

How To Be A Good And Faithful Servant

(Part 2)

Text: Romans 1:1-17

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

Series: Book of Romans [#02]

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Introduction

Last Sunday we began the “formidable and exciting task” of working our way through the book of Romans. It is “formidable and exciting” because, James Montgomery Boice tells us, studying Romans “will change us profoundly and unalterably”¹; because, as the reformer John Calvin wrote, understanding this letter gives us “an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture.”²

Paul states the central message or theme of this letter in verses 16 and 17 of the first chapter.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”

His theme is the gospel—the good news of Christ Jesus.

Paul begins the letter in typical fashion by introducing himself. As he shares some things about himself he shows us something of what led him to be successful. Last week we noted one of Jesus’ descriptions of success from Matthew 22, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (25:21,23 NLT). We want to be *good and faithful servants* of God. Paul’s introduction shows us something about how. In the opening 17 verses he reveals two major areas: First, what we *are*. We are God’s servants. We looked at *the servant’s basic identity* last week. Second, what we *do*, or *the servant’s service*, which we are considering this morning. Paul writes about two areas of a good and faithful servant’s service. We begin with...

The Servant’s Service To The Church.

When we think of service in and to the church, our lists often include things such as teaching, music, caring, ushering and maintenance, among others. Paul shows us four areas that we might not have at the top of our lists. Four areas that are critical in our service to each other as good and faithful servants.

The first is being thankful and giving thanks for others. Drop down to verse 8. “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” The first thing on his mind, the first thing he mentions about his attitude and serving them was his thankfulness to God for them.

Being thankful for other believers was ingrained in Paul's attitude and actions. He mentions it frequently in his letters. Consider just two other examples. Philippians 1:3-5.

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Philemon 1:4-5.

“I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.”

We see the broad scope of his thankfulness when we look at all of his letters. He was thankful for:

- close friends and associates;
- for churches that were close to him;
- for churches which had grown and matured in faith;
- for churches with problems;
- for believers and churches he had not met.

In short, he was thankful for all believers.

The good and faithful servant's service to the church is grounded in thankfulness for others. Why is this important? It is important because it acknowledges God, His love, grace and power in and through others. It helps us see ourselves and others in proper perspective. It reminds us of our unity with and need for each other. It helps to keep us close to those we are close to, and draw closer to those we are not close to, even those we may not agree with or get along with very well.

Paul set the example of *telling others* he thanked God for them and why he was thankful for them. Why is *this* important? Let's start on the most basic level of how expressing thankfulness affects others, whether they are believers or not. Samuel Clemens, or Mark Twain, said that he enjoyed people thanking him for his writing and would always report that to his family. Now, his family didn't always believe those nice things people said, but he told them anyway. He said, “I like to dream of them if I can.”³

All of us identify with that. When someone thanks us for something we've done or expresses thankfulness for us as a person, it makes us feel good, it encourages us. But we need to take this farther, to the spiritual level. The Bible tells us to encourage one another and to build up one another (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14). Not only does being thankful for others bring praise and glory to God, not only is it used by God to help us grow in understanding them, but the Holy Spirit also uses our telling others we thank God for them to reaffirm, encourage and build them up.

Your service, my service to the church which pleases and is blessed by God is grounded in thankfulness. Next weekend we celebrate Thanksgiving. Begin now. Begin by being thankful for others, expressing it to God, and to them.

Secondly, we are Christ's good and faithful servants as we pray for others. Go on to verse 9.

“For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.” (9-10)

Being thankful is expressing gratitude for what has been and is being given, while prayer here emphasizes looking to the future. Some examples of Paul doing this in his letters are,

- here, praying to finally be able to see the believers in Rome face to face so both they and he could be strengthened.
- He prayed for the church at Corinth to move on to unity and maturity.
- He prayed that the believers at Thessalonica would live worthy of their calling, would have the desire for and then the experience of the work and power of God.
- He prayed that he would have a joyful reunion with Timothy, and for Timothy to have a fresh vision and energy for his work.
- He prayed that Philemon would be effective in his service.

We too need to pray for our church, for each other, as well as other believers. Pray specifically for their needs, goals and desires. Pray for strengthening for any areas of stress, problems and weakness. Pray for others to grow in the knowledge and love of God. Pray that the other believers we know, and know of, would live God-honoring lives filled with God-honoring service. Pray for reconciliation where relationships are strained or shattered. This is one of the reasons that at Knox we have had sharing in our prayer time for many years. And so too why many of us pray consistently for those requests on their own. Good and faithful servants of Christ Jesus pray for others.

