

“In All These Things Serve Christ” (Romans 14:16-18)

INTRODUCTION – Service is what man is created by God to do. He serves self or family or society or country but at the end of it, it is still service. He cannot escape service. To live is to serve. To serve is to live. The key question is, who is he serving or living for? Does it matter, you may ask? It matters from the perspective of life. Man has only one life to live. It is more precious to him than all the things he possesses. Once it is spent it is gone forever. He cannot take back his time. Once it becomes past time, it remains in the past for eternity. His time on earth is very finite. The average lifespan is threescore years and ten. However, no man is guaranteed at birth that he will live threescore years and ten. He does not know how much time he has. He ought not to waste even one second of his previous and finite life!

It also matters from the perspective of judgment. If there is no one waiting for man, he can live any way he likes. He answers to no one. The reality is that God is waiting for all mankind to give an account of how they lived. If man stands before the holy God in sin, he will immediately be cast into hell. There is no debate or argument or presentation of excuses. All are conceived and born in sin. Man can serve self or mammon or anyone he wants if there is no judgment waiting for him at the end of life. But the reality is that there is a judgment. **Hebrews 9:27** “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” How can man live any way he likes knowing that a judgment from God awaits him? If he is foolish he will. But if he is wise he ought to take heed how he lives before the Day of Judgment arrives.

Sinful man will not take heed of the judgment even if death stares him in his face. But God’s children, i.e. everyone who calls himself a Christian, ought to. The reason is in Romans 14:16-18 which was written for Christians. God does not desire any of His children to live their lives foolishly and to waste them, not even one second. Their lives from henceforth are priceless as they now live and witness for Christ, the Son of God! Being able to walk around, living and serving, bearing the image of Christ in our mortal flesh is the highest honour God could ever bestow upon any of His creatures. How can we take this privilege lightly! We must carry this honour reverentially by offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. This is our reasonable service in Christ. It is in such a context that God encourages us to ensure that “in all things we serve Christ.”

I. Do Not Void Your Service – 14:16

“Let not then your good be evil spoken of.” This is a prohibition to stop an action in progress. Apparently, there were believers in the church in Rome who had allowed their holy witness to be tarnished because of their personal liberties as Christians. They were careless of their witness and ate whatever their hearts desired. **Romans 14:14-15** “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. **15** But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” A dominating personal preference is a symptom of an egocentric heart. What I want, I just do. What I desire, I just get! There is no second thought on whether the want or desire might impact his witness for Christ. Years of diligent and hard labour bearing a godly witness for Christ could be easily destroyed by one thoughtless act of personal preference.

For example, a mature believer would like to play his favourite sport in a particular overseas location. He has retired and flying to this location to play his sport has been his goal for years. An opportunity of a lifetime arose to do so. However, it clashed with his service in church that has been arranged months before. He looked for a replacement for his service. When asked why he needed to find a replacement, he evaded the truth by saying something general as he was embarrassed that it was to satisfy his personal sporting longing. However, the truth was revealed

a month later. The ones who served with him, especially the one who replaced him, were badly stumbled by his decision. The years of labouring to bear a trustworthy and faithful witness for the Lord were severely damaged! His apology after the fact helped and he was forgiven but the damage to his witness could not be fully repaired as it was like trying to glue back the pieces of a broken mirror. The cracked lines remain.

Building a holy witness for Christ through service takes years. To impact someone for Christ takes more than a year or two of service. It might require decades of patient and selfless service. Long-suffering and perseverance are common virtues in a dedicated and Christ-centred service where others are blessed. Solomon spent the first half of his long 40 year reign as the last king of a united Israel serving the LORD in building the Temple and his palace. However, the succumbing to his personal desires ruined the remaining half of his reign as king such that at the end of his life the LORD divided his kingdom into two.

Many enemies of God's people will try their utmost to ruin the witness of God's children, especially those who have spent the better part of their life building it. But not a single one of them, not even Satan, can void his hard earned devoted witness except himself. He voids his own holy witness when he succumbs to temptation or his own personal preferences.

