

Serving One Another

Reading: Romans 12:1-8 (NKJV)

- 1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.
- 2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good acceptable and perfect will of God.
- 3) For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.
- 4) For we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,
- 5) So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individual members of one another.
- 6) Having then gifts differing according to grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy, in proportion to our faith;
- 7) Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;
- 8) He who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Introduction

Our subject this morning is 'Serving One Another.' I want to preface what I'm going to say by acknowledging that there are very many people in our church who are serving us all in a wonderful variety of ways. The Lord knows who you are and one day you'll receive your reward which is being stored up for you in heaven.

Our current series of sermons is designed for our church family to be encouraged to see ourselves as part of a body. I'm using Romans 12: 1-8 as a guide.

Laying the Foundation

As Christian brothers and sisters the motivation for our works of service should come from a God given desire, prompted by the Holy Spirit, to be a blessing to those around us and to share the good things God has given us with others. There should be no such thing as a self-centred Christian.

Paul's letter to the Romans has sometimes been called the manifesto of the Christian church. The reason is that for the first eleven chapters Paul has set about revealing the great mercies of God. The gospel is precisely the account of God's great mercy shown to wretched sinners, in the giving his Son to die for them, in justifying them freely by faith, in sending them his life giving Spirit and making them his children.

So having taken 11 chapters to explain all of that Paul wrote **I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God** that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God which is your reasonable service.

Can you see now that the word therefore is there for a very good reason? By recognising the tremendous work God has done for us he therefore deserves nothing less than we give ourselves totally, body and mind to his service. Which when all is said and done is a very reasonable response.

C.T. Studd, a great 19th century missionary, who in his youth had a huge opportunity to gain worldly wealth and fame, put all that aside to go and present the gospel to people who had never heard it.

In doing so he said; 'If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.' That sounds like a very reasonable response to me. The tragedy for many of us is that somehow or other we never quite reached the point C. T. Studd obviously did

It is on the foundation that God wants us to do our part in building up Christ's body, his church.

Our Relationship to Ourselves

Having established in Chapters 1 -11 that the basis of our relationship to God and our service is founded on Christ's life, death and resurrection Paul then goes on to show us that we need a proper view of ourselves, if we are to effectively serve God and each other.

In verses 3 we read; that we're not to 'think of yourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.' That is, we are to have neither a too high or too low an opinion of ourselves.

What God calls us to do he equips us to do and it is something he's prepared us do. In our service for God the scriptures make it abundantly clear there is no room for pride. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1: 27 'God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. And in John 15:5 Jesus said 'Apart from me you can nothing.' And that's true. If we are to truly serve him we need the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.' It's not our abilities that God is after; it's our availability.

After many years of service a pastor wrote 'I am constantly amazed at the work God has done in people not because they are the most confident or talented, but because they were willing to fulfil God's plan for their life and serve him. When their "No, I can't do that" changed to "OK God, if that is what you want I'll do it." i.e. they became obedient, God really used them. Things that were tough in the beginning then become easy to them. They look back and wonder why they were so afraid. No, they were not magically changed into somebody who had it all together. They were not somebody who learned how to preach or how to sing. They were not somebody without doubts and insecurities about having the abilities they needed, to do what God wants them to do. They were people who were prepared to trust God and obey him. Those are the type of people God uses."

Our Relationship with Others

Having looked at our relationship to ourselves we're now led to look at our relationship with others. In Romans 12: 4-5 Paul draws an analogy between the human body and the Christian community as he also does in 1 Cor.12. He says; 'For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ.' In 1 Cor. 12 he goes to great lengths to insist that no one should think of themselves as better or more important than another part of the body. We are to hold each other in respect recognising that God is as much at work in others as he is in us. Verse 24 says God actually composed the body giving greater honour to the part that lacks it indicating that that is how he views Christ's body, the church. The important thing for us to understand is that we all matter and are very important to each other.

Gifts for Service

Romans 12 verses 6 – 8 describes a list of seven gifts which are to be found in the body of Christ and are there for everyone's benefit. These can be divided into 2 main groups. They are 'speaking gifts' (prophesying, teaching, and encouraging) and 'service gifts' (serving, contributing, leading and showing mercy.) Each gift has its place and is equally important in the life of the church but the Lord doesn't mean them to be a heavy burden.

In Matthew 11: 28- 30 Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The yoke he was referring to is the yoke oxen wore when they were pulling a cart or a plough. It was a yoke of service. By saying the yoke was easy he wasn't saying the work he gives us to do isn't going to be hard and difficult at times. What he was saying is that the particular type of service he is calling us to- that is the yoke he has for us- fits us well and is comfortable.

Do you see what Jesus was telling us there? He was saying to us 'don't try to serve me in your own strength, slaving away taking on tasks that perhaps I've not appointed you to or equipped you for.' In other words don't try to be a square peg in a round hole that's not how he works. Instead he's telling us to take on the yoke he has designed for us- not someone else's yoke.