Moving on, we come to serving the church by having a genuine concern for the growth of others. Look at verse 11.

“For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.” (11-12)

As we read Paul's letters we find that he was thrilled when others were growing, doing well and enjoying God's blessings. His desire for them to grow is evidenced, in verse 11, by his great desire to minister to and with them so they would be blessed. There was no

comparing or competition in Paul's mind. The natural way people think and talk about others focuses on problems more than pluses, on past failures more than future potential, on obstacles more than opportunities.

When the English and French were fighting in Quebec, the commander of the British Fleet was Admiral Phipps. He was ordered to anchor by Quebec City and wait for the infantry so they could launch a joint, coordinated attack. The Admiral and his fleet arrived early. He surveyed the scene and was irritated by the statues of saints decorating the roof and tower of the Catholic Cathedral close to shore. So, he spent his time shooting at the statues with his ships' canons. No one knows how many he hit, but history records that when the infantry arrived and it was time to attack, the Admiral found himself out of ammunition. He had used it all "shooting at the saints."⁴

One of the greatest tragedies in the church is when believers are unconcerned about each other or *shoot at each other*. Indifference, comparison and competition have no place among believers. Good and faithful servants of Christ Jesus care about, care for each other. They genuinely care for the welfare and growth of others.

Finally, we serve the church by having a genuine love for others. Paul's love for his Christian brothers and sisters at Rome is seen in his eager desire to be with them. Verse 11, "I long to see you." Remember, he had never been to Rome. He had not met let alone spent time with those believers.

His love for them is also seen by his eagerness to serve them. Verse 15, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." Later in chapter 5 Paul writes about God's love having been poured out within our hearts (5). God has saturated the very core of every believer's being with His love. It was that love of God which propelled Paul to preach the gospel wherever he could. In verse 14 he tells us, "I am under obligation [or, I am indebted] both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." Having received the gospel of God's grace, there was no way he would or could keep it to himself. And so, Paul loved the believers at Rome, he wanted to preach the gospel alongside of them, to proclaim the truths of the gospel to them so they could be better grounded, encouraged and equipped for serving Christ.

Love for others in the family of God is both the roots grounding and nourishing our service and the fruit of a heart and life of service. This begins with always remembering and exploring God's great love which He showers on us. This continues, for good and faithful servants, with the choice and commitment to love others, to love in action and in words. Good and faithful servants serve the church. Each and everyone of them also serve the world.

The Servant's Service To The World.

To clearly understand and carry out our service to the world we need to have a handle on our mission. It is difficult to see let alone focus on what really is important, what really matters, without a clear understanding of your mission.

One memorable episode of the British television comedy “Yes Minister” was titled *The Compassionate Society*. Administrative Affairs Minister Jim Hacker learned from his chauffeur about a new hospital in North London. The hospital was reported to be one of the best run hospitals in the country. It was up for the Florence Nightingale Award for being the most hygienic hospital in the area. Its large staff kept it running smoothly and cleanly.

There was just one *small side point*: the hospital had no patients. And, it would be at least another eighteen months before patients would be admitted to this fully staffed hospital because, “First of all,” he was told, “you have to sort out the smooth running of the hospital. Having patients around would be no help at all.”⁵ The administrators may have had a clear understanding of what *they* understood their mission to be, but certainly not of what it should be in *The Compassionate Society*.

Paul had a clear understanding of his mission. Verse 16. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” He knew that it was in the gospel and in Christ, and only in the gospel and in Christ, that people can be transformed from sinners to saints, from being separated from God to being in an everlasting relationship with Him. Everyone, anyone who believes is saved. This takes us back up to verse 14. “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.”

Each one of us has the same mission of serving our world. Yes, the mission of presenting Christ and His gospel does not appeal equally to every believer. Yes, not all of us are *gifted* in evangelism. But, as Paul told Timothy, we all are to “do the work of an evangelist,” to “fulfill [our] ministry” (2 Timothy 4:2, 5). There are countless ways and means of fulfilling this mission. Talk with Karen Hoel, Ron Morgan and Bob Ekstrom and others here at Knox about some of the ways they are using to carrying out our mission. That might stimulate your thinking about some unique ways for you to share the gospel and fulfill your mission. If you have not been to Missions Fest here in Edmonton, go next February to see and be challenged by different ways people use to carry out our mission.

