

How Does the New Testament Church Serve?

1 Cor. 4:1-5

Have you ever ridden a stagecoach pulled by horses? Of course, you don't see them anymore these days. Back in the old days of the west if you wanted to travel to California you had to travel by stagecoach and it was a long trip. There were three classes of passengers: First-Class; Second-Class; and Third-Class. One day a man went to buy a ticket to get on the stagecoach. He discovered that he could save substantially by obtaining a third-class ticket. So he bought a third-class ticket and saved money. He looked over the seats. The seats looked all the same. They had a cushion on each seat and he thought, "My! I've made a wise decision here." Everything went well for miles. All classes of people rode along in the same comfort; first-class, second-class and third- class. They were all the same. He rejoiced at his wise decision. The first-class folks were no better off than he was.

Finally they approached the base of a steep uphill road. The horses stopped. The driver jumped down from his high seat and opened the door and he said: "First-class passengers, keep your seats. Second-class passengers, please get out and walk! Third- class passengers, please get behind and push!"

There were many steep hills and the trip was long and hot and dusty. And each time he had to get out and push. Finally he saw the wisdom of buying a first-class ticket.

I want to speak today about first-class Christians and third- class Christians because in my humble opinion we all ought to be third-class Christians, be willing to get out there and push.

Right now, you're all sitting there and I'm all alone doing the pushing here. That's fine. At this time, that is my job.

But after this message, I hope that I have pushed you enough to say to yourself, “I just don’t want to be a first-class Christian. I want to be a third-class Christian.”

If you want to be a third-class Christian, someone that God can use, you need to know the essentials of becoming one. And that is the essence of my message this morning, “How Does the New Testament Church Serve?”

We’re continuing our series on “Becoming like a New Testament Church.” We looked at how the early Christians worshipped, fellowshiped, and discipled. Today, we’re going to look at how they served. Through this message, I hope to share with you certain principles about service that I hope can encourage us as we serve the Lord in this church.

First, let us define Service.

What is **service? The dictionary defines it as “an act of helpful activity.”** It is something done to benefit others. It is an activity that is common to all. All of us serve in one way or another. We serve in our families, in our school, at work, in church, wherever.

Let me give you a few examples of service. This one is about a man who doesn’t appreciate the kind of service he gets. He visited a marriage counselor and said, "When we were first married, I would come home from the office, my wife would bring my slippers and our cute little dog would run around barking.

Now after ten years it's all different, I come home, the dog brings the slippers and my wife runs around barking." "Why complain?" said the counselor. "You're still getting the same service!"

This one is about a woman who believes she is serving her husband well. One woman told another: "My neighbour is always speaking ill of her husband, but look at me, my husband is foolish, lazy and a coward; but have I ever said anything bad about him?"

And this one is about a husband's quite reasonable service request:

From his death bed, the husband called his wife and said, "One month after I die I want you to marry Sammy." "Sammy! But he is your enemy!" "Yes, I know that! I've suffered all these years so let him suffer now."

Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. Follow along as I read the following verses, "This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God."

This morning, let me share with you a few principles about service by answering three questions. First,

1. Who Do We Serve?

There are three answers. First and foremost:

a. We Serve Christ

Paul says that people should see us "as servants of Christ and those entrusted with the secret things of God." It should be evident to all who we serve – Jesus Christ. Not self, not others, not our families, not our bosses or our customers, not our country, but Christ. All other service should then flow out of our service to Christ.

Christ deserves our service. You see, if you're a Christian, you're doing everything for Christ. He saved you and redeemed you and serving him is the least you can do for him.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer had returned to Europe on furlough from his missionary service in Africa when he was 80-years-old. One of the reporters who came to interview the humble doctor just could not understand why such a famous person would leave the comfort and security of Europe to live on the mission field in Africa. He asked Dr. Schweitzer for an explanation. Schweitzer replied: “You see, I had to do something for Christ.”

He recognized the fact that he owed everything to Christ and, therefore, he must do something for Christ. Now, it doesn't mean that you're doing it out of obligation or you're being forced to do it. But, you see, as you come to realize that Jesus served you first by giving his life for you, your service for him will be the result of your thankfulness to him. It's been said: “We are saved to serve, not to be served.”

Jesus Himself set us an example as a servant. **Mark. 10:45 – “For even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Now, remember that you serve only one master, and that is Christ. **Luke 16:13 say, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”**

Mark Twain and a Mormon were arguing about polygamy. The Mormon said, “Give me just one verse in the Bible that forbids polygamy!” Twain quickly answered, “That's easy. ‘No man can serve two masters.’”

I hope you get my point. Who do we serve? We serve Christ. Then, secondly,

b. We serve our physical family.

God wants us to love and serve him first. Then, he wants us to love and serve our families second. Remember, Jesus says that the greatest commandment is

“Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and so forth.” What’s the second greatest commandment? Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Who is your closest neighbor? Your family! For married folks, who would be your very closest neighbor? Your spouse. So, love and serve your spouse. Tell your neighbor, if your neighbor right now is your spouse, “I will serve and love you.” Don’t be shy, this is the love month.

So, we serve our physical family. Then,

c. We serve our spiritual family.

Who is your spiritual family? That’s the church. In our case, we serve each other here in this church. In John 13, Jesus gave this commandment to his disciples, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34, 35) Note that this verse applies only to those who are followers of Christ. So, you show love to other Christians by serving one another.

