

Living as the People of God

There Is No Divide Between the Secular and the Spiritual

Sermon Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life 13 July 2019

Revelation 1:6

Ephesians 6:6-8 (quoted)

Normal human life has two clear segments: first being secular or worldly, and the other spiritual. Those of you who agree with this statement may kindly put up your hands. From a Christian perspective, this view cannot be upheld. We have but one mode of life, which is living as the people of God, the flock of Christ. Therefore, I stand to correct the initial statement. Had we not been arrested by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the blood He shed for us on the cross, by His never-to-be-repeated sacrifice to end all sacrifices, to redeem us, we would have continued as servants of sin and slaves to our body and fleshly desires. Having thus been redeemed, we need to conduct ourselves, in our lives, worthy of His grace, as His people.

The question before us today, the introspection we need to do, is to determine whether we are obedient to Jesus and living as the people of God. Critics of Christianity claim that we live a kind of double life, as though the Christian who behaves one way in church on a Sunday were an entirely different person for the rest of the week: what happens from Monday to Saturday, they say, has no relationship to what took place on Sunday. Sadly enough, most people, including some Christians, believe that our day-to-day life and our spirituality cannot mix. We will argue a case that this assertion is not true, and that we can very well reconcile the two, assumed segments into one, and live as the flock of Christ.

This divide, as full-time and part-time Christianity, probably arose much earlier in history with the concept of "full-time Christian service," as though those who are not clergy or evangelists by vocation are only part-time in the service of Christ. Perhaps it was true to some extent in those days, centuries ago; however, it is definitely not according to the teachings of Christ. But we find this concept very convenient, especially in view of the much-talked-about globalisation, the fast-changing marketplaces, the work environment, and the nuances of this world. What we do not consider is the fact that pastors, bishops and ministers who have chosen "full-time" Christian service as their vocation are also required to interact intensively with the everyday world. They go to banks, they travel, they buy things at the superstores, they deal with various commercial organisations, just as any layperson would. Can we say, or can they afford, to shed their spiritual orientation while doing all that? The answer is that they are required to hold to Christian values, irrespective of where they are and what they do. By the same token, the

laity also need to adhere strictly to the values taught by Christ, irrespective of what we do or where we may be.

When Jesus came to earth, He came as a carpenter, a man given to work with His hands and to provide an honest service to His fellow men. He did not come as a priest, although He was both a King and a Priest (Revelation 1:6). When it came time to recruit those through whom the church would be founded, He chose twelve men from the marketplace: fishermen, a tax collector, and so on. Interestingly enough, none of His disciples were priests in the Jewish temple, a natural place to recruit from if one were going to start a religious movement. Was it an accident that Jesus called men and women from ordinary life to play such a vital role in His mission? Obviously not.

When God created the earth, He demonstrated something right up front to human beings. He was setting the stage for a day-to-day life. As the Master Creator, He was an artist, designer, strategic planner, organiser, project developer, zoologist, biologist, chemist, linguist, programmer, materials specialist, engineer, and even a waste-management technician. His work did not end when He created man, but was only the beginning of His continued care for mankind. In doing all that, and thereafter, God did not cease to be God, even for a nanosecond. Whether we call our lives "spiritual" or "secular," our lives reflect the activity of God. Jesus is honoured when we live with the goal of reflecting Him through our life. So why, and how, should Christians draw a line of separation between faith and day-to-day living?

Having said that, let me caution you that our task is not to renounce our secular life and put on a spiritual mantle. Let me explain: as Christians we hold a different attitude towards misfortune, failure, sickness, slander, material benefit, riches, poverty and honour. We have a different understanding of human existence, as we see these through the prism of the gospel of Christ. Our first task is to develop and cultivate an inner life. This is possible when we sit with our Bibles, when we intently absorb the inner meaning of the passages and decide to internalise the teachings of Jesus, making them part of our nature. When we turn our attention to the inner man, to the needs of our soul, then God teaches us and shows us how to live in the secular world around us, without sacrificing our spirituality. We must therefore put all our energies into developing a spiritual person within us.

Put in other words, the remedy is not for laypersons to be trained to do Christian ministry; they have their own "ministry" to accomplish, and this is not necessarily the same, nor does it require the same skills. An architect, accountant, doctor, business executive, software programmer or designer who undertakes to do his job to the glory of God, who works with integrity, diligence, fairness and excellence, who treats his wife with the love Christ has for the church, who raises his children in godly wisdom and instruction, who urges non-Christians to heed the gospel

message — in short, who acts as a responsible Christian in whatever arena God has placed him — this man will receive eternal praise from God. That is what really matters in the kingdom of Jesus. This applies to women too, without any dilution. In short, God's interest is not simply that we do holy activities, but that we become holy people.

The gospel passage for today calls our attention to the fact that there exist several doors before us, from which we may choose. Most of the doors open to us can lead to problems; not every door open before us is of the Lord. This is why it is so important that we know the word of God, for it is the will of God for our lives. Jesus is the true door through which we can enter into the abundant life that He has for all of us. It seems to be all about knowing the false shepherds and the true Shepherd apart. The world is full of the former, especially in our country, and Christians are forewarned about them.

We must understand that God takes us through the process of life and allows us to develop specific skills and talents for His purposes. The world is where many of us have the greatest opportunity to display these gifts. God gives us talents to achieve what He wants us to achieve. However, not all of us become chief executives, or become highly successful from a worldly perspective. Some of us have been called to use our talents to serve others, for the benefit of the kingdom of God. The world is a training ground for most of us: it is the place where we deal with the everyday challenges of life, but it is also where God wants to reveal His glory, "that the world might know that he is God."

We, therefore, should live our lives "as unto the Lord." As Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

"Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." — **Ephesians 6:6-8**

According to Paul, all of us are in the full-time service of the Lord, for we are all to be working as unto Christ. All that we do should be for the Lord Jesus Christ; it should be to His glory. We should step back for a moment and remind ourselves that each of us is called to a personal relationship with God the Son, Jesus Christ, first and foremost. From this position all else follows. The fruit of our relationship with Christ moves us to the level of our calling in life. That work, whether serving on the mission field or delivering food ordered online, is a holy calling of God. The lowest task, however humble, becomes a love-song of praise to the Lord Jesus when we do it as unto the Lord.

We must realise that in every single breath we breathe we can know the presence of Jesus in our lives, if our primary focus is on Him. God

values our lives even when what we materially achieve here has no eternal value. It is a fine balancing act, an act of dovetailing our secular compulsions with our responsibility, submission, reverence and obedience to our Lord. Just think of it: can anything be done unless we have His blessing? We have only one single choice: to live to His glory. We cannot divide our lives into spiritual and secular segments.

Let us pray: Ever-gracious God, how amazing is Your grace, that You choose us as Your people and saved us through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Enable us to be ever conscious of Your calling to be an inclusive community, nurtured by Your love. Guide us, through Your tender mercies, to be Your people and to radiate Your love and mercy to the people around us, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as the good shepherd with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.