

“Examples of Service”
(Romans 16:1-16)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This morning’s message is very simple, foundational and practical:
 - a. It answers the question as to what should be most outstanding in our lives as Christians.
 - b. It is the bottom line as to what the grace of Christ should produce in our lives.
 - c. It shows us what God desires in our lives, what He will honor us for.
2. Men honor others for things that aren’t as important:
 - a. Good looks: handsome, beauty; we see them in movies; celebrities.
 - b. Strength: great athletes: baseball, football, basketball.
 - c. Intelligence: great discoveries, teachers, inventors: Einstein, Newton.
 - d. Affluence: authority, respectability: President, military leaders.
 - e. Financial worth: Howard Hughes, Rockefeller.
 - f. In the church: for their godliness/Christ-likeness.
3. But what does God honor men for?
 - a. Not for their good looks.
 - (i) God said of Eliab to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God *sees* not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).
 - (ii) King Lemuel wrote in Proverbs, “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *But* a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised” (31:30).
 - (iii) The Lord isn’t interested in these things.
 - b. Not for their intelligence, strength or affluence:
 - (i) Paul writes, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God” (1 Cor. 1:26-29).
 - (ii) God does not honor men for their wisdom, strength or noble character.
 - c. Neither for their finances:
 - (i) The rich young ruler thought he had all he needed, but he went away grieved because he wasn’t willing to give to Jesus all he had (Matt. 19:22).
 - (ii) Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (vv. 23-24).
 - (iii) God doesn’t honor men for their money.
 - d. Certainly He does for their godliness.
 - (i) That is what He aims at in Scripture.
 - (ii) But not a barren godliness: He wants something more.

B. Preview.

1. Paul has finished his explanation of the Gospel and of his current plans.
 - a. He had finished his work in those regions.
 - b. He was going to Jerusalem to serve the saints.
 - c. Afterwards, he hoped to see the Roman believers on the way to Spain.
 - d. He asked for their prayers so that he might be able to do this.
2. Now he closes with some greetings.
 - a. But in them, we see him pointing out something again and again, something outstanding, something honorable.
 - b. It is something the Scripture tells us everywhere the Lord will honor, if done with the right motives and out of love for Him.
 - c. It is something that was perfectly exemplified in the life of our Lord.
 - d. It is a life of service.
3. This morning, I want us to consider:
 - a. What Paul commends in the saints at Rome.
 - b. That this is what our Lord commends throughout Scripture.
 - c. Finally, that we should learn from these examples to be more Christ-like in this area.

II. Sermon.

A. First, notice what it is Paul commends in many of these he greets:

1. Phoebe:
 - a. A servant.
 - (i) Perhaps one who was set aside to minister to the women in Cenchrea as what we would call a deaconess.
 - (ii) A deacon is one who is set aside to serve in the church. We are all called to serve, but particularly deacons.
 - (iii) Deacons have no spiritual authority, but the authority to minister on behalf of the church to those in material need.
 - (a) Certainly, an important part of that is ministering the Gospel.
 - (b) But they are not involved in teaching, preaching or governing the church.
 - b. Paul said they were to receive her and help her in whatever way she needed.
 - (i) For she has helped many and Paul.
 - (ii) She was a servant, and those who serve the saints are to be honored and helped.
2. Priscilla and Aquila:
 - a. "Greet Prisca 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" (vv. 3-4).
 - b. We remember Aquila and Priscilla as those who traveled with Paul (Acts 18).
 - c. They were the ones who helped Apollos know the way of Christ more accurately (Acts 18:26).
 - d. They also hosted a church in their house (1 Cor. 16:19).
 - e. Paul says they risked their lives to help him.
 - f. Not only did Paul have reason to rejoice, but also the Gentiles.
 - g. Priscilla and Aquila were servants.
3. Mary:

- a. “Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you” (v. 6).
 - b. We don’t know who she was or what exactly she did, but whatever it was, she did it faithfully for the saints in Rome – *i.e.*, “for you.”
 - c. She was a servant.
4. Andronicus and Junias:
- a. “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me” (v. 7).
 - b. They were Paul’s kinsmen or countrymen/Jews.
 - c. They had also suffered imprisonment in their labors.
 - d. They were well known by the apostles.
 - e. Sounds like they were workers: servants of Christ and of the saints.
5. Urbanus:
- a. “Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ” (v. 9).
 - b. Again, one who worked as Paul did, a servant.
6. Apelles:
- a. “Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ” (v. 10).
 - b. Approved means to be tested and found to be genuine.
 - c. We’ll see that this can only mean the fruits of his life were consistent with Christianity.
 - d. This means Apelles was a servant.
7. Tryphaena and Tryphosa: “Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord” (v. 12).
8. Persis: “Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord” (v. 12).
9. Rufus:
- a. “Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine” (v. 13).
 - b. It was his father Simon who bore our Savior’s cross (Mark 15:21).
 - c. He himself was a choice man, an excellent man.
 - d. Most likely, he was following in the footsteps of his father who became a servant of Jesus.
 - e. Paul calls Rufus’ mother, his mother as well, probably because of the love and service she bore to him.
10. I believe we see a pattern emerging:
- a. All those commended here are commended for their work/service.
 - b. They were all workers, producing fruit, giving what they had in the service of their Lord.
- B. Second, this shouldn’t surprise us because this is what the Lord commends throughout Scripture.
1. Examples:
- a. Paul writes to Titus that Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (2:14).
 - b. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). This is what He saved us for.
 - c. This is why James writes, “For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (2:26).
 - d. Faith was given to produce works: the fruit of a godly life. This fruit is revealed in service: both to God and to man, and always to God’s glory and not our own.

- (i) Paul writes, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).
 - (ii) “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8).
 - e. It is the one who serves the most who is honored the most.
 - (i) James and John – their mother as well – wanted the places of honor in Christ’s kingdom, so they asked Jesus.
 - (ii) And what did He say? Is greatness achieved in God’s kingdom as it is in the world? No.
 - (iii) He said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28; cf. Mark 10:35).
 - f. Those who seek honor from men may receive that honor, but not from God.
 - g. God honors those who honor Him, through obedient service.
2. It is any surprise then that this is what Paul draws our attention to.
- a. His commendations to the Romans would certainly make those who weren’t that heavily involved to become more involved.
 - b. For the Gospel to go forward, everyone of the Lord’s people needs to do his or her part.
 - c. But here the Lord has recorded the names of these faithful men and women for all posterity to honor them.
- C. Finally, let’s be exhorted by these examples to devote ourselves to service.
1. Is it okay to do this, to learn from examples?
- a. Yes. Paul said to the Corinthians, “For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:15-16).
 - b. He said, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).
 - c. The author to the Hebrews wrote, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:10-12).
 - d. The Lord included these examples in His Word for us, for this purpose.
2. And so let’s do what the Lord made us to do: serve.
- a. Serve God: in worship, in prayer, in giving, in evangelizing, in serving others.
 - b. Serve man: in ministering our gifts, in encouraging, in helping, in praying for one another, in giving to meet each others needs.
 - c. Remember, the Lord will reward you for it.
 - d. It will also strengthen your faith and assurance that you are His.
 - e. May God give to each of us a servant’s heart. Amen.