

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

A number of years ago, London resident Simon Thompson was trying to push his stalled BMW off a road in a London suburb when another driver called out, “Do you want a hand?” And then the car’s back doors flew open and out jumped two brothers, William and Harry, to help Simon — that would be Prince William and Prince Harry, heirs to Britain’s throne. The two young men rolled up their sleeves, helped Simon move the car, and then got back in their own vehicle and resumed their journey. Thompson said the princes acted as if it was no big deal: “I could not look them in the face because I did not want them to feel uncomfortable, but it is amazing when there are two princes pushing your car down the road,” he said. [*Dallas Morning News*, Aug. 5, 1999, 2A.]

Of far greater significance than that, of course, is the account of our Savior, given by Mark — “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The King of the universe is the servant of men.

So it should be natural for followers of the King to also be servants. Yet most of us find that service isn’t easy. Service doesn’t come naturally. We might affirm the words of George Whitfield verbally but find them hard to do: “Let my name be forgotten, let me be trodden under the feet of all men...I care not who is uppermost. I know my place...even to be the servant of all.”

But servanthood is essential as a follower of Christ and as a member of His 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 discovering how Paul models care for the Body 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 have 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. Last time we examined the first four of these and this week we will look at the remainder. Here are eight attitudes to cultivate and develop to become God-honoring servants.

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* (v. 11) the Romans. This longing is a strong desire — he *needs* to see the Romans.
- 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? We need to feed a sense of longing for and dependence on one another.

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

- When Paul said he wanted to be with the Romans *so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you...* it meant he had something he wanted to give them. He wanted to come, evaluate their spiritual needs and then use his gifts and possessions to help them, to be a spiritual blessing to them so they would be *established*, made spiritually mature.
- This mindset doesn’t happen naturally, but it does happen supernaturally when we understand that God has graced us with the privilege of serving; He has placed *us* (amazingly) in the life of that individual so that we can serve. So strive to intentionally and purposefully be a blessing to others.

### 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. 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 — *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. This is humility.
- 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.

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

- Paul has *often been prevented from coming to you* (the Romans). Paul has persistently attempted to come though the doors have regularly closed (15:22). But because they are his **brothers** and because he loves them as brothers, he persists in attempting to come.
- Service can be wearying, and even the attempts to serve can make you weary. Yet Paul was unafraid to keep trying to help the Romans even when he received a number of “no” responses from God (and don’t overlook the fact that it was God that sovereignly closed those doors).
- Our effectiveness as servants will increase as we persist in attempting to help others.
  - ✓ 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.

Now let’s notice four new attitudes to cultivate to make us more effective servants:

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

- In the middle of v. 13, Paul says he wants to come to them *so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles*.
  - ✓ The fruit Paul desired could have been conversions — since Paul mentions the **Gentiles**, it suggests that he is thinking about his ventures in Asia Minor: the planting of churches that were founded on the conversions of unbelieving Gentiles (1:5; **15:16**; 16:5; **1 Cor. 9:16**).
  - ✓ But the fruit could also include spiritual knowledge and growth (Gal. 5:22-25) — the fruit of maturity that follows conversion.
  - ✓ Whatever fruit he was pursuing, “Paul’s ministry was an unending quest for spiritual fruit.” [MacArthur] Cf. 6:22 (in the middle of an extended section on sanctification, chs. 5-8).
- Notice also that Paul specifically mentions the **Gentiles** — “among the rest of the Gentiles.” So he is emphasizing that he has done some labors among the Gentiles and now he wants to continue.
  - ✓ This emphasizes the nature of his ministry and calling (Acts 9:15) — a Jew, set apart to serve Gentiles so that they would come to trust in the Messiah and Savior.
  - ✓ This is also foreshadowing of what he will say in chs. 9-11 about the inclusion of the Gentiles.

There were many social and cultural difficulties of bringing these two groups together into one Body (Eph. 2:11ff), and there was also difficulty in uniting their theology — the understanding of the use of the OT Law. So Paul is hinting at the need for unity in the body. Though they are two distinct groups in the body, they have one identity, and that identity is Christ. So whether we are Jew or Gentile, Paul says, we should be willing to serve together.

