

The High Call of Service

by George Grant

The sermon calls for a revitalization of the church's commitment to translating faith into action through service and community engagement.

Scripture: Matthew 25:35, Acts 6:2, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 3:17, James 2:14, 1 John 3:18

Topics: "Faith In Action", "Christian Service"

Description

George Grant emphasizes the importance of translating faith into action, highlighting that love, mercy, and hope are demonstrated through deeds, not just words. He stresses the significance of aligning right doctrine with right action, emphasizing the need for both Word and deed in the Christian life. Grant points out that the early church structured ministries around Word and deed, with elders preserving sound doctrine and deacons translating truth into practical deeds, ensuring selfless service and community transformation.

Transcript

The heroine of *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle, captured the sentiment of most of us when she complained, "Words, words, words -- I am so sick of words. I get words all day through, first from him, now from you. Is that all you blighters can do?" She was tired of empty rhetoric -- as high sounding as it was. Instead, she wanted to see something real.

Talk is cheap. Promises are a dime a dozen. Most of us have had about all of the spin-controlled sound-bites we can stand. We've heard just about all the hollow rhetoric we can tolerate. We all know that actions speak louder than words. That is a universal truth -- no less valid in business or politics or media as in faith or family or church. Good intentions are simply not sufficient. There has to be follow-through. There has to be substance.

John the apostle admonishes us accordingly, "Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). In the biblical scheme of things, love is something we do, not just something we feel. Mercy is something we extend, not just something we intend. Hope is something we must act on, not just something we harbor. Our orthodoxy (right doctrine) must be matched by orthopraxy (right action). Our life together must be marked by both Word and deed.

This does not by any means minimize the primacy of the Word of God in the Christian life. It is simply a recognition that God's truth will always bear incarnational, tangible, and demonstrable fruit.

The Westminster Confession of Faith highlights this notion, asserting that the church has been entrusted with "the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world" (25.3). In other words, to carry out this stewardship faithfully, the mission of the church must be organized around Word and deed -- or what Francis Schaeffer called "contents and realities."

To that end, from the earliest days of the apostolic church, congregations were purposefully structured for Word and deed ministry. Each local body was to be led by elders who were charged with the weighty task of preserving sound doctrine. They were to teach it, exhort it, nurture it, and highlight it in every aspect of congregational life -- in both its evangelism and its discipleship, from its worship to its societal presence. They were to bring the Gospel to bear in Word and deed. That fixedness in the Word was to provoke holiness, godliness, and faithfulness.

In addition to the elders though, those early fellowships were also served by deacons -- or more literally, servants. They were to translate the truth of the Word into very practical deeds. They were to make evident the beauty of human relationships transformed, reconciled, and restored by the Gospel. They were to provoke abundant evidence of true koinonia (community). At the same time, they were to ensure that covenantal relationships would show forth selfless service crafted in tenderness, empathy, excellence, intelligence, and glory.

According to Acts 6, the deacons were charged with the responsibility of coordinating, administering, and conducting the charitable generosity and stewardship of the church. It seems that because of the spectacular growth of the Jerusalem congregation, the distribution of food to the needy had gradually become uneven and inefficient. A number of the Grecian widows had been overlooked. The Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (vv. 2-4). Thus, these seven men, or deacons as they would later be called, were to practically translate Word into deed. They had as their primary duty the oversight of the mercy ministry of the church. This was the essence of the diaconal function.

Throughout church history, this sort of practical-deeds ministry has been more or less faithfully carried out by men of passion, conviction, and concern -- men like William Olney and Joseph Passmore. Olney and Passmore were deacons for many years at London's Metropolitan Tabernacle during the pastorate of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Their busy stewardship of service involved the administration of almshouses, orphanages, relief missions, training schools, retirement homes, tract societies, and colportages.

Sadly, in our congregations today this balanced Word and deed vision is, at best, a secondary notion in the functioning of the church offices. Indeed, instead of meting out the succor of compassion in ministries of service, our deacons are often called upon to spend most of their time sitting on committees and launching building drives. Instead of spending and being spent on behalf of the needy, instead of modeling Word and deed, our deacons are waxing the floors of the fellowship hall or dusting the dampers, pew by pew, "and goodness knows what other trifles," as Olney put it. Consequently, we leave our churches and our communities with the impression that the Gospel really is little more than "Words, words, words."

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