

How To Be A Good And Faithful Servant (Part 4)

Text: Romans 16:1-27

Series: Book of Romans [#22]

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Theme: **Good And Faithful Service Flows Through Partnerships.**

Introduction

This morning we come to the conclusion of this walk through the book of Romans. In these weeks we have not explored all the details of the letter, let alone exhausted its meaning. But hopefully we have allowed God to open the door a bit more to understanding the riches of His truth in the Bible. And also I trust God has used the truth of this book to change us in deep and lasting ways.

Paul wrote this letter after more than twenty years in ministry. He had learned many things and he had matured greatly. God had tested him and blessed his ministry in many different places and circumstances. And so Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, wrote this letter from both experience and understanding. His message, his theme, has been the gospel. As he wrote in chapter 1,

“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.’” (16-17)

Paul opened and closed the letter with personal comments. God gave us these pictures of Paul for a number of purposes. One of them is to show us something of what it means to be a good and faithful servant of Jesus Christ. We had two looks at that from the first 17 verses of chapter 1 and then, last week, another from the beginning of this closing section, verses 14-33 in chapter 15.

Our final look today is at chapter 16. I can say without fear of contradiction that this chapter is more often skipped than studied. After all, who wants to read all those names? In these 27 verses Paul lists 37 individuals or groups, 35 by name. While it is Paul’s longest list of names, it isn’t the longest in the Bible. That title goes to the genealogy which opens 1 Chronicles and spans through the end of chapter 9. Page after page after page of names.

The greetings and genealogies *are* part of God’s word for us. This particular list shows us something about being a good and faithful servant. Specifically, we get a glimpse into the important truth and place of partnerships in ministry. *Good and faithful service for God flows through partnerships.* Not just any kind of partnership, but partnerships with certain qualities.

Partnerships That Value Each Other.

First, partnerships in which people truly value each other. Paul shows us that he valued relationships with people. We see that here in this chapter in a number of ways. First, in his own greetings to people that start the chapter, and then toward the end in the greetings from some of those with him in Corinth where he wrote the letter. Paul used the word *greet* twenty times in this chapter. It was the standard way to write “Say hi to” or “Give my greetings to” someone.

Paul greets more people here than in any other of his letters even though he had not been to Rome. He had met some of them in other places and had heard of others. Why so many? People speculate, but we don’t really know why. And yes, these greetings are part of Scripture, part of what the Holy Spirit guided Paul to write.

It is clear from the number and nature of the greetings that these relationships were important to Paul. In verse 13 we read, “Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.” Rufus’ mother was not Paul’s actual mother, but apparently she had treated him like a son. He valued that and honored her and their relationship by writing this so all would know.

We also see Paul valuing relationships because he makes a point of commending a believer to them. Look at verse 1. “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea .” Cenchrea was the nearby port for Corinth. He asked them to warmly and fully receive her into their fellowship. He wanted her to be connected, to develop relationships whether she would be there temporarily or permanently. He also asked them to help her in whatever needs she had, whether settling into Rome, or accomplishing some tasks that she may have gone there to do.

Next Paul showed the value he placed on relationships by publically expressing his thanks to two old and dear friends. Go to verse 3.

“Greet Prisca [or Priscilla] and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” (3-4)

Beyond this, if we look carefully at the people he lists we will find a broad spectrum of people: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, free people, slaves and officials. Paul valued people and his relationships with them without any filters for background or position.

In addition to valuing his relationships with these people, Paul valued their ministry. Paul uses familiar but meaningful terms to express this. Phoebe, he writes in verse 1, was a *servant* of her church. He valued and noted her attitude and actions of serving others in following Jesus’ example and commands.¹

Prisca and Aquila were not only his dear friends, but they also were his “fellow workers” not junior or assistant workers in Christ Jesus (3). In other descriptions Paul draws attention to a woman named Mary who “worked hard” for the church there in Rome (6), as well as a man named Persis who “worked hard in the Lord” (12). Then he also refers to two ladies, Tryphaena and Tryphosa as “workers in the Lord” (12).

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4 that believers are servants and stewards of Christ who have the requirement of being trustworthy of this great privilege (1-2). Paul valued, he challenged people to and appreciated their faithful service for God.