- ✓ And because we are one in Christ, this statement about serving the Gentiles (as a Jew) is also a veiled affirmation of the need to serve broadly in the body of Christ. Don't be restrictive about who is "worthy" to receive your service and who is not. Christ washed *all* the disciples' feet (including Judas'); we should be willing to serve similarly.
- As we think about serving others, Paul's desire for his service is helpful for us. When Paul says he wants to see *fruit*, he is being purposeful and intentionally in helping spiritually:
  - ✓ Let us be careful not to be distracted from our main purposes: justification and sanctification, conversion to Christ and maturity in Christ. It's fine to help financially and physically, but what is really needed is for us to help spiritually, or we just are sending people to Hell with a full belly. Are you being purposeful in your service so that people are moved toward Christ? (That's one aspect of ACBC training that has been particularly helpful for me — I'm much more intentionally looking for what the real needs of the individual are.)
  - ✓ Let's be sure we love *all* the members of Christ's body. Just as Paul worked for Jews *and* Gentiles, so we don't want to make racial or financial or societal distinctions in our service. Galatians 3:28-29 really does need to guide us.

Another thought to transform our thinking about serving others is —

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

- Paul says, *I am under obligation...* The sense of the word **obligation** is that one has a debt, and Paul says that even now, he is under that debt; the debt is ongoing and continual. No matter what he does in his service, he remains indebted to work and labor.
- Now Paul's debt is not directly to the Romans. They did not save him and they had not yet done anything to support his ministry. So why was Paul obligated to serve them?
  - ✓ Paul was obligated because of the apostolic call of God for his life (Rom. 1:5; Acts 9:15).

- ✓ And Paul was obligated because of the spiritual need of the Roman church, which gave him a moral obligation to go and serve. This is like the obligation one has to attempt to rescue someone from a burning house (or like Raye Jeanne, who has had me “rescue” several wayward turtles from our road).

*“Do you really believe and know that the unbeliever, the person who dies in his sin, goes to hell? Well, if we really believe that, there will be a sense of constraint in our lives. You will not care what people will think of you. ...you will say, Whoever they are and whatever they are, they are dying in sin; they are wretched as they are — there is worse to come! I must. I must speak.” [Martyn Lloyd-Jones]*

- ✓ Paul doesn’t want to serve the Romans for his own personal benefit, but because of his obligation to Christ’s calling and the spiritual needs of the Romans. “Paul is deeply conscious of his calling, of his being ‘set apart for the gospel’ (1:1), and it is this *divine* obligation to use his gift (Eph. 3:8) that motivates Paul — ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’ (1 Cor. 9:16b).” [Moo, 61.]
- Now this obligation of Paul’s is not exclusive to him. Everyone who has been saved by the gospel has obligations to the Savior for the gospel (1 Pt. 2:9; Mt. 28:18-20): “For any of us to receive the gospel is to incur a debt, and Paul shared in this. ‘Obligation to him who died produces obligation to those for whom he died.’ ...the gospel [imposes] a debt on all who receive it, a debt which calls for...passing on the gospel to someone else.” [Morris, 63.]
- And Paul talks about this obligation in several of his letters with the words **trust** and **stewardship**. Cf. 1 Cor. 4:1f.; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; **2 Tim. 1:12-14**.
  - ✓ We will not serve and evangelize until we feel the weight of our indebtedness to God for our own salvation. Only when we comprehend our unworthiness for the gospel will we appreciate the magnitude of the gift we have received and be willing to do the Lord’s work (Lk. 7:36-48).
  - ✓ We will not serve and evangelize until we feel the weight of our indebtedness to man.
  - ✓ We will not serve and evangelize until we love that our indebtedness is also a privileged stewardship — the Lord has entrusted His most precious gift, the gospel, for us to give to those who are in need. Service — and service by proclaiming the gospel — is not just a “have to...” but it is also a “get to...”

