

Christian Servanthood 2

Week Eight - 2 Keys to an Enduring Ministry

Introduction

As we conclude our time together, we need to take a close look at a couple of personal spiritual issues that will likely come up over and over in your ministry . . .

Ministering under law vs. Ministering under grace

Introduction

Before we get into this subject in depth, we need to review terms.

“Under law” means that I do something for God in my own power.

“Under grace” means that God does something for me.

The Bible draws this contrast in several areas:

Justification: With regard to seeking God's acceptance (justification), to do this “under law” means that we try to earn his acceptance by our good works. When we do this “under grace,” it means that we simply receive God's gift of acceptance that he provides through Christ's perfect and finished work.

Sanctification: With regard to spiritual growth and character change (sanctification), to do this “under law” means that we focus on the demands of God's moral law and exert self-effort (vows, resolutions, etc.) to change ourselves. When we do this “under grace,” it means that we trust God to gradually change us as we focus on our position in Christ and on relating to him and receiving his life-changing power through his Word, prayer and fellowship.

We also need to understand the difference between ministering under law and ministering under grace.

We have a fantastic ethos in Xenos that ministry (serving others, giving ourselves away to other for Christ's sake) is central, and that everyone (including the newest Christian) can and should build a lifestyle of ministry. You may not realize how rare this is, and how integral it is to being a home group movement . . .

But Satan will not let this go unopposed. Since he hasn't prevented this ethos from taking root in our fellowship, he will try to corrupt it by luring you into ministering under law. We saw him largely succeed in this during the early 1980's, and we're determined not to let him succeed in the present situation.

What all of us need is to be able to know when we (and our fellow-workers) are ministering under law, and we need to know how to get back to ministering under grace.

Contrasts between ministering under law & ministering under grace

When you minister under law, your *primary focus is on what you must do* in ministry (“I must build the church”). It becomes so central in your focus that you even begin to take on God’s role in ministry (see more on this later) and even take responsibility for others’ response to God. This is what we sometimes call “taking possession of the ministry.”

Symptoms:

You may feel chronically overwhelmed, anxious, and crushed because you are trying to carry a burden God never intended you to bear.

You may be inordinately focused on what other workers are doing, rather than being concerned for their personal walks, compassionate about special life situations, etc.

You may believe other workers should do more and better, because after all you can do more in the same situation.

When you minister under grace, your *primary focus is on God’s power and promises to play his role* (“You will build your church.”). You still have an important role, and you take that role seriously. You realize that your role of planting and watering is significant—but that only God can cause the growth (1 Corinthians 3:4-6).

2. When you minister under law, you *base your self-worth on your ministry results* (how others respond to your efforts to persuade them to come to/follow Christ). This is completely precarious, because you simply cannot control (even God won’t control) other people’s choices.

Symptoms:

You may get so devastated by ministry setbacks that you want to quit ministering.

During ministry setbacks (slow or negative group growth), you may panic and resort to inappropriate pressure on people. I have done this with disciples in the past—and had to admit to myself that I was preying off of them rather than ministering to them! I needed them to follow Christ so I could feel OK about myself.

You may be defensive to instruction and constructive criticism about your ministry—you can’t afford to admit that you made mistakes because that would mean that you are a failure.

You may worry a lot about what you think your home group overseer thinks of you.

When you minister under grace, your *self-worth is based on your identity/position in Christ*. You are still concerned about how people respond. If you aren’t emotionally affected by how people respond to Christ, you don’t really love them (see 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10; 2 Corinthians 11:28,29). But not on your ministry results. You take your security from the fact that you are God’s child, forgiven, gifted and called to a role in his church, etc. This focus helps us to be patient and genuinely serving with others—and to be open to constructive criticism.

3. When you minister under law, you have a *horizontal focus*. You tend to compare yourself to other workers in terms of gifting, ministry fruit, roles in the church, etc. You are a success only if you are better than other people in these areas. You can only be significant if you teach, are a leader, etc.

Symptoms:

This perspective usually starts with us seeing ourselves superior to others in some area and once Satan sees our horizontal focus, he now highlights where we are inferior (see Galatians 5:26; 6:3-5). This fleshly competitive linkage will breed division within the church—something Satan is always promoting.

