

Hebrews 12:18-29
Additional Reading: Luke 9:46-62

Introduction

In Hebrews 12 there are a number of injunctions about Christian living. Hebrews 12:14 is a summary of many commandments, and therefore a crucial test. Also in this chapter is another warning about the danger of going back, and disobedience. There are several such passages in the epistle, in particular Hebrews ch.6, which we have already looked at. Therefore going to concentrate on Hebrews 12:28,29, which introduces new theme – service. Going to consider the motives for service, nature of service, and the means for our service.

Motives for our service

Many times in the New Testament we find exhortations to service, based on what God has done for us in Christ – the mercies of God. Here the writer does not deal with generalities about service but concentrates on certain particulars. He does not deal with the subject by a superficial and general statement, but he lists privileges and brings ideas to us which involves aspects of Christian truth not touched on elsewhere. In v.18-21, he contrasts our present privileged position with old Israel, which learned on Mount Sinai God's awful majesty, inapproachability and sheer terror.

Then he list of new glories awaiting the Christian (Hebrews 12:22-24):

- (a) Mount Zion, the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem.
- (b) Innumerable company of angels in festival gathering – the joy of heaven is such that angels break into rejoicing.
- (c) General assembly and church of firstborn enrolled in heaven. They belong to the firstborn son, Jesus Christ, and their names are on God's register. All those whom God has honoured and all who were His faithful citizens.
- (d) God the judge is there. Solemn thought that amidst the joy, all is still under God's scrutiny.
- (e) Spirits of all good men who are now perfected. They join the company of the godly who went before us.
- (f) Above all, Jesus is there, who mediated the new covenant through His precious blood. Created new relationship with God because of His perfect sacrifice.

Then another privilege – **Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved** (Hebrews 12:28). An unshakable kingdom is a thrilling thought. To belong to a country ruled over by God, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, under the saving rule of God. We can enjoy it now, but its completion will be manifest when Christ returns.

The Christian life requires us to live according to the kingdom's principles, enjoying its power as it transforms our lives. As its citizens, we know its protection and provision. We have been taken as beggars from the dunghill and set among princes.

This kingdom is unshakable. All other kingdoms of the world will go to pieces – where are the ancient civilizations and empires today? God’s kingdom cannot be moved. He shall reign forever and ever. No dynamite can touch His kingdom. When the sun and moon are blown out in darkness, and the stars fall like leaves in autumn – God’s kingdom will remain untouched. **Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations** (Psalm 145:13).

Deep sense of security. Phrase to bear in mind in the midst of unrest, confusion and uncertainty. In Christ, we are not building on shifting sands, but on a rock which shall endure. Bound to bring stability of outlook, calmness, poise and quiet spirit when all else is in turmoil. This must be reflected in life – a life of service to our king.

Nature of this service

According to the New Testament, our service affects the whole of life, there is no sphere which is beyond where we may serve the Lord.

- (a) We can serve the Lord in the common acts of life – New Testament writers envisaged service in the kitchen, field, winepress, stable, porter at the door. Not just to be industrious and honest to please our earthly masters, but remembering that we are serving God at the same time. If slaves, in mean domestic tasks served the Lord, how much more those with great responsibilities and opportunities. How much more fathers and mothers, people of influence, and leaders and members of the church. The simplest acts can be done to the Lord. To the man who lives for the Lord, nothing is secular, all is sacred. What God has cleansed we must not call common – cleansed pots and pans, tables and shops. Therefore all labour is holy if we serve God in it. How this ennobles life, and gives significance, importance and dignity to the least actions. No unrewarded toil in His service.
- (b) We serve God in our religious activities. If we name Christ as our Lord, we should be doing something for Him. Every talent to be used for Him. How important that in His service we are actually serving Him. It is possible for there to be a conflict of motives here. We could teach the Sunday School but not serve Christ, witness and preach but not serve Him, engage in worship but not serve Him – if all these activities are done without thought or heart or desire to magnify His name. We need to guard against serving ourselves in our religious activities – being concerned with prominence, ambition and shining before others. Neither must we act to please our fellow believers. We should be happy to hear of others being blessed – if we love Christ, we love the whole church and delight wherever He is blessing, even if it is not in our area of service.
- (c) Special acts done to Himself. How often we wish we could serve Him personally. He is no longer with us in person, else we could minister to His needs, like Zacchaeus, or Mary and Martha. Can we still do anything directly and distinctly for Him? We can adore Him as Master and Lord. Meditate and think of Him. Speak well of Him, extol Him before others. Commune with Him. Sit at His feet and learn of Him, like Mary. Then obey Him. If we love Him we shall keep His commandments. C.f.

relevance of ordinances. Willing to bear reproach for His sake. Care for His people – as we feed, clothe, visit – unto Him (Matthew 25:31ff). Yield whole body and spirit to Him – **Whose I am, and whom I serve** (Acts 27:23).

Means to serve Him

Let us have grace (Hebrews 12:28). εχωμεν χαριν - also translated in the R.S.V. as “Let us be grateful for receiving such a kingdom”. N.B. We have to receive the kingdom and His grace before service. We cannot serve God in reliance on our own gifts, but in reliance on Him. **Without me ye can do nothing** (John 15:5). **I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me** (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Gifts of God’s grace. ξαρισμα meaning “grace gift”, from which we get the word Charismatic. In Ephesians 4, apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers – their gifts were from Christ, from His grace. C.f. they were not to be witnesses until the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8).

Our service has to be done with reverence and awe, carefully, remembering whom we serve, and what we have been brought from. **Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling** (Psalm 2:11). Tremendous honour. It is an honour to serve an earthly ruler – how much more to serve God. Again, danger in mixed motives, can make us unworthy. Fear lest we offend God, lest our spirit and temper grieve the Lord. **For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do** (Romans 7:19). Be careful lest we are not serving God at all, e.g. preaching because it is a vocation, or something we are expected to do. Be careful lest we serve Him but are not in His will. True in all forms of service, but especially in “fulltime service” – many have lost their way, followed the call of man rather than the call of God.

No one can examine himself too carefully, no church can be too careful. Good lesson for the preacher – “Do not go into the pulpit unless you cannot help it.”

Final reminder of the nature of the One we serve – **Our God is a consuming fire** (Hebrews 12:29, Deuteronomy 4:24). Holy, just, and not to be trifled with. This aspect of God’s character needs to be emphasised in this sloppy and sentimental age. We can only approach Him on redemption ground – we have no right to go before Him on our own. His consuming fire is seen in the Cross. Sin had to be dealt with before He could bless us. Quality of work to be assessed, quality of work to be revealed by fire. Fire to try every man’s work. Some to be burnt up. He Himself to be served but so as by fire.

Conclusion

Why serve the Lord? Because we are part of His unshakable kingdom, and we have to serve our king. We can serve Him in our daily lives, in religious service, and serve Him personally. We do so by relying on His grace and in reverence and fear because of His nature.