- He told the church at Corinth to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding *in the work of the Lord*, knowing that *your toil* is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- He told the church at Ephesus that the spiritual abilities God gives each and every believer are “for the equipping of the saints for *the work of service*, to the building up of the body of Christ” (4:12).
- And so, we are to “bear fruit in every good work”, which is part of living “worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10).
- Paul told Timothy that church elders who work hard and do their work well are to be honored (1 Timothy 5:17).

Good and faithful service flows through partnerships in which the partners value each other and the work they do individually and together. It is vital that each one of us value every other believer in our church and elsewhere for who they are and their service. We need to ask ourselves if we really believe this. Does what we think and do demonstrate it?

How we demonstrate it varies. We are not all the same. The book *The Five Love Languages* suggests that there are five basic in ways people express love and want to see it expressed: words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, gifts, and physical touch. There is not one way that is most meaningful for everyone to give and receive love.²

However we express it, if we are being good and faithful servants we will be valuing our partners in Christ. One unavoidable, necessary implication is that we demonstrate that tangibly, including in what we say, do, in how we pray and, yes, in actually telling others that we value them, and how we value them.

Partnerships That Protect Truth And Unity.

In addition to valuing each other, our partnerships need to protect truth and unity. A practical starting place is to recognize and always remember that loving unity and doctrinal purity are partners. Some people emphasize loving unity more than doctrinal purity, while some others do the opposite. Sometimes this results in confusion, misunderstanding and even fireworks. To one the other doesn’t care enough about truth. He or she has sold out, has no standards, or is liberal. To the other one that first person doesn’t really care about

others, is cold hearted, or doesn't have a heart at all.

The Biblical reality, again, is that these two must go together if we are to serve God well. God designed this partnership and the tension between them to keep us in balance. So we are to be committed to unity and truth. We find a beautiful expression of this is Psalm 85. The Psalmist calls out to God in a time of difficulty, looking back to past times of blessing with God and also expresses confidence in God's salvation and blessing in the future. And so, the Psalmist wrote in verse 10. "Lovingkindness and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." So it is when we live faithfully under God.

In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus he tells us we are "[speak] the truth in love," and so then, "to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ" (4:15). Our relationships, partnerships in serving Christ are to protect truth and unity.

Paul's main focus in this chapter is on truth. We are to protect each other from falsehood and so then, from disunity. He warns that not protecting doctrinal purity not only leads to defection from the truth, but also to fractured fellowship. Drop down to verse 17.

"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them."

The people we are to watch carefully and turn away from are people who believe and teach things contrary to "the teaching which [we] learned." In the context of this letter, that truth is the gospel, the fundamental truth of the Christian faith. We see a similar use of "teaching" back in 6:17 where Paul commends the church. "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed."

He describes these false teachers in verse 18. "For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites [their own desires, their own thoughts, their own dreams]; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." The effect of allowing their teaching would be to cause divisions and hindrances, or stumbling blocks, as that word is translated earlier in this letter (11:9; 14:13). A church can not maintain and enjoy the unity which the Holy Spirit creates if we entertain false teachers and teaching.

So, how do we protect the church from falsehood and the disunity it brings? In verse 17 Paul urges us to "keep [our] eye on" those who teach falsehood. *Keeping our eye on* means to watch carefully, pay close attention to, examine thoroughly. We see this principle in the Bereans in Acts 17 as they were "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (11).

When our careful attention and examination reveals teaching that is contrary to Scripture we are, Paul says, to "turn away from them" as well as their teaching (17). We are not to welcome, identify or share with them as brothers or sisters in Christ, because they are not. The word means to turn aside, to deviate from, to avoid, to keep away from, to keep

aloof from, to shun. Paul used this word in a different context back in chapter 3. After he said that “there is none righteous, not even one” (10), he wrote “All have *turned aside*...” (12). All have turn aside, turned away from God. The only other occurrence of this word in the New Testament is in 1 Peter 3 as Peter cites Psalm 34.

“The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must *turn away* from evil and do good; He must seek peace and pursue it.” (10-11)

Paul’s point here is not an isolated statement. Right after he finished the greeting in the letter to the churches of Galatia, he wrote

“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”
(6-9)

The apostle John also sounded the same warning in his second letter.

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.” (7-11)

Our outlook on and handling of Scripture is to be positive, but not pollyannaish where everything is *really positive* no matter how negative it really is. On the other hand, if we become obsessed with finding errors we will be a sad and sorry lot of people.

