

Intro:

Two weeks ago, we looked at Rm 1.8. Our subject was ‘Thanksgiving for Saints’. One word we noted was the word ‘first’. We pointed out that Paul doesn’t ever get around to ‘second’ or ‘third’. I suggested that perhaps this means ‘primarily’ rather than *first of a list*. And I think that is right, because Paul is emphasizing the heart he has for the church in Rome in verse 8.

But in preparing for this message, I ran across a comment from Lloyd-Jones where he noticed the same thing. He takes it that Paul meant to start a list then just never got around to finishing it – he sees Paul ‘trampling’ on proper style, but sees in it something of Paul’s heart:

“I am suggesting to you that we are frequently guilty of paying so much attention to form, that the spirit is forgotten. And I’m not sure that it isn’t the greatest curse of the church today. So often at the end of the service you hear people say, ‘Wasn’t it beautiful?’ Now let us be quite clear about this; you must not misunderstand me. I am seriously suggesting that the form has become so important in our minds that we forget the substance, and it is a very grave danger. Service for Christ, and for God, is not meant first to be beautiful; it is meant to be true — truth first. And if we forget truth for the sake of beauty of form, or something like that, we are, I think, sinning grievously. No, this man was not tied by form; he enjoyed a great freedom of the spirit. He leaves loose ends.”¹

Lloyd-Jones wasn’t suggesting we pay no attention to style, or form, or things of that sort. But he points out that these things aren’t first things. They are secondary.

That leads us into our topic for today. I want to talk about the kind of heart we must have to serve God.

Paul is in the midst of describing to the Romans his interest in them and his intense desire to serve them in the gospel. They are fellow Christians whom he has never met, but he longs to be of spiritual service to them.

In fact, Paul is going to tell the Romans, his desire is so intense that it is a matter of regular and persistent prayer for him. We are going to look at Paul’s prayer as he describes it next week.

But along the way, Paul offers us an aside – almost incidentally, although it underscores the intensity of his prayer. The aside gives us a window into the things that dominate his life. I am going to submit to you that they ought to dominate your thought also.

¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Gospel of God*, p. 187.

Read Rm 1.8-10

Our text will be this phrase in v. 9:

‘whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son’

Our title is *Serving God in my spirit*.

Proposition: Your life — its work, its play, its worship — should be seen as religious service to God.

I. What kind of service? religious service

- A. The word ‘serve’ in secular Greek meant service of any kind – initially service for reward, but ultimately any kind of service
- B. The word is used in the LXX to distinguish kinds of service
 - 1. Hebrew has a generic word for ‘serve’ whether it be the service of God or service of man, *i.e.*, regular work
 - 2. LXX tends to distinguish
 - a. Secular work: ‘*diakoneo*’ – *i.e.*, slaving service
 - b. Religious service of the people, not the priests: ‘*leitourgeo*’

“*leitourgeo* means more precisely to serve or worship [religiously], especially by sacrifice. Moses is told that the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt is (Ex. 3:12) ... namely, in [religiously] acts, and especially in sacrifices.”²

- C. In the NT, the word is used to refer exclusively to religious service, but for Paul it means his whole life

God, whom I serve – whom I worship, whom I actively serve with my body and soul.

- D. The apostle is our example, our life should be lived in religious devotion to God

- 1. 1 Pt 2:5

^{NAU} **1 Peter 2:5** you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

² *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976). 4:60.

2. Heb 13.15-16

^{ESV} **Hebrews 13:15** Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledged his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

3. Rm 12.1

^{NAU} **Romans 12:1** ¶ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

II. What sphere of service? – gospel work

A. Everything about the apostle's life and work is oriented to one thing: the gospel of the Son

1. We have already given a good deal of discussion to the gospel in our study of Romans so far (and much more to come)
2. The gospel is the good news
 - a. The good news of God's Son come to earth [God became a man]
 - b. The good news of God's sinless Son dying a sinner's death [our perfect substitute]
 - c. The good news of God's glorious Son rising from the dead and reigning in heaven [our hope and life]