This perspective may lead to provincialism--caring only about success in your particular ministry, rather than also caring about and working for success in other ministry spheres in your home group and in the church as a whole.

You may become inordinately critical of others' ministry skills or results.

With honesty, consider these questions:

Do you have the habit of looking around at others with callings close to yours?

Do you feel called into question by their achievements?

Do you feel that their success is more than they deserve and yours somehow less?

Are you disappointed, even angry, at the gap between your desires and your accomplishments?

When you minister under grace, you have a *vertical focus*. You realize that all such comparisons with other workers are foolish, because there are so many variables in terms of gifting, ministry experience, etc. Instead, you focus on the fact that God has given you the role he knows is best for you and his church at the present time.

When Jesus calls, he calls us one by one. Comparisons are idle, speculations about others a waste of time, and envy as silly as it is evil. We are each called individually, accountable to God alone, to please him alone, and eventually to be approved by him alone. If ever we are tempted to look around, compare notes, and use the progress of others to judge the success of our own calling, we will hear what Peter heard: "What is that to you? Follow me!" (Os Guinness, *The Call*, pp. 132,133)

He's not asking you to be like someone else—he just wants you to serve him in the capacity and situation in which he has placed you. This frees you to be thankful for the diversity of roles and gifts in the Body of Christ, and for the opportunity to work with and benefit from others' ministry.

Consider the mighty ways in which God used a dead stick of wood. "God so used a stick of wood" can be a banner cry for each of us. Though we are limited and weak in talent, physical

energy and psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood. But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which I *me* must become the *me* of God. Then, I can become useful in God's hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God. There are no little people and no big people in the true spiritual sense, but only consecrated and unconsecrated people. The problem for each of us is applying this truth to ourselves: Is Francis Schaeffer the Francis Schaeffer of God? (Francis Schaeffer, *No Little People*, p. 17)

4. When you minister under law, you often have a *perfectionistic standard*. You cannot feel satisfied unless your ministry attempts have been flawless.

Symptoms:

You may focus on all of the flaws in your outreach, teaching, discipleship, etc. Obviously, this leads either to self-deception or (more likely) to demoralization over time.

This focus will usually make you reluctant to try new things in ministry—because you have virtually no chance of doing something new perfectly!

You may become unduly rigorous with others. Rather than seeing and encouraging gradual progress, you may only notice where they are still lacking.

You may be a "black and white" thinker--difficult to see matters that are "gray" or to acquiesce to something less than ideal.

Extra-biblical imperatives easily creep in – we take strong “moral” stands on issues God doesn't! Dating standards that go beyond the Bible, the “right” number of meetings per week if you are godly, the godly time to fellowship after the teaching.

When you minister under grace, you focus more on your availability to God, trusting his ability to multiply your meager offerings (FEEDING OF THE 5000; Ephesians 3:20). You reject all perfectionism because as a fallen person in a fallen world, no ministry or ministry attempt will ever be perfect. You focus rather on the fact that God is pleased if you want to serve and are willing to get out there and do the best you can. You focus on the general direction of your life and ministry. You view new ministry opportunities as just that—opportunities to trust God in new ways and to experience his grace and empowering.

5. When you minister under law, there will be relatively *less dependence on prayer* related to your ministry attempts. Because we think we can and must do the work by ourselves, prayer is more of an after-thought.

Symptoms:

You may find that you seldom pray for the people you are serving or reaching out to.

When correcting or challenging someone who does not agree with you, you may have a difficult time walking away without "winning" (which requires prayerfully trusting that God will work).

When you minister under grace you will have a greater and *greater emphasis on prayer* as central to your ministry: affirming God's faithfulness and adequacy, intercessory prayer for people to be convicted, illuminated, etc.--and prayer for guidance on how you can "keep in step" with what the Spirit is doing in others' lives. You become more and more convinced of your own inadequacy to change people's lives—but more and more confident that God is adequate and will make you adequate to play your part (2 Corinthians 2:14; 3:5,6)

6. When you minister under law, you become *motivated mainly by duty and obligation* ("I have to do all of this").

Symptoms:

This usually manifests itself in self-pity, complaining (to others or to yourself), and doing the least that you can to get by.

