

CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER: A LIFE OF SERVICE
ROMANS 1:11-15

It's hard to be a servant. To serve others is to do something that is contrary to our natural inclinations and to fight against the flesh. That's why we just read the story of Epaphroditus. We don't know much about him, but isn't his story remarkable? He risked his own health and life to serve the Philippians in Paul's place for Christ. His service wasn't even for his own benefit — it was for the benefit of Paul. Who does something like that?

We know that kind of service is contrary to our flesh by an account from the disciples. Jesus has just been transfigured in front of Peter, James, and John. They have seen the outshining of His eternal glory (Mk. 9:1-8). And then after coming down from that mountain, they heard Jesus speak about his coming crucifixion.

“For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, ‘The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.’” (Mk. 9:31)

Evidently things were pretty quiet as Jesus and the Twelve continued on their way to Capernaum; it was quiet except for some low murmurings, maybe from the back of the group. So when they arrived in Capernaum, Jesus asked them, “what were you discussing on the way?” (Mk. 9:33) And Mark tells us, “they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all’” (Mk. 9:34–35). The first must be last. We nod, “that’s right.” But it’s easier for me if *you* are last; it’s hard for me if *I* must be last.

Service isn't easy. But it's essential as a follow of Christ and as a member of His church. And the “first shall be last” kind of service is what the apostle Paul himself models and extols for the Roman church. As we have been slowly making our way through the introductory section of the great letter of Romans, we have seen Paul's model for how a church cares for one another through a life of prayer (1:8-10). Now in verses 11-15, we are going to find how Paul models care for one another through service. Here is Paul's point —

BELIEVERS WHO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER SERVE ONE ANOTHER.

Now that's easy to say and just a little harder to do. How can we cultivate the desire to serve and joy in our service? We begin by having our minds renewed about service and ministry. And in this passage,

Paul identifies eight attitudes to cultivate so that we will be more able and joyful servants. We will examine the first four of these this week and look at the rest next time. Here are eight attitudes to cultivate and develop to become God-honoring servants.

- 1. Cultivate a DESIRE for Service (v. 11)**
- 2. Cultivate a “BLESSING” Mindset (v. 11)**
- 3. Cultivate HUMILITY (v. 12)**
- 4. Cultivate PERSISTENCE (v. 13)**
- 5. Cultivate a Desire for FRUITFULNESS (v. 13)**
- 6. Cultivate a Sense of DUTY (v. 14)**
- 7. Cultivate an Awareness of SIN and GRACE (v. 14)**
- 8. Cultivate an EAGERNESS to Serve (v. 15)**

In these verses, Paul offers eight thoughts to transform our thinking about serving others —

1. Cultivate a DESIRE for Service (v. 11)

- In verse 10 Paul said that he was always praying that, “at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.” Why was he *always* (regularly) praying that prayer? Because (*for*) Paul *longs to see* the Romans.
 - ✓ This longing is a strong desire — he *needs* to see the Romans. And this longing is not something that has just come up; it is a long-term desire. Notice that v. 13 tells us that he has made multiple attempts to visit the Roman church and has been repeatedly thwarted.
 - ✓ And the initial desire he had has not diminished; he says *I long* (present tense) — the longing he had initially for the Romans is still in operation. He still wants to see them to serve them.
- What we want reveals what we are. Sometimes we do things that we know that we should do, but we have no desire to do them — we do them only from duty or perhaps to preserve an image or perhaps to gain someone’s favor.
 - ✓ So an employee might stay late working on a project for work so that his boss might be more favorable towards his request for time off work; or a student might stay after class and visit with the teacher/professor in hopes that his friendliness might move a C+ to a B-. We call those kinds of actions hypocrisy — they are not genuine.
 - ✓ Paul’s mindset was very different. He *wanted* to be with the Romans. And he didn’t want to be with them so that he could go to the Coliseum or to view the Roman Senate governing. As we will see throughout this text, he wanted to be with them so that he could serve them —
 - to use some spiritual gift for them so they will be strengthened (v. 11)
 - to encourage them in their faith (v. 12)
 - to see spiritual fruit produced in them (v. 13)
 - to preach the gospel and its implications to them (vv. 15-17)
 - Paul’s motive was to be with them to serve them.
- As Stephen Yuille has said, “Paul has a deep concern for his fellow believers. The lesson for us is this: *Longing for the company of other Christians is a sure sign of spiritual health*. The church is a family. A family longs to spend time together. If it doesn’t, then it’s dysfunctional. Similarly, a Christian who doesn’t long for other Christians is dysfunctional — something is seriously wrong.”

- What about us? Do we desire to be together? Do we long for fellowship with one another so that when we don't have it, we miss it — we *ache* for fellowship with one another?
 - ✓ Do you believe our fellowship with each other is necessary? Do you believe that you are dependent on the fellowship of others in this body? You are (12:3-5, 10a; 1 Cor. 12:22ff).
 - ✓ If we are going to grow in our sense of community and if we are going to be a testimony of the love of Christ, it will be marked by genuine compassion and care for one another — and we need to feed that sense of longing and dependence on one another. George Swinnock was right when he wrote, “Next to communion with God, there is no communion like the communion of saints.” [Yuille, 17]
 - ✓ When your flesh tempts you to believe that fellowship and service in the body is unnecessary — “I’m not needed...I don’t want to participate,” then remind yourself that you *are* needed and that your service *is* a necessity. And then get in there and make every effort to serve.