I remember somebody saying to me once as they were preparing to take on a new, and what proved to be, a very effective ministry, "I feel as if my whole life, up to this point has been a preparation to do this work." When we are walking in harmony with Jesus, bearing the yoke he gives us, the service he requires of us will fit comfortably with the person he has been shaping us to be.

A Christ-Like Attitude

In whatever service our Lord appoints us to it is important to have a right attitude. Philippians 2: 5 which tells us;

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. **Your attitude** should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

When we undertake acts of Christian service our attitude is important. We're told we are to have the same attitude as Christ had in his ministry. So we'll look at a sample of events recorded in John's Gospel which show Christ's servant attitude when he faced a variety of situations and see what we can learn from him.

Christ's Attitude

Obviously there are heaps and heaps of examples in all the gospels but in the limited time available I'm just going to take four very brief examples from John.

1) **Jesus attending a wedding at Cana in Galilee.**

In John chapter 2 we're told that Jesus attended a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Whilst he was there his mother came to him and said "They have no wine." I find Jesus response quite intriguing. He replied to his mother "Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." I guess many men here can empathise with how Jesus responded. Faced with a similar situation when a man's wife asks him to do something for her I guess many will (sometimes) say 'you'll have to wait a bit dear, can't you see I'm busy!?'

We get the sense here that Jesus was very reluctant to do anything at all. It wasn't the right time for him to begin performing miracles. Nevertheless he heard her request and responded even though it didn't suit him to do so at that time. So Christ's attitude was to show patient consideration of the needs of others in spite of the fact that it didn't fit with his agenda.

Sometimes in our service to others we have to have the same attitude, especially if God has equipped us to meet that particular need. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, 'Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those of the household of faith.' Gal.6:10

2) **Feeding of 5,000.**

In John Chapter 6 we read about the feeding of the 5,000. In our first example Jesus was reactive. In this second instance Jesus is pro-active. We're told that he'd gone up onto a mountain with his disciples and had been teaching them. Then when he lifted up his eyes he saw a great multitude coming towards them. Jesus must have realised that they'd be hungry,

and, said to Philip “Where will we buy bread that these may eat?” He knew the answer but was just testing Philip. So it is we too need to have a Christ like attitude and be pro-active when we see needs arising around us. Many of the great social reformers of the past were Christian people, like William Wilberforce, or William Booth or Florence Nightingale or Martin Luther King. They saw the needs around them and were pro-active in bringing about change. These people didn’t just protest, they promoted a much better way.

3) The Woman caught in adultery.

In John Chapter 8 we read the story of how the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They did so to see how he would respond. After all adultery is a sin.

She had clearly messed up. As her particular sin would indicate, her interpersonal relationships were a problem. It is plain to see that Jesus attitude here was to look beyond the sin. After her accuser’s hypocrisy had been exposed he asked her “Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?” To which she replied, No one sir.” And Jesus said “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.” You see Jesus looked beyond the immediate issue. In our service we need to avoid making hasty judgements when someone messes up. In the case of this woman Jesus was living out exactly what he had taught us to do in Matthew 7. There Jesus tells us to “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged.” We often need to look beyond the sin and see the needs of the sinner, and perhaps be prepared, if we can, to identify the root cause. Which might be something that we find quite mind blowing. Be it a dysfunctional family or sexual abuse or poverty etc.etc. So we need to be very careful about rushing to conclusions. Our ignorance can cause an awful lot of hurt. So we must tread very carefully. Jesus did both with this woman and also with the woman at the well we read about in John chapter 4.

4) Washing the disciples feet

Now we get to the biggy. In John 13 we read that very shortly before his trial and crucifixion, Jesus washed his disciple’s feet. By removing his outer garment and wrapping a towel around his waist he was to adopting the dress of a menial servant. Thereby exposing himself to be despised by both the Jews and the Greeks alike. It was a totally unexpected and apparently spontaneous act. In explaining his actions Jesus said “I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”

It was an act of incredible humility. Some Christians have performed feet washing as a ritual act. I am sure that never was Jesus intention. His disciples were set to become apostles. They would be the leaders of the body of Christ on earth. That was a high office. This act of foot washing by Jesus their Lord and Master and the Son of God, must have removed from them any thought of privilege from the office of Apostle. There was to be no fancy regalia no pomp, no arrogant seeking of the baubles of office.

And so it is in our Christian service we should never be seeking for or basking in the applause of men. We should never think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. As Philippians 2:3 says ‘Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.’

Conclusion

Let’s recap. We saw that the foundation for Christian service is laid by recognising the tremendous greatness of the salvation Jesus has bought for us. Our response to that should be to sacrificially

present our physical bodies to the Lord which is our reasonable service. We then looked at what that meant in our relationship with ourselves, then in our relationship with others. We then looked at how we were to accept and work with the gifts God has given us. Finally we looked at what it meant to have a Christ like attitude in our service and sought instruction from Christ's attitude.

I'll finish with the lyrics of a song we used to sing about being like Jesus and being a servant.

Make me like you, please make me like you,
You were a servant, make me one too,
Lord I am willing, do what you must do,
To make me like you Lord,
Please make me like you.

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