You may deal with others mainly by appealing to imperatives, duty, etc.--rather than by persuading through reasons, casting vision, praise and encouragement, etc.

When you minister under grace, you are *motivated by the privilege of getting to work with God*. You realize that you have a responsibility to play your role and remain at your post (see 1 Corinthians 9:16,17). There are times that only this conviction has kept me from caving in or running away. But overall, it is the excitement of seeing how he will be at work ("I get to be a part of what God is doing"). See Ephesians 3:7-9 on this.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? If you can't relate, or feel that you never struggle with ministering under law, it is either because you are a very new Christian, or because you are not seriously engaged in ministry! Christian workers don't magically learn to minister under grace and then never struggle again with ministering under law. Rather, it is a sign of health that you struggle with this issue! Maturity is more a matter of catching yourself more quickly when you are ministering under law and returning more quickly to ministering under grace.

But you have to know how to get back to ministering under grace—or you will get demoralized and quit ministry. Or you blame the church/other leaders/your schedule/God for overwhelming your life. In this state of mind, the world becomes more attractive because "there is no pressure, lots of time to do what I want, etc." For me, the problem is almost always my under law perspective, so the solution is getting back to ministering under grace while I remain at my post.

How can we get back to ministering under grace? There is no magic formula, but there are basic biblical principles that have saved my life in this area over and over again . . .

Getting back to ministering under grace

Ask God to give you fresh and deeper illumination of his grace in ministry. Ultimately, this is a spiritual issue, so only the Holy Spirit's enlightenment will do the job. This is why Paul not only teaches the Ephesian Christians about grace (Ephesians 1:3-14), but then prays for them that God will open the eyes of their hearts to personally grasp the significance of his grace in their

lives (Ephesians 1:15-18). With this as our most important step, I look for God's answer in three places . . .

1. Share your struggle and confusion with other relatively mature Christian workers who know you well. Usually, the longer you keep this struggle to yourself, the more confused you get. But when you bring this out into the light with colleagues, God often corrects your misconceptions and personally communicates his grace to you through them. It also helps to realize that you're not the only one who wrestles with this.

2. Prayerfully meditate on biblical passages that emphasize God's grace and faithfulness in ministry.

For example: Matthew 11:28-30; 16:18; 28:18,20; John. 15:4,5; Acts 20:32 & 2 Timothy 2:1; 1 Corinthians 3:4-6; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 3:5,6; 12:9,10; Ephesians 2:10; 3:7-9; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:6,28,29; Hebrews 13:21; Psalm 46:1,10,11; 127:1,2.

3. Prayerfully read and reflect on quality Christian books that emphasize ministering under grace. I especially like Watchman Nee's *Sit, Walk, Stand*, Howard Taylor's *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, and Bill Lawrence's *Effective Pastoring*.

Zeal - What is it?

Biblical zeal is earnest, enthusiastic commitment to God and his purpose. J. I. Packer defines it as being "positively and passionately devoted to his person, his cause, and his honor."

Explain the connection between "jealousy" and "zeal" in the Old Testament (same root word).

God is jealous for the glory that belongs to him (Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy. 32:16). Like a husband who is righteously jealous for his wife's sexual love to be exclusively kept for him, so God is righteously jealous for our devotion to be kept exclusively for him.

God's people are to be jealous/zealous for the same thing, that God receives that kind of devotion from them, and that he receive it from others also. Jesus drove the money-changers from the Temple because "zeal for your house has consumed me" (John 2:17).

J. C. RYLE: "Zeal . . . is a burning desire to please God, to do his will, and to advance his glory in the world . . . It is a desire which no man feels by nature--which the Spirit puts in the heart of every believer when he is converted--but which some believers feel so strongly that they alone deserve to be called 'zealous' men . . . He burns for one thing; and that is to please God and to advance God's glory . . . He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if he is consumed in the very burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him. Such a man will always find a sphere for his work . . ."

Zeal is essential for Christian workers

You will be effective in ministry if you are zealous. But no amount of gifting, intelligence, personality, force of will, etc. can make up for the lack of it.

SPURGEON: "In many instances ministerial success is traceable almost entirely to intense zeal, a consuming passion for souls, and an eager enthusiasm in the things of God, and we believe that in every case, other things being equal, men prosper in the divine service in proportion as their hearts are blazing in holy love."