Another thought to transform our thinking about serving others is —

2. Cultivate a “**BLESSING**” Mindset (v. 11)

- It has always interested me who has been able to integrate into the church body and who struggles to feel connected and a part of the flock. One dominant reason why people integrate well is that they arrive with an attitude of, “how can I serve? how can I help?” And that is the very principle that Paul demonstrates next — *so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you...*
 - ✓ The word *impart* contains the idea of sharing — “I have something I want to give you...” It is a word of self-sacrifice and service. In **1 Thess. 2:8**, Paul demonstrates how far this will go.
 - ✓ And what Paul wanted to share was a *spiritual gift*. Because Paul uses the word “some” he is indicating that he isn’t thinking of some specific spiritual gift from the list he will give later in this book; in fact, he is probably thinking very generally — “I want to come and see what the need in the church is and then apply whatever gifts and abilities I have to that need so that I can be of benefit to the Roman church.” Paul wants to do whatever he can to minister to this church.
 - ✓ Paul was coming to the Roman church in order to be a blessing to them — to *establish* and strengthen them spiritually, not so he can be entertained by them and served by them.
- We often say that everything we have we have by God’s grace. There is another principle here as well — everything we have we have as a gift of God’s grace so we can extend grace to others.
 - ✓ Our gifts and abilities and possessions are not for us; they are for us so that we can use them to serve others and be a blessing to others — so that the weak will be strengthened.

- ✓ John MacArthur has said it well: “The foremost characteristic of genuine love is selfless giving.” That was Paul’s model in Rome and Corinth (2 Cor. 12:15) and Colossae (Col. 1:28f).

“The Christian who looks on his service to the Lord as a means of receiving appreciation and personal satisfaction is inevitably subject to disappointment and self-pity. But the one who focuses on giving never has such problems. “ [MacArthur, Romans 1-8, 42.]

- Let me just say what you might be thinking — this is ridiculously hard because the flesh screams out against this.
 - ✓ You get some steaks for your family for a holiday meal and then one of your children invites a friend over and you realize that there is not “enough” meat for everyone. You wanted a 10-12 oz. steak and now a 6-8 oz. steak is not enough. You will share with your family but not a neighbor? (Not that I’ve ever faced this dilemma...)
 - ✓ A friend calls for some assistance and you are able to help and you are grateful for the opportunity and you pray that you will be able to help again. And then the phone rings with that same friend right as the movie you planned to watch with your wife is beginning...
 - ✓ You have a child that needs more care and attention than the rest of your children — when he’s five he just learns more slowly and it takes more repetition to instruct him; when he’s a teen he seems to have more trials and troubles than your other children combined; and when he’s an adult he regularly has financial and personal problems that require you to intervene. Once is fine and twice is okay, but the dozens of times you’ve had to act are just wearing you out.
 - ✓ There are ministry demands in the church (like the nursery) that seem to be endless and you are tired of serving and you’ve asked for a break and then the phone rings and you see it is one of your pastors and you suspect he’s going to ask you to hang in there a little longer (“until Christ comes back”). Can you do it?
 - ✓ The flesh fights against all these things. But Paul says, “I just want to come and do whatever I can to help you and serve you.” How could Paul maintain this mindset? In part, because I believe he never got over the fact that he, Paul, was being used to serve Christ (1 Tim. 1:15-16).
- When you are in a position to serve someone and it seems weighty, just remember that God is sovereign. And in His sovereignty, He has chosen *you* to serve Him by serving His body. That is the very attitude cultivated by Epaphroditus that enabled him to serve when the service might have killed him (Phil. 2). Don’t get over the fact that God has graced you with the privilege of serving. So strive to and intentionally and purposefully be a blessing to others.

