily a matter of whether I am in what is called the ministry, a missionary or a Christian worker, in this particular category or that, or whether I am serving the Lord in the way in which certain others are serving Him. That is quite a secondary matter. We would all like to be doing what certain

people are doing, and doing it in the way they are doing it. You might aspire to be an apostle Paul, probably if you understood a little more you would not! But, you see, whether Paul is doing it along his Divinely appointed line, in his Divinely appointed way - or Peter, or John, or this one or that one - the object comes first, the way afterward.

The service of the Lord, whatever may be the means, the method, is ministering to the fullness of Christ and ministering of that fullness, and you may be called upon to do that anywhere. It can be done just as much out of public view as in public view. Many who have ministered to the Lord and by whom He has been wonderfully ministered are those of whom the world has heard and read nothing. This, you see, is a 'Body' matter, and a body is not all hands, not all major members and faculties. A body is comprised of numerous, almost countless, functions, many of them remote and very hidden, but they all minister in a related way to the whole purpose for which the body exists; and that is a true picture of the service of God.

So think again. While we would not put you back from aspiring to the fullest place of service, nor say that you are wrong in desiring to be a missionary, to go forth into the world in a full-time spiritual capacity, remember that even before the Lord puts you into that specific work, you are a minister all the same. For 'minister' is not a name, a title, a designation, but a function, and the function is contributing something to the fullness of Christ and ministering something of that fullness.

So it comes back to us as a question: What am I ministering of Christ; what am I contributing to that ultimate fullness? If it be by leading the unsaved to Him, I am adding to Christ, so to speak. That is all it means, but that is what it means. I am building up Christ. If I am encouraging the saints, I am ministering to Christ and of Christ. That is "My servant...in whom My soul delighteth." In whom does God delight as His servant? Those who minister to His Son, and that is the beginning and the end, however that may be done by Divine appointment.

"Behold, My servant..." God calls attention to the servant in whom His soul delighteth. The beginning of all service in relation to God is the servant himself. What makes a servant of God? We think of a servant of God being made by academic training, Bible teaching, by this or that form of equipment; and we think when we have all that, when we have been through the course and have in our minds all that can be imparted of that kind, we are the Lord's servants. But that is not the way the Lord looks at it at all.

In the first place, the Lord looks at the servant, and He is going to demand that He shall be able Himself to point to His servant and say, "Behold, My servant." I know that there is a right sense in which the instrument has to be out of view, but only in one sense; that is, that he in his own person, his own personal impression as a man, his own impact by nature, shall not be the registration made upon people; only in that sense he has to be out of view. There is another sense in which he has to be very much in view. If that were not true, all the autobiography in Paul's writings would be wrong in principle. Paul keeps himself, in a right sense, very much in view. He calls attention to himself very properly and very strongly and persistently. The Lord is going to require that He shall be able to say, "Behold, My servant", and the servant to whom He will call attention will be the servant who is the impression of Christ. Yes, Christ registered, Christ presenced, Christ apparent, in the servant. The beginning of all service, I repeat, is the servant himself. God is far more concerned with having His servants in a right state than He is with having them furnished with all kinds of academic qualifications and titles. It is the man, it is the woman, that God is concerned with.

If you turn to the letters of Timothy, you find there that beautiful designation of the servant of the Lord: "O man of God" (I Tim. 6:2). Paul's appeal to Timothy is in those terms. And then, speaking of the study and knowledge of the Scriptures, he uses the same phrase again: "...that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3:17). But note the order: he says, "that the man of God may be... furnished completely", not that there may be a complete furnishing to make a man of God; the man of God already exists. Now all his study with the Word is to make him who is the man of God an efficient workman. The man of God comes before all his study. He is that before he has a knowledge of the Scriptures.

You know that 'man of God' was the great designation given to some of the prophets of old. Elijah on one occasion, having been hidden by God at the brook Cherith, found the brook to dry up; and the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Arise, get thee to Zarepath... behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain thee" (II Kings 17:9). Elijah went, and you remember how he found the food situation. She was gathering two sticks to bake her last cake for her son and herself, and then to die. But the barrel of meal did not fail: the Lord was faithful to His word. But then, after that, it came to pass that the woman's son fell sick, and so sore was the sickness that there was no breath left in him. The woman made her very pathetic appeal to the prophet. He took the child up to his own chamber and called upon the Lord, and saw the child revive; and he presented him alive to the mother, who said, "Now I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

What were the credentials of his ministry? That he had the secret of life triumphant over death. He had the words of life and the word of life is not always the mere usage of Scripture. You can use the Scripture and it may have no effect at all, or you can use it and it may have a mighty effect. A great deal depends upon who uses the Scripture. It is the man of God who can use it in that way and be attested as the true servant of the Lord. It is the spiritual power of life that is in the man that makes him (to use Paul's words to Timothy) an approved servant of God.

"Behold, My servant." Do you grasp the point? It is with you and me that the Lord is concerned; it is with what we are; it is with our personal knowledge of Himself. It is that we may have within us the secrets of the Lord that it may be true of us as it was of the Lord Jesus and of others that the key to the situation spiritually is in our hands. We, as Elijah hidden away in secret, have been in touch with God. There is a background. God had said to Elijah, "Hide thyself"; and he was a long time hidden before the word of the Lord came, saying, "Go, show thyself..." Someone has remarked that for every servant of God there must be much more of the hidden life than of the public life. How true that is!

The Lord will take pains to ensure that the secret history, the spiritual history, of every true servant of His is looked after. With all the eagerness to get out to do the work, and may it not abate!, with all our enthusiasm to be active, all our desire and craving to be serving, let us remember the first thing is the servant, not the service. The first thing, the beginning of all service, is the instrument. We see that the servant comes firstly into the Lord's view, that He may have one to whom He may draw attention in a right way and say, 'Look at that servant of Mine and see My work. See My grace, see my power, see the traces of My hand. '

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