Though zeal will be expressed differently according to our own personalities, every Christian is to be zealous (Romans 12:11). Passive temperaments need to get zeal (the reason why this subject is important to me). Aggressive temperaments need to have the right object for it and be sanctified in their expression of it. Every Christian needs to learn how to maintain it.

Two complementary insights

1. The Bible teaches that it is God and God alone that supplies spiritual zeal. It also teaches that we have a role in cultivating and maintaining that zeal. Both of these insights are contained in Paul's exhortation to Timothy in Philippians 2:12,13.

" Philippians 2:12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. " This is the indicative that emphasizes that God's Spirit supplies the resources for zeal.

" . . . kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you . . . " This is the imperative that makes it clear that unless we tend the fire God's Spirit puts in us, it will die down. "Fan back into full flame" is our role. Paul assumed Timothy knew how to do this, and we need to know, too.

2. Human agency is required to maintain the zeal. Romans 12:11 also affirms our part in maintaining zeal: "Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord." Maintaining zeal may be compared to tending a fire. The energy is there in the logs, the fire is supplied by the match--but human agency is required. The fire will tend to die down, but only by neglect will it die out. You have to learn how to keep an eye on the fire, stoke it, feed it, etc. This is one of the most important skills to develop in the Christian life.

Checklist for cultivating zeal

1. *Do you expose yourself regularly to zealous people?* The zeal of others can "stir you up" if you are spiritually responsive (2 Cor. 9:2). It's like one burning match touching off another.

The same is true of Christian workers even when they are not teaching. This is one of the great benefits of vital fellowship: you can rekindle zeal in each other.

Another way to catch others' zeal is to read biographies of Christian workers (DAWS; BURNING HEART; WHITEFIELD).

Avoid regular, close contact with chronically unzealous Christians. They not only don't get stirred up by your zeal; they can drain you of it, especially if you are a young believer or expecting them to be vital.

SPURGEON: "We shall often find ourselves in danger of deteriorating our zeal by the cold Christian people with whom we come in contact. What terrible wet blankets some (Christians) are! . . . If these frost-bitten men should happen to be the officers of the church, from whom you naturally expect the warmest sympathy, the result is chilling to the last degree, and all the more if you are young and inexperienced . . . "

But this is not enough. While we should definitely take advantage of this "jump start" that God provides, every worker has to learn how to cultivate it when no one else has it so he can stir them up. This is an essential ability for spiritual leaders.

2. *Do you pray for zeal regularly?* SPURGEON: "Fan (the flame of zeal) with much supplication . . . There is . . . an absolute necessity of prayer . . . To fan your (zeal) to a vehement flame you should seek the spirit of continual prayer."

Oswald Sanders cites a couple of scholars' interpretations of Luke 11:9-13 that bears on this. The lack of the definite article before Holy Spirit suggests that Jesus is referring not to the Person of the Holy Spirit, but to his operations or resources. If you ask God for zeal to serve him, he will give it to you through the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

In my own life, there is a definite correlation between spending time alone with God in prayer and the zeal that I have. I normally do not experience it while I am praying, but afterward, during the course of the day. Those of you who are struggling to maintain your zeal--how regularly do you pray that God will fill your heart with zeal for him and his work? This is an obvious application of James 4:2--many of us get depleted in zeal simply because we don't regularly ask for it!!

3. *Do you fuel it with God's Word?* In Luke 24:32, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus described their reaction to Jesus teaching them the Word--"our hearts were burning within us." Christ was illuminating them to not only understand the meaning of scripture, but also its significance and importance for them personally.

It is essential that we are burdened when we teach. When we speak of developing a burden, we mean that we have become personally convinced of the significance of this truth for ourselves and for others. John Stott calls it "so possessing the truth that the truth possesses you." This is zeal.

How do you get this? As you study scripture, prayerfully ask yourself these questions concerning the truth you are studying:

When did I first learn this truth? How did my life suffer because I was ignorant of it? How did learning it and applying it change my life at that time? How has it done the same thing since? How was my life hurt because I have refused to respond to this truth? How does this truth apply to me now?