I see that in display in our church. And I so appreciate everyone for the service you’re doing. Every Sunday, people come early to set up this place for worship. Every Saturday night, someone picks up the bread. Every lunchtime after service, people serve food. And I could cite so many other examples. If you’re serving, you’re a third-class Christian.

We serve Christ, our physical, our spiritual family, in that order. And fourthly,

d. We serve all others.

Others can be anyone that I’ve not mentioned already. That’s your neighbor outside of your household. And we are surrounded with so many of them. How do we serve them? By doing random acts of kindness, as they say. Or deliberate acts of kindness. Whichever you prefer, you serve.

The radio station WGTS 91.9 has been promoting service to others through their project Drive-Thru Difference. I'm sure you've heard of it. Let's watch.

DRIVE-THRU DIFFERENCE VIDEO

Now, I've downloaded a copy of the paper you give to the attendant. And instead of the business card of WGTS 91.9, I would suggest you give our own church business card. But don't do it yet until I've gotten permission from the station. I'll call them later and let you know. OK? In the meantime, you can already start making a difference. I have copies of the paper in the back and you can print your own copies, too, at home. Just go to their web site and download it.

So, we answered the question, Who do we serve? The next question is,

2. How do we serve?

The answer is

We must serve faithfully. Our text says, "It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (v. 2). Paul says that faithfulness is "required" – it's not an option or a suggestion. What he is saying is that if you commit to serve, serve until it is completed. Unless there's an act of God like a snowstorm, or an earthquake, or an illness, please don't offer excuses when you don't feel like doing the job or task anymore. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no" as the Bible says.

Yesterday, I was at the receiving end of service. Many of you don't know but for the past several weeks, I've been going back and forth to Jersey City in New Jersey on weekends. We own a house over there, a two-family house. On the first floor, my former tenants left last November, who was my brother and his family. And so, I had to prep up the apartment for the next tenant. And I realized Usually, I'm gone the whole day Saturday. My family has come with me twice. That's their service.

So, we must serve faithfully, no backing out. Finally, we come to a very important question:

3. Why do we serve?

a. To please God, not men.

Paul says, “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court... Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.” (vs. 3-5)

Paul is stressing the fact that as long as we are faithful in our service to Christ, it doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks or says about us as long as God approves. The important thing is that at the end of the day, Jesus is going to say to us “Well done, good and faithful servant”.

Years ago, I was a missionary in Russia. In my stint over there, I became friends with quite several elementary and high school-age Russians.. I don’t know but they just gravitated around me, maybe it’s my color, how I look, I just looked so different from them. Actually, it was the time when I was trying to draw near to God because I had been backslidden for a long time and I know that God himself brought those kids in order to encourage me and tell me that he still loves me despite my years of spiritual indiscretion. I had the chance to lead a Bible study with those youngsters and we had fun, we sang, we played the guitar, and stuff.

Anyway, my co-missionaries noticed that and I discovered later they were jealous or at least questioned my motives. One time, after a mission outreach, I was walking a few steps ahead of some missionaries when I overheard some of them talking about me. They were saying like I was too eager to befriend these youngsters because I want to look good before others and things like that. I was hurt, of course. But what hurt more was the next day, my missions leader called me and spoke to me privately.

He didn't say much but one thing I remember him saying was, "Rolly, D.L. Moody once said, 'Character is what a man is in the dark.'" Then, our conversation ended.

I left wondering why he said that. I was puzzled. Why did he say that to me - 'Character is what a man is in the dark'. Then, it dawned on me that he was talking about my seeming hypocrisy. That I'm not the person the others see in public. Probably, they couldn't understand why a person so quiet like myself could be so gregarious around the teenagers. I was deeply hurt and cried to God. But God impressed on me to just continue what I was doing. Not to mind what others think.

I did, and God vindicated me in the end. Because at the end of our outreach, when all of us were gathered in a church in Germany, my missions leader spoke and gave his praises to me. He had a change of heart apparently as he saw me do my ministry. Apparently, everyone else thought the same way because they jokingly said, "Rolly, you're the pastor of the first children's church in Russia."

Folks, it wasn't about me. It was about God and what he can do if we serve him faithfully.

And also, let me remind you which I have said many times before, what matters to God is your availability, not your ability. When you are called to a task by the Lord, don't worry whether you can do it. Just do it. Let God do the worrying. As the saying goes, "God will not lead you where his grace cannot keep you." Another one says, "If he leads, he provides".

God will see to it that the work he has assigned you to do will be finished. He will guide you, he will train you, he will equip you, he will provide everything you need. Just be faithful.

In line with this, we are doing a Ministry Fair sometime in March. I want each one of us to find our place of service, to find our place in ministry.

If you are serving already, that'll be a time for you to check out other opportunities of service.

Let me give you another verse to encourage you that it's not about your ability or capabilities. God looks at your heart, at your desire to serve him and honor him in your life. When Samuel was looking for the future king of Israel who would succeed King Saul, God told him to see the sons of Jesse. When Samuel saw Jesse' son Eliab, he said in 1 Sam. 16:6 – “Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD.”

But listen to vs. 7 – “But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart.’”

Someone once said to Abraham Lincoln that the Union's cause in the Civil War was in good shape as long as God was on their side. Lincoln replied that his concern was not whether God was on his side but that he was on God's side.

Are you on God's side? Are you ready to serve the Lord?