II. Serve Not for Meat and Drink – 14:17a

As children of God, we need to know that our life of witness for Christ is not of the flesh. This means that it is not made up of the volume of stuff we own on earth. Wanting an abundance of possessions continues to grip the minds and hearts of unbelievers. This world is their home. It is logical and also inevitable that they put their heart, soul, mind and strength into this world. They will protect it from destruction and decay, albeit an utterly futile endeavour. But that will not stop sinful man from trying. They have absolutely nothing to hold on to except this fallen broken self-decaying destructive world. All attempts to find life outside of earth is total foolishness. It is a colossal waste of time, money and energy. Scarce resources are spent in the pursuit of emptiness. Sinful man will never stop building castles in the air. Every generation will serve meat and drink, their unforgiving masters, till the day they die. That will be the only way they can break free from these two cruel masters. The moment they stop drinking and eating, they will surely feel the pain and the bondage they are in. No man can run away from these cruel masters unless they have Christ.

Christ becomes the living water and the bread of life to all who accept Him as their Lord and Saviour. Then they will experience in their hearts the reality of God's truth: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink!" The moment a sinner becomes a Christian he immediately becomes part of the kingdom of God. This happens because he is born again as a son or daughter of God. **1 John 3:1-2** "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. **2** Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." His service for God is in the same mortal flesh but his relationship and total constitution before God in Christ are no longer that of a sinner but a child of God. Therefore he knows that his eternal kingdom is more than just meat and drink and certainly NOT meat and drink! What this means is that he can live without food and water if His heavenly Father decides it to be so. Moses experienced four occasions of forty days and forty nights without food and water:

- 1st time - on Mount Sinai when he received the tablets of the Ten Commandments written with the finger of God (cf. Deuteronomy 9:9);

- 2nd time - at the foot of Mount Sinai after Aaron led the rebellious Israelites into making the golden calves. Moses had to intercede for them inside a tabernacle (temporary one) for 40 days and 40 nights (cf. Deuteronomy 9:18);
- 3rd time - on Mount Sinai where Moses brought new tablets for the Ten Commandments also written with the finger of God. Moses threw down the first tablets because of the golden calf incident and God told him to prepare new tablets (cf. Deuteronomy 10:10);
- 4th time - at Kadesh-Barnea after the Israelites believed the faithless ten spies who reported that the Canaanites were like giants and in their own sight they were as grasshoppers and were convinced to not enter the Promised Land (cf. Deuteronomy 9:23-25).

As children of God, we need to live by faith and focus on seeking only God's kingdom and His righteousness in all that we do, trusting Him to provide whatever we need to keep body and soul together. God may choose to use food and water to keep His children alive but know that He is not dependent on them. His hands are not bound like man's. Therefore as children of God, we must no longer be motivated by materialism. Such a motive is an enemy of faith. All who live by faith serve not for meat and drink!

III. Serve to include All Things Eternal – 14:17b

God's children serve with the love of Christ constraining them. They must take the feelings and spiritual well-being of others around them into consideration when they live their lives and serve Christ. But they must not become man-pleasers. To be a man pleaser is a sin. He is one who has no conviction. To protect the Christian from this fall, God has stated carefully what all Christians must do as they serve Christ. They must serve for all things eternal. Their goals of service are no longer materialism "but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." These have become their new desires.

- *Righteousness in the Holy Ghost* – All believers have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when Christ baptized them with the Holy Spirit at the moment of their salvation. At the same time, the righteousness of the law was also imputed onto them. They have been made righteous in Christ before God. Based upon this inward righteousness, living a righteous life is not only possible but also the constant desire of every believer. He seeks to do all things according to Holy Scriptures, for he knows that this is the only way to live righteously before God. He will learn to put to death things of the flesh that once bound his heart and soul. Truthfulness and all things that are right become his new way of life.
- *Peace in the Holy Ghost* – This is not the peace that the world gives. It is a peace that God alone can give to all who are in Christ. The child of God first experiences this peace when he becomes a child of God. The enmity he had with God has been replaced by peace. He no longer turns his face away from God. He faces God as his heavenly Father just like a child faces his father with love and endearment. He knows he is accepted of the beloved because of the finished work of Christ at Calvary. With this peace in his soul, he serves his God even in the midst of the darkest hour. The storms of life will not diminish but will deepen and establish this peace in his soul as he remains faithful in his service unto Christ. He sleeps like a baby every night knowing that he is at peace with his Creator God and nothing in this universe can take this peace away from him, for it has been gained for him and sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son. He serves with the peace of God in his heart.
- *Joy in the Holy Ghost* – This results in a joy that finds its place in the deepest recesses of his being. No sorrow on earth can dim this joy. He learns to rejoice evermore as he prays without ceasing. Everything that happens to him causes him to give thanks, for he knows that this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning his life. He serves joyfully seeking no reciprocation

