

Live to Serve God

27 October, 2010

By Rev. Lonny R. Bower

Scripture Reference – 1 Peter 4:1-19

Unit Theme: Counsel for Christlike Living

Central Truth: Having a mind of Christ and a servant's heart are key elements of a committed Christian Life.

Focus: See life from Christ's perspective and live by His worldview.

Key Verse: 1 Peter 4:7 - *the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.*

Introduction:

What does it mean to live to serve God? When we started this study I briefly spoke about the perception of Christianity from both the “religious” and worldly view. Certainly we could garner many different answers to the posed question, but who is right? If I would have answered this question 10, 5 or even 2 years ago my answer would have varied vastly from what it is today. I say this because I must confess that as a preacher of the gospel I (as many preachers are) was guilty of preaching personal convictions and albeit unknowingly overemphasizing the behavior (one might say outward appearance). The fact is, the gospel of Jesus Christ is about the heart and we cannot see the heart as God does, nor can we change the heart – only God can. Therefore, we must determine to live to serve God, and if in fact we're going to do this we must figure out what it means. As I have already stated in this study, if the “religious” of today could go back to the first century church and live with the Church of the first born they would more than likely condemn our founding brothers and sisters for their behavior. So have we missed the mark? Have we become modern day Pharisees that are more concerned with and rely more on behavior to save us than we do the living Word of God? My personal plight in this matter actually started in February of 2007 when I heard P. Douglas Small proclaim “I am not a Christian” What? He's president and founder of Alive Ministries: Project Pray and just may be the most gripping, profound preacher and teacher I have ever heard! His words have seemed to echo through my mind and I have found myself face to face with my own doctrine even the more so as of late. I later told him that he didn't fool me, that I thought he was a pretty convincing Christian. Little did he or I know how that short message to a group of ministers in Guam USA would impact my life. I would like you to give up your perception of what you think it is to live to serve God (be a Christian) and ask God to help you see yourself as He sees you. Paul told the young minister Timothy (1 Timothy 4:16) that he should watch his life and doctrine closely and persevere in them, for in doing so he would be able to save himself and his hearers. Are we on course or have we facilitated a lifestyle that claims Christianity, but in the eternal reality it's as far from Christ likeness as can be imagined? Living to serve God (our life) is a matter of the heart (mind) and it must be changed in order to affect behavior.

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I. Have the Mind of Christ – 1 Peter 4:1-6

The mind of Christ was this; He faced the cross for the joy set before Him. Why? So that you and I could experience the joy of a personal relationship with the Father. The word tells us to put on the mind of Christ, not so that we would be filled with the Spirit, overcome with joy or even made to prosper monetarily. No, but so we would be through with sin. Anyone that has been around me for any length of time will know that I often speak of this, because I believe the word to be true and I believe that when we live to serve God we can live without sin, but it takes persecution! I'm not talking about name calling; I'm talking about persecution as the 1st century Christians understood it and as many Chinese Christians and Christians living in Muslim nations today know it. Let's fast forward to eternity future and see ourselves standing among the heroes of the faith; I'm talking of those mentioned in Hebrews 11:35-38, the Christians! I could not in good conscience stand there and say alongside them "I too am a Christian". Don't misunderstand me, God's grace has no limits, but really, think about what we have become. As so called Christians we have cheapened the title and de-capitalized His holy name! The heroes of the faith were no doubt, capital 'C' Christians. Comparatively, we on the other hand can hardly call ourselves such. Finally, the mind of Christ does not run after the things of the world. This does not mean that I will take myself out of the company of those who do run after the things of the world, though this is exactly what the church has preached and done for over a millennium and by the way we're paying for it now – instead of an awakening we're facing an exodus! There was a reason they called Jesus a glutton and drunkard (Mt 11:19), look at the company He kept. I'm not saying that we should become like them, but we certainly aren't winning them by staying within the walls of Christianity! We have to deliberately and prayerfully walk as Jesus walked and go and get them, all the while, being wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Note Taker: What is "strange" to unbelievers?

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II. Have a Servants Heart – 1 Peter 4:7-11

To live to serve God means that we will serve, after all, Jesus himself did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). We often get this backwards too; Christian ministry is often viewed by "what can they do for me?" attitude, "me" being the so called Christian.

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The word is true and I challenge you to put it to the test, serve because you love God and as you do He will give you a love for those you're serving. This love is what will scream "I'm a Christian" to the world around you and in essence what you are actually doing by serving and loving one another, is lifting up Christ for the world to see and the word says if He (Christ) be lifted up from the earth He will draw **all** men unto himself (Jn 12:32). Live to serve God by serving others!

➤ **Note Taker:** Why is having love for each other above all things?

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III. Commit Yourself to God – 1 Peter 4:12-19

Live to serve God by committing yourself to Him wholly and fully nothing held back! However, we cannot live to serve God when we're holding back x, y, and z. When a servant committed himself to his master he was completely indebted to his master's will. That is, the servant gave up his own will for the will of the master, this should sound familiar – The Lord's prayer ... "not my will but your will be done...." Lets actually be honest, after all God already knows, we simply don't want to give up our will, because we have convinced ourselves that our will is best. So we manipulate the gospel and our situations in order to fulfill our will all the while calling ourselves – you guessed it, Christian. In point one we talked about persecution, now again Peter address the fiery trail, sufferings and reproach all of which few today can identify with. But let us not totally miss the point if we're going to suffer Peter says, it's best that you suffer for righteousness sake and Jesus said that when we do, ours is the kingdom of God (Mt 5:10). Finally, we must commit ourselves to God because judgment will start with us and if we're barely saved, what will come of those who don't commit to God?

➤ **Note Taker:** What is persecution and have you experienced it for living right?

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Conclusion:

To answer our opening question – what does it mean to live to serve God? According to the word of God it means that those who do will be a different people, a people with hope, a people driven by love for one another. They deviate from the “norms” of religion and of the world; those who live to serve God do so with all their heart mind and strength. Interesting that this is exactly what the Lord commanded His people in Deuteronomy 6:5, known as the Sh’ma it tells us how we are to live to serve God – by loving Him with everything. As I live to serve God and love Him with everything (all my heart) I find that He brings about a change in me – this testimony is not mine alone, but is shared by many who find themselves on this narrow road. As a preacher what I most not do is expect the change in me to be the necessity (rule) for everyone else on this road. Instead I must simply be faithful to preach His word and leave the business of change up to Him. In turn, this will draw people into the kingdom, not drive them away with rules that bring condemnation. I can relate to Paul who said “what a wretched man I am” I need Jesus as much as the next sinner – maybe more! What an honor it would be to live in such a way that the world recognizes the difference between “the religious” and us and accuses us of being “Christian.” The truth is, the world really don’t know what Christianity is, because we who claim such have missed the mark. Let’s determine now to get back on track and live to serve God.

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Except where I have paraphrased all scripture is taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

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