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

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

- Paul has said that he is under obligation, but he has seed that he is under obligation to two pairs of groups in particular — *Greeks and barbarians* and *the wise and the foolish*.
  - ✓ Generally the term *Greeks* is used to refer to all non-Jews, i.e., the Gentiles. But Paul uses it differently here; he is speaking of those who are part of the Greek culture and influence. They are educated, cultured, and sophisticated.
  - ✓ In contrast, the *barbarians* are those who speak an unintelligible language — they are uneducated, uncultured, and uncouth. In fact the word *barbarian* is onomatopoeic — the word itself sounds like babbling nonsense — “bar bar...” So this first pair refers to all Gentiles, no matter what their cultural background or education.
  - ✓ The *wise and foolish* refer to all people, whether Jew or Gentile, who are educated, astute and know how to navigate the difficulties of life well, or whether they are enslaved to silliness, simplicity, and ungodliness.
  - ✓ These two pairs of examples illustrate the breadth of Paul’s ministry. He was purposed by God to give the gospel to a wide spectrum of people. Here is an example not only of the power of the gospel to transform a variety of people, but the importance of *taking* the gospel to a variety of people. All who are unregenerate are in need of Christ and redemption.
- “Paul was no respecter of persons. The gospel is the great equalizer because every human being is equally lost without it and equally saved by it.” Paul was not just overwhelmed by the sinfulness of the world, but he was overwhelmed by his own sinfulness and if the gospel could save *him*, then it could also do its work in others (**1 Tim 1:15-17**).
- Two weeks we heard of the chief medical officer for Planned Parenthood harvesting body parts of aborted babies to sell them [<https://wordsofgrace.wordpress.com/2015/07/15/how-can-it-be/>]. It’s easy to be righteously indignant (and arrogant).
  1. Do I see my spiritual condition without Christ as desperate as hers? (Eph. 2:1-3)
  2. Do I see the power of the gospel as sufficient to save her (and that I have an obligation to proclaim the gospel to people like her so she can be liberated from her blindness and sin)?
  3. When we cultivate an awareness of our own sin, we will be more willing to serve and be more effective in that service.

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

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

- Because of his obligation to Christ (v. 14), Paul draws a conclusion in v. 15 — ***I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome***. “I am eager,” he says. He’s not just willing, but eager. His external compulsion was matched by an inward motivation. He *wants* this ministry!
- Now think about how remarkable that is:

*Paul preached in Jerusalem (the religious center), and he was mistreated. He preached in Athens (the intellectual center), and he was ridiculed. He preached in Rome (the political center), and he was executed. We, too, can expect opposition from Jerusalem: the religious center. They’ll tell us we’re too narrow-minded. We can expect opposition from Athens: the intellectual center. They’ll tell us we’re too ignorant. And we can expect opposition from Rome: the political center. They’ll tell us we’re too intolerant. That’s difficult to take. It’s a real temptation to hide the gospel or to soften the gospel, in order to be accepted by others. It’s difficult to preach Christ — ‘a rock of offense’ (9:33) — to a hostile generation. Paul knows all about that, yet he’s eager to proclaim the gospel.” [Yuille, 21.]*

- With this statement, Paul also ends where he began (v. 11) — ***I long to see you...*** Paul yearns for ministry to these people. Yes, he is under obligation, but it is a joyful duty. He wants to serve.
- Let me summarize this section with just two main observations:
  - ✓ When Paul thinks about service, he’s thinking about evangelizing with the gospel, and discipleship. There are other forms of service, but what is primary is spiritual fruitfulness and godly transformation. That should always be our objective as well.
  - ✓ Effective service begins with the transformation of the mind. When serving others is hard, what keeps us going is the renewal of the mind to biblical truths:
    - When it feels like drudgery, remember that God has given you this place of service — think of it as an opportunity; intentionally cultivate a desire and eagerness to serve.
    - Cultivate a mindset to bless others — it’s about helping them more than being helped yourself
    - To do that will mean you will have to think humbly and not pridefully (which is always good).
    - Remember that transformation takes time — be willing to endure many troubles with others.
    - Always work toward spiritual transformation (and remember that it is the Spirit who does the work of transformation, not you).
    - Remember your own sin and your own experience of God’s grace and cultivate such joy in that gift that you also carry out your privileged duty to others.

**CONCLUSION:** At the beginning of this message I alluded to a statement by George Whitfield about humility. But I omitted part of his statement. This is the entire statement:

“Let my name be forgotten, let me be trodden under the feet of all men, *if Jesus may thereby be glorified....Let us look above names and parties; let Jesus be our all in all....*I care not who is uppermost. I know my place...even to be the servant of all.”

The key to being a Christ-honoring servant is to follow the example of Christ. And when we follow Him and desire to live for Him, then we will be believers who care for one another by serving one another. So cultivate the biblical attitudes that will enable and enhance your ministry of one another.

**BENEDICTION:** 1 Timothy 1:15-17