of kindness or thanks. The joy in his heart is not measured by the abundance of what he possesses on earth. He considers all the meat and drink as dung to his soul. Whatever his heavenly Father gives to him, he gives thanks with joy. He learns how to be abased and to abound. He has been freed by Christ from the tentacles of materialism that once bound his heart so tightly. He is convicted in his heart to never serve materialism ever again now that he has tasted how sweet and delightful it is to serve his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Holy Ghost is the One who enables him to live in righteousness, peace and joy. It is from above and not below. Unbelievers cannot live in such a manner. It is not by the will of man but the power of the Holy Spirit that helps and energises the child of God to live in such a manner all his life and under all adversities and difficult circumstances.

IV. Serve to be Accepted – 14:18

As such, he now serves to be accepted by God only. “For he that in these things serveth Christ *is* acceptable to God, and approved of men.” With righteousness, peace and joy in his life as he serves his Lord Jesus Christ, he knows when his life ends that he has lived an accepted life to his God. This final acceptance will be on the day of the Great White Throne Judgment after which he will be ushered into the New Jerusalem of the new heaven and new earth. He does not have to wait long, for even now as he serves Christ in this sin-filled world, he knows in his heart that he is right with God as he lives out his life of service according to Holy Scriptures. It is a life of holy service that guarantees success in the eyes of God. It is a success that is measured by his obedience to God’s holy, perfect, and precious Word of Life.

Man will also approve of his life. This approval will not be universal in that there will be the agents of Satan who will persecute him, even unto death. Hundreds of thousands of God's faithful God approved servants have been martyred as they served Christ. However, there will be many others who will be amazed by the holy testimony of God's children. Men like Potiphar who promoted young Joseph to take complete charge of his wealth and did not worry that Joseph would steal from him or be derelict in his duties. **Genesis 39:2-5** “And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. **3** And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. **4** And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all *that* he had he put into his hand. **5** And it came to pass from the time *that* he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.” This was also true of Daniel in the eyes of king Nebuchadnezzar.

The world may hate Christ but they love men with God's given integrity. By such a testimony, believers will see more and more of their loved ones and friends come to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour when the gospel is shared. They will not only hear the gospel of Christ but they will see the gospel of Christ in the lives of God's children who serve Christ in righteousness, peace and joy to the glory of God. Amen.

APPLICATION

Materialism was the bane of every believer before salvation in Christ. Now that the believer is in Christ it is utter foolishness to him to come under the yoke of materialism again. He must be mindful of the liberty he now has in Christ. However, the liberty he has in Christ must not be abused. It must be carefully lived with others’ spiritual well-being in mind. Otherwise, he might end up being his own enemy and destroy the holy witness for Christ that he spends his life building. His life is more than meat and drink. It is in things eternal such as righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Constrained by the love of Christ, the child of God will surely find approval from God and from man by his life of service unto Christ, his Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have there been experiences in your life where you made the wrong choice in exercising your Christian liberty and you regretted it? Please share one of these experiences.
2. A Christian student has been sharing Christ with his classmate for the past year. During a class test he saw this classmate cheating. What is the right thing for him to do?
3. You witnessed your colleague opening the office safe and taking some money out. You confronted him and he was evasive. You reported him to your manager who questioned your colleague. The conclusion was that he took the money to supplement the company's petty cash. There was no "bad behaviour" on the part of your colleague. What is the right thing to do to correct the misunderstanding?
4. Do you have the peace of God in your heart during this pandemic? Please share your experience.
5. Are you a joyful person or a person with a sad disposition? Please give reasons for your answer.