And so we are to teach the Scriptures positively, to find the best in and celebrate with others who may not see all the details as we do. But, when it comes to a false gospel, as good and faithful servants we must expose, reject and separate from that in order to protect truth and unity. Several years ago, after looking carefully, we dropped our affiliation with an organization that gave and still gives a platform to a group that teaches a false gospel.

We are good and faithful servants of Christ when individually and together we protect truth and unity.

Partnerships That Rely On And Give Glory To God.

And then as well, good and faithful service flows through partnerships that rely on and give glory to God. We have heard these truths so often, we might rush by them. But it is one thing to be familiar with them and another to be living them. First, we should always, in everything be relying on God to establish us and believers with whom we fellowship and serve.

Paul begins his closing benediction by affirming that God “is able to establish You” (25). Yes, God “is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Ephesians 3:20). This is an all inclusive statement touching all our needs and dreams. The apostle Peter urges us to resist Satan’s attacks knowing that

“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” (1 Peter 5:10)

As Paul told the believers at Corinth,

“we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

And, yes, here in this section that closes Romans, Paul tells us in verse 20, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” God “who began a good work in you *will* perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). God “will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:8).

And so the question is not “Is God able?” Nor is it “Will He do this?” Rather, it is “Do I believe He is able and will do this ... for me, for all my brothers and sisters in Christ?” And then, “Do my thoughts and actions demonstrate that I really believe that God will establish us?” Some people struggle with this more for themselves than for others. “Yes, God is able to and will establish and confirm others, but when I look at myself, where I have been, my background, I’m not sure he will do it for me.”

Others struggle more with really believing and trusting God for this with respect to others. Occasionally it may be that the others have so many weaknesses and struggles and fail so often that we just don’t see how God will do this. Or it may stem from a attitude and need in ourselves — these people need *me*, and others like me. When that is in our thinking we don’t really, fully turn them over to and trust God. In the final analysis, we don’t really

trust God to do this for those people. Partnerships that lead to good and faithful service rely on God to establish us and our partners.

They also are partnerships where we all give glory to God. Look at the closing phrase of this letter, verse 27, “to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.” Glory. God’s Glory. God’s glory is the brilliant, beautiful splendor of His perfect nature, character. God is the only eternal, holy and perfect One. All glory in and from His creation belongs to Him, only to Him. And so, glory be to God forever and ever, as Paul wrote and prayed so often.³ Now, we cannot add to God’s glory. But we can display, be a showcase of His glory by how we live. We should display it so others can see God’s glory and then see Him. And so 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us that in “whatever [we] do,” we are to “do all to the glory of God.”

“Whatever we do” is a wonderfully broad statement. Sometimes it may be a troubling statement. How about something a bit more specific? Turn to Philippians 1:9.

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (9-11)

Notice the specifics and the process here:

- An ever growing love in knowledge and discernment leads to being able to determine and approve not only what is good, but what is excellent.
- This in turn helps us live sincere and blameless lives.
- All of this is tied to and is the fruit of the righteousness which we have in Christ.
- And the end goal and result is that we then will bring glory and praise to God.

This statement is an example of a basic truth: when we read God’s word, accept the truth and apply it to how we think and live, when we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we *will* bring, we *are* bringing glory to God.

It is easy to say that our chief purpose and goal as individuals and partners is to bring glory to God and enjoy Him forever. This is reflected verses 5-6 of chapter 15.

“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is not always easy to say that our thoughts, dreams, plans and actions are actually doing this.

Conclusion.

Good and faithful service flows through partnerships — partnerships that value each other, protect truth and unity, and rely on God and give Him glory.

The letter to the Romans ends here, but Paul’s contact and relationship with those people did not. Luke records Paul coming to Rome in Acts 28. He describes the final parts of the voyage and then concludes,

“and thus we came to Rome. And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, *he thanked God and took courage.*” (14-15).

What a partnership!

As you go to God in the next quiet moments, Thank God that He calls and enables you, and all of us, to be good and faithful servants. Thank God for the partnership of fellowship and service that you have with others here and in many other places. Ask God to work in you and your partners so that you all can thank God and take courage in each other, that we all can truly radiate, display God’s glory.

¹ cf. Matthew 20:2-28; John 13:12-17; Philippians 2:5-8.

² Gary Chapman. *The Five Love Languages*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992.

³ cf. Romans 11:36; Ephesians 3:21; 1 Timothy 1:17.

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