



Closing out the book of Esther, we're reminded that serving God requires costly obedience even though it doesn't always pay short-term dividends. Of course, as Guinness reminds us, it isn't any different for God himself, who takes on our weaknesses to express his love to us. So like Jesus, we're called to serve because we are God's servants, and he will accomplish what he desires through or even in spite of our feebleness.

God has disclosed himself to us in a form that is a shocking surprise, and one that contradicts and confounds all our human expectations and ways of thinking. The Word became flesh and spoke in a human form as one of us, though incognito and in a disguise that fooled us and made fools of us. And, dare we say it again with silent reverence, *all this was because he had to, as there was no other way to subvert the stubbornness of our sinful disobedience and reach our hearts.* What a mystery, what an absurdity if not true, and if true what a wonder! The God of all power chose to become weak to subvert our puny power, the God of all wealth chose to become poor to subvert our meager wealth, the God of all wisdom chose to become foolish to subvert our imagined wisdom, and the God who alone is the sole decisive one chose to be a nobody to subvert us when we stupidly thought we were somebody. If such dire lengths were necessary for God himself, can we expect to speak differently? If our Lord had to do it in that costly way, it would be absurd to think we do justice to his incarnation by decking out our arguments in our best finery or speak worthily of his cross through arguments that preen with their own brilliance.

Shame on our folly when we think we know better than God! God's truth requires God's art to serve God's end. There is an art to truth, and an art that is shaped by truth. Christian truth requires its own art that alone communicates Christian truth, so any Christian explanation or defense of truth must have a life, a manner and a tone that are shaped decisively by the central truths of the gospel. Like the incarnation, our words are always most effective when they become person-to-person and face-to-face toward others. Like the cross, our message must pay the cost of identification, so that from the inside out it may have a chance of succeeding in its high and worthy aim. And like our reliance on the Holy Spirit, it should always be from him and not us. That, surely, is the context of St. Ignatius of Antioch's saying, "It is better to keep silence and to be, than to speak without being," or the often misquoted advice of St. Francis: "Preach the gospel constantly, and if necessary use words."

. . . Humility and vulnerability should always be among the clear marks of the Christian advocate. We do not know the answer to every question. We will not have a satisfying response to every objection. We should always be happy when people come to know Jesus, regardless of how we may have bungled our witness. We are mere midwives, and what matters is not us but the Spirit's gift of the fresh-born life of the new child of God. Put the issue this way: Do we really think that we are more passionate about people knowing God than God himself is? How absurd. God is more true and more certain than our best defense of him. And if the Christian faith is true, as we believe for reasons that go far beyond us, God will remain God and our faith will remain true even when we are completely stumped and shown up for the untrained ignoramuses we really are.

Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk*

Discussion Questions

Society says that we should be rewarded for our work and can go elsewhere when not rewarded to our satisfaction. What is the biblical view of service, and how are we tempted to view kingdom service through societal concepts of work, compensation, and retirement?

What should motivate our service to God and others, and how does God respond to this kind of service?

If God's love for us required demonstration, what can we expect for our role in communicating the gospel, however poorly we may do it?