B. Our own life should be lived oriented to this sphere as well

1. Spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God are oriented to the gospel
2. Sacrifices of praise to God, fruit of our lips – oriented to the gospel
3. Doing good and sharing what you have – oriented to the gospel
4. Presenting your body a living sacrifice – oriented to the gospel

III. What instrument of service? – my spirit

A. The depth of the Paul's inner drive

1. Not achieved by performance of ritual: achieved by devotion of inner man

“Paul’s ministry is spiritual and rendered with his spirit — not like that of the ministers in the [holy order] at Jerusalem.”³

“Paul’s service was with his **spirit**. It was not that of a religious drudge, going through endless rituals and reciting prayers and liturgies by rote. It was service bathed in fervent, believing prayers. It was willing, devoted, tireless service, fired by a spirit that loved the Lord Jesus supremely. It was a flaming passion to make known the good news about God’s Son.”⁴

2. The service of the soul

“What fits Pauline usage and makes sense in the context is an emphasis on the engagement of Paul’s ‘deepest’ person in the ministry to which he has been called.”⁵

3. Service from the heart, not from worked up emotions (a la the charismatics)

“Paul’s service to God was in his spirit ... Paul did not depend on music, or architecture, or oratory, or rhetoric. He did not hold ‘inspirational’ meetings to arouse the emotions to mystic resolves. He served God directly, in his spirit.”⁶

B. The characteristics of someone serving God in the spirit

1. Sincere service

- a. Whole man
- b. No dissimulation (no false appearances)

2. Not achieved in external performance

“There was nothing detached about the way the Apostle preached. He was not an actor. He did not do it in an academic, detached manner. You know, I have heard people handling the Word of God and yet doing it as if

³ James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans" in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., p. 588.

⁴ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995). Ro 1:9.

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 58.

⁶ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 11.

they were teaching Shakespeare or geography or history; doing it very well and very cleverly, but you felt it was outside them. They had taken it up; they were giving a marvelous display and an analysis of an exposition, but it was outside themselves. The man and the message were detached. It is an awful temptation to any man who has the privilege to preach and to teach, that the thing should be done outside himself, externally, and ultimately quite mechanically, and not in the spiritual and in a vital manner. Paul served God 'in his spirit', not in an external way."⁷

3. The antithesis of 'in the flesh'

a. In the flesh = to be seen of men

"The essence of carnality is self-display. The flesh always wants to show itself and to vaunt itself."⁸

b. In the flesh = to satisfy men

"I have discovered this — and I have almost made a pledge and a vow on this subject — if ever I remotely mention anything medical, I notice a new interest at once! You see what I mean. That is human. That is the man. That is personal. And service in the spirit must never be like that. So let the congregation take this to heart. Congregations often spoil preachers; they encourage them to do certain wrong things. If the preacher starts speaking to their flesh they will respond, and they will show an interest which they were not showing in his doctrine, and the temptation to him is to give them more of the flesh, and to talk more and more about himself, and to display himself, and they will like it. They will smile, and they will enjoy it, and they will say, 'It's wonderful, and we have had a great time!' And in the meantime Christ has been forgotten, and the spiritual message has not been emphasized, and has not been stressed. That is not serving God in the spirit. It is almost the exact opposite."⁹

⁷ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Gospel of God*, p. 209-210.

⁸ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Gospel of God*, p. 210.

⁹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Gospel of God*, pp. 211-212.

- c. In the flesh = to impress men by exceptional gifts
- 1) Oratory and eloquence
 - 2) Learning and knowledge

That is not to say a man should not use the gifts God has given him, but he must not use those gifts merely to impress men, rather he must use them to serve God: he must become unconscious of his gifts.

Conclusion:

Compare Paul's testimony in Ac 20.24, 31

Proposition: Your life — its work, its play, its worship — should be seen as religious service to God.

In the Old Testament, one of the offerings of Israel was the drink offering. It accompanied the daily offering, the offering of firstfruits, the burnt offering and the free-will offering.

The ritual involved the pouring of the libation out before the Lord, representing the whole life offered up to God.

Is Paul's testimony your testimony? Is your whole life offered up to God?

'God..., whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son'