Another critical factor in carrying out our service to the world is our motive. We see Paul’s motive in three key phrases. First, in verse 14 he says “I am under obligation.” Salvation is a gift of God’s grace. We are not under obligation to pay God back for it—we never could, and if we could it would not be grace, it would not be His gift to us. Paul was under obligation to all people to share, to proclaim the gospel to them. He rejoiced in his forgiveness, new life, peace and righteousness with God, and he wanted everyone to know about it. He couldn’t keep it to himself. He had this debt to pay to everyone, to share the good news of Christ Jesus with them.

The second phrase is in verse 15, where he tells us he was eager to preach the gospel in Rome. His sense of obligation was not a heavy weight nor yet a big black cloud following him ready to send down rain, hail and lightning if he didn’t fulfill it. No, he was *eager* to fulfill it. He was willing and ready. He was, as he told Timothy to be, “ready in season and out of season” to preach Christ (2 Timothy 4:2).

The third phrase is in verse 16. “I am not ashamed.” Yes, the gospel sounds like foolishness to many people because no one can understand it without the Holy Spirit enlightening them (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14). But Paul did not shrink back, he was not timid nor ashamed, but rather, he boasted “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). What is your motive, my motive for living a Christ-like life, for serving our world, people who do not yet know Christ?

In addition to have a clear mission and the right motive, we must have the correct message as we serve our world. Paul’s message, simply, was the gospel, the good news, the unchanging truth of Christ. The gospel is “the power of God for salvation” (16). Paul could debate with the sharpest thinkers of his day, but he knew his arguments never saved anyone. Yes, he gave carefully reasoned, prayerfully prepared presentations, but he always knew that only God saves people, and He does that through the good news of Christ Jesus.

We see the human side of things—what people look like, what they tell us they believe and think about God. But in the end, as God releases His power through the gospel, He saves anyone and everyone who believes. Everyone is not saved because Jesus died and was raised for our sins, but everyone who believes in Him is saved.

It is in the gospel that the righteousness of God is revealed (verse 17). It is in and through gospel that God’s own righteous and the believer’s righteousness in Christ are revealed.

Paul accepted people preaching Christ with less than perfect motives, but he denounced and condemned those who did not preach the true gospel of Christ, those who added works into the mix for being saved; those who diminished the full deity or humanity of Christ in any way; those who preached a gospel which seemed to just have a different emphasis, but really was not the true gospel.

To be good and faithful servants of Christ to our world we must be focused on and guided by the mission we have been given, fulfilling it with the right motives and always holding out the true message that faith in Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the one and only way to be saved.

Conclusion.

Are we good and faithful servants? Some of you may be thinking, “That sounds right. It sounds good but I don’t need, I can’t handle any more things on my *To Do List!*” We are busy people. The last thing I want to do is something God will never do —place that last straw on your back which breaks you.

All of us need to keep reviewing our priorities and measuring what we are doing by those priorities. Some of us need to switch gears—to slow down and let go of some things. Others, to let go of some things in order to pick up other things. And, yes, a few of us may need to pick up the pace. We go through different seasons with different challenges and responsibilities. One constant is our identity as God’s servants, called to serve Him by serving each other and the world.

The great news is that being a good and faithful servant releases us from drudgery and despair, it releases us from comparison and competition to a life of peace and joy! We don't have to wait until we see Christ face to face to hear his "Well done, My good and faithful servant!" We can hear it from Jesus every week, every day we live as His servants.

As you think about this with God, thank Him that He has saved you and sent you to serve Him. Thank Him that He is with you, guiding and empowering you every step of the way. Renew your commitment to be His good and faithful servant today, and each day He gives you.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Volume 1, Justification by Faith, Romans 1-4* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1991), 9.

² John Calvin, *The Epistles To The Romans And To The Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1960), 5.

³ *Mark Twain Speaking*, Paul Fatout, editor. (Iowa City: Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 358.

⁴ Richard C. Schwab, *Let The Bible Speak About Tongues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990).

⁵ Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn, "The Compassionate Society," www.yes-minister.com, (1981), 02 October, 2009, <<http://www.yes-minister.com/ymseas2a.htm#YM 2.1>>

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