How is this person suffering because he is ignorant of this truth? What could happen to him if he learns it and applies it?

Learn to study and meditate on scripture this way, and you will have an inexhaustible source of zeal!!

4. *Are you responsive to the Holy Spirit's personal guidance in moral & ministry matters?* This is a somewhat subjective issue, but so important. Much of our walks with God are "private" in the sense that no one else sees them. God convicts us of wrong attitudes and he prompts us to step out to serve in various ways. No one else knows about this guidance, so we often tend to disregard it. When this is the case, we are living our Christian lives primarily "in public," as Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for doing (Matthew 6). I believe that how we respond to the Lord "in private" has a lot to do with the power and zeal we receive from him that eventually becomes manifest in our "public" ministries.

Denying self is essential to maintaining and increasing zeal. Giving into self-centeredness dampens and suffocates zeal. This obviously applies to giving into sins of commission. If you have made a provision for the flesh that God has put his finger on, don't be surprised when your zeal for God and his work dries up--you're grieving his Spirit.

Especially zeal-destroying is complaining. Some of us actually complain to others about how we have to serve the Lord! I have learned to keep it to myself where I moan and complain in my thoughts. In either case, complaining like this is blindness and unbelief--we forfeit a lot of spiritual power and zeal right here!

Sometimes we're looking for some exotic reason for our state when it's embarrassingly simple!! The way out is also simple: turn away from the sin-area, and you'll see your desire come back! (Romans 13:12)

5. *Do you put your heart into your work?* As an act of faith, choose to throw your heart into your ministry regardless of how you feel (Romans 12:8 - "Let him who leads, lead with zeal."). Often, the key to enjoying hard work is to "put your heart into it." I first learned this with back-breaking work at a landscape nursery, but it also applies to spiritual zeal.

Colossians 1:29 indicates that there is a connection between Paul "laboring" and "striving" and his experience of God's power "mightily working within" him. It is as we choose to stretch out fully to the tape that we experience God filling us with his zeal.

With spiritual work like going to home church, I often feel tired, oppressed, etc. It is easy to just "go through the motions" because I have to be there as a leader. But the key is to fight my way through to victory, and be able to go to bed that night satisfied that I was used by God.

6. *Do you expose yourself to the needs of lost people?* Paul's spirit was "provoked" when he saw the idols of

Athens so that he witnessed to people on the streets and preached the gospel at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16ff.).

SPURGEON: "Take care . . . to be on most familiar terms with those whose souls are committed to your care . . . Get into close quarters with those who are in an anxious state . . . It will help to

make you (zealous) when you see their eagerness to find peace . . . As a doctor walks the hospitals, so you ought to traverse the lanes and courts to behold the mischief which sin has wrought. It is enough to make you weep tears of blood to gaze upon the desolation which sin has made in the earth . . . See the masses living in their sins . . . dying sodden and hardened, or terrified and despairing; surely this will rekindle expiring zeal if anything can do it. The world is full of grinding poverty, and crushing sorrow; shame and death are the portion of (millions), and it needs a great gospel to meet the dire necessities of men's souls . . . Go and see for yourselves. Thus you will learn to preach a great salvation . . . not with your mouth only, but also with your heart . . . "

7. *Do you stay focused on ministry related to your spiritual gifts & burdens?* There is a correlation between staying focused on God's calling on your life (what he has gifted and burdened you to do ministry-wise) and being filled with the zeal to carry it out (see 2 Timothy 1:6,7).

We all have ministry responsibilities that do not fall directly into this area, but we need to be careful not to get distracted by them and other ministry opportunities so that we gradually drift from God's calling on our lives.

For further reading:

Waylon Moore, *Multiplying Disciples*, pp. 95,96.

Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Worker*, "Diligence," pp. 9-20

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 151-158

J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, pp. 134-136

Charles H. Spurgeon, *Encounter with Spurgeon*, pp. 81-87

John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, "Earnestness," pp. 273-280

Assignment Due Next Week

Study for Exam

Memory Verses

Key Points to Know for Exam

1. You should know each of the six elements of ministering under law and each of the contrasting elements of ministering under grace.
2. You should be able to define "zeal" and explain the seven ways in which you can cultivate zeal.