A third thought to transform our thinking about serving others is —

3. Cultivate HUMILITY (v. 12)

- One of the reasons that we struggle to serve (though we would be reticent to say it) is that we believe some service is beneath us. E.g., husbands don't clean toilets, grandpas have an exemption from dirty diapers, moms don't have to mow the lawn, pastors don't have to help the indigent, etc.
- Into that temptation steps Paul with his example in vv. 11-12 — he wants to come and use his gifts to build up a body that is weak and needy. Notice the connection now in v. 12 — he wants to do that, *that is, that I may be encouraged together with you...*
 - ✓ Paul is coming not just to help the Romans grow in their faith, but also so that *he* will grow in his faith as he is stimulated and challenged by them.
 - ✓ Now think about that for just a moment. This is the apostle Paul. He is author of 13 NT books; he is the human reason for the expansion of the church into Asia Minor and Europe. Paul is the most prominent figure in the NT following the ascension of Christ. And the church in Rome is young and there are no prominent members yet. And Paul says he needs them and their ministry and their encouragement!
 - ✓ This is humility. As John Calvin said, “Note how modestly he expresses what he feels by not refusing to seek strengthening from inexperienced beginners.” Exactly.
- If we are going to be effective in serving each other, we will recognize the necessity of our mutual ministry. “I need you and you need me.” And that statement is for all of us. The Lone Ranger is only a radio/tv show. It's not reality. We are mutually dependent on one another.
 - ✓ If I believe I have no need of others I can be of no service to others. Only when I recognize my need for others will I be a benefit to others.
 - ✓ How does this work? Someone goes into the hospital and they will say, “Don't come...it's not necessary; I'll just be there one day...” But you go anyway. You just want to be there to communicate love and compassion and maybe read a verse and pray with your friend. As you leave, he says, “Thank you for coming; I greatly appreciate it.” And you say with all sincerity, “It was my joy.” By that you mean, it was a benefit to you. Sure, you served and went out of your way and spent some money on gas and flowers, but you also received: you saw that person's faith in a hard time and it exposed some of your own selfishness or worry or fear or pride and watching that person's response stimulates you to believe Christ more faithfully.
- When we are humble, we are in a position to serve others, and we are in a position to receive the ministry of others to us so that we can grow as well. That's why when Paul begins the transition in this book to discussing how to use our spiritual gifts, he begins with humility (12:3-5).
- We may not be as far along spiritually as we think we are (but God can still use us).

Another thought to transform our thinking about serving others is —

4. Cultivate **PERSISTENCE** (v. 13)

- When Paul says, *I do not want you to be unaware*, it's an understated way to say, "I really want you to know...you must be aware of this...it's important..."
 - ✓ And what he wanted them to know was that he has made repeated attempts to come to Rome. In 15:22 he says that he has *often been prevented from coming to you*.
 - ✓ So Paul has had a long-standing love and affection for the Romans to come to them. His love for them and desire for ministry to them is not new. It has existed for a long time.
 - ✓ And Paul has also been persistent to attempt to come though the doors have regularly closed. When the door opens and closes we know and believe that it is God who is the doorkeeper who is allowing or denying entry (8:28-29).
 - ✓ Yet as long as the doors have remained closed, because of his love for the Romans, Paul has continually attempted to go visit them.
- And how do we know Paul loves the Romans? Notice that Paul also calls them *brothers*.
 - ✓ For Paul to use that word to refer to believers is not unusual — he uses the word about 100x in his letters. But it seems unusual that he would call these people *brothers*. He was not involved in the founding of the church and has never been to visit the church. Yet he calls these readers *brothers* throughout the letter (1:13; 7:1, 4; 8:12; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14, 30; 16:14, 17). Why? Because there is a unity and kinship that we have with other believers that supersedes even our physical relationships (Eph. 2:11ff). He loves them because they are his brothers. And because they are his brothers he persists in coming to visit them.
 - ✓ How can Paul persist in serving when you know that at times he is weary? Notice 15:1ff —
 - Bear the weaknesses of others (persist in it!) by not living just to please yourself (v. 1).
 - Work for the good of others believers because of the example of Christ (vv. 2-3).
 - Remember that you are not the first that has had to endure hardship (v. 4).
 - Ask God for the strength to persevere (strength comes from Him!) (v. 5a).
 - Be unified in mind with other believers (don't think too highly of yourself) (v. 5b).
 - Live for the glory of God, which precludes us from living for the glory of self (v. 6).
 - Accept (embrace and welcome) perpetually and repeatedly, others in they body (v. 7).
 - When we are spiritually weary of serving, it is time to take positive action and apply these kinds of principles, so that we will continue to be effective servants.

- Application principles:
 - ✓ When ministry doors close, that doesn't mean we need to stop pursuing them. All we know that it means is that at the moment the Lord has restricted us. It is not ungodly or sin to keep praying or pursuing those ministry opportunities.
 - ✓ Persist also in serving those who may not be as well-known to you. If they are in Christ, they are your brothers, and God has put them in your life for you to minister to them as if they are your brothers. Be brotherly with them. Don't quit being brotherly.

5. Cultivate a Desire for FRUITFULNESS (v. 13)

6. Cultivate a Sense of DUTY (v. 14)

7. Cultivate an Awareness of SIN and GRACE (v. 14)

8. Cultivate an EAGERNESS to Serve (v. 15)

CONCLUSION:

The flesh will entice you and I to believe that others must serve us and that we deserve to be served. The Spirit, in His Word, says that you and I must serve others. What J. Oswald Sanders said on this topic is helpful —

“The fundamental lesson that greatness comes only by way of servanthood and that first place in leadership is gained only by becoming everybody's slave, must have come as a great and unwelcome shock [to the disciples]. It is noteworthy that only once did Jesus say that He was leaving the disciples an example, and that was when He washed their feet...” [“The Revolutionary Leadership of Jesus.”]

Believers who care for one another serve one another. Cultivate the biblical attitudes that will enable and enhance your ministry of one another.

MEMBERSHIP TESTIMONY AND WELCOME: Jim and Chris Kucholtz

BENEDICTION: Prayer of gratitude for their membership and the unity and service of our body.