



The King's Highway

An Advocate of Scriptural Holiness

"And an highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness."

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SERVING TABLES AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

By Peter Wiseman, D.D.

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:3, 4).

The Christian Church in her infancy had very little organization. A mighty revival had broken upon her with the coming of the Holy Ghost. There was now more work to be done than the twelve could do; hence a new problem, a new situation had to be met, and it was met.

There had been a division of long standing between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. It appears, however, at this time there was a just reason for the complaint of the Grecians. But the solution of the problem caused a vital and necessary division in the interest of the life of the Church. It resulted in two services; one service was that of tables, the other the service of the Word. Both were necessary and both were sacred. This may be argued from the qualifications required for those who would serve tables, "Men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," (Acts 6:3).

The method of creating this office is simple and interesting. The twelve called the multitude together and suggested that they make the selection of the seven men of the Christian character stated, whom they (the twelve) would appoint. The saying pleased the whole multitude, and they did the choosing or selecting; and the apostles did the appointing. It is interesting and informing, especially in the light of modern church methods, to note the emphasis on Christian honesty and Holy Ghost fulness required for seven laymen of the Church to fill this office of looking after the "daily ministration."

The service of tables is placed in contrast with the service of prayer and the ministry of the Word; to make provision for the former would mean full time for the latter. This does not mean that the former is not important, but it does mean that the latter is more important, and the apostles had not time for both. The

qualifications of the seven men appointed would prove the sacredness of both.

The implication is challenging. It is this: the apostles could not do both and do justice to their calling. They could not serve tables and at the same time "give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." No man can do both, however small his circuit may appear to be; for to have more time for his work, "the ministry of the Word," means an enlarged work.

The qualifications required for the laymen who were to look after the service of tables should get the ear and heart of the church of this day: "Honest men full of the Holy Ghost." It is easy to understand how this spiritual qualification should be required of the ministry, but the early Church required it to the laity to serve tables. God help the church to take notice!

The idea gathered from the word "serve" is that of a servant, giving service as required or of necessity. "Daily ministration" means the giving daily out of the common fund to the needy widows of the community.

The provision for carrying out the work of the ministry, "the service of the Word," is marked by two spheres of ministerial activity; namely, the ministry of prayer and the ministry of the Word. These are indispensable for a successful ministry.

As to the first, the ministry of prayer, we are met by the teaching and practice of the Master Himself, and then the New Testament writers. What a challenge! How important is this ministry! Indeed, it is more important than anything else. In the life of the Master it appears to have been more important than preaching, eating, sleeping, or any other thing. Check up on this and see for yourself. Read Paul's Epistle with his prayer practice in mind and you will very likely end on your own knees. If it is true what the Rev. John Wesley says concerning prayer; namely, that "God works only in answer to prayer," then how necessary and important in the life of all ministers, yes, all Christians, is the practice and culture of prayer.

Concerning the second, the ministry of the Word, we are face to face with the necessity of a persistent and continuous study of the Word. How could one minister the Word without knowing the Word? We would suggest the following, keeping in mind the "need" of the study of the Word, rather than the "how" of it.

A study of the Word is necessary because it is God-given. "Holy men spake as from God, being borne along by the Holy Ghost." They spake from God and for God; indeed

God spoke through them by His Spirit. "Borne along" suggests the idea of a vessel with all her sails stretched and filled with wind being carried out beyond all limits, even out into the deep. In like manner, holy men of old were supernaturally carried out into the deeps of God. God said through them by His Spirit what He wanted to say. He wrote through them by His Spirit what He wanted them to write. Might we not say with equal emphasis that they under the direction of the Holy Spirit, omitted what God wanted them to omit. This may cause a destructive critic heart trouble but we believe it just the same.

A study of the Word is necessary because it is God's glorious and final revelation of Himself through His Son to mankind, revealing God's love, man's fall, his recovery through Jesus Christ, what it is to be a Christian, man's destination.

A study of the Word is necessary because it is the only system of divine truth, the only glorious and saving source of material for true gospel preaching. "Preach the Word," said Paul, the Incarnate Word and the written Word; both found in the Book, the Word of God. It is the only Book that can give life by impartation of spiritual food, "the milk" and "the meat." It is the only Book that can give a preacher life. "My words are spirit and they are life," said the Master. Sermons gathered from any other source independently of the Word of God are either dying or dead before they are delivered, and when delivered, they kill. Sermons fresh from the Word quicken and make alive.

Such a study of the Word, then makes possible the ministry of the Word in all the various ways in which it may be ministered, in the sermon, the preached word, and in the various ways in pastoral activity. In the preached word, the sermon material is arranged and interpreted by the aid of the Holy Spirit, with the emphasis not so much on the homiletical category as it is on the Scripturalness, spirituality, and the divine purpose of the message. One of the great secrets of apostolic preaching may be gathered from the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ called "whom He would, that they might be with Him, that He might send them forth to preach." Association resulting in impartation and as a result emanation! With Him in association to see, to hear, to realize and learn; thus impartation; then the going forth to preach by what they were, by what they might say, and by what they might do and suffer.

The prophet of old was God's mouthpiece. He would speak forth the message of God

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