The Servant’s servant

Text: Romans 12:1

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**Scriptures:** John 13:1-17; Romans 12:1-8

**Songs Chosen:** Behold our God, [SttL] 468, 476, 271, 106

Series: Occasional (Cadets and GEMS focus)

Theme: In light of all that God has mercifully done for them in Christ, Paul calls the Roman Christians to present themselves for active, humble service in the church, thereby utilising the gifts graciously given to them by the Lord for the benefit of others.

Proposition: Present yourself for active service in the church with a humble willingness to use the gifts which you have been given for the benefit of others.

**Introduction**

Cadets & GEMS is a scouting-type movement for children aged from 8 to 15. The children complete Bible studies and badge work. National camps are held every three years where the children from across New Zealand meet together for a week of fun, fellowship and studies. The Cadet program was founded in 1952 in the United States of America, and was introduced into New Zealand in 1964. Since then, it has grown to [14 clubs throughout New Zealand](http://rcnzonline.com/cadetsandgems/clubs/). The basis of the Calvinist Cadet Corps & GEMS movement is the Word of God (the Bible) understood according to the concepts expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic confession.

We earlier sang the ‘Cadet hymn’ – “Living for Jesus a life that is true” which reflect the Cadet Motto: Living for Jesus. Here are the words of the first stanza: “*Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please him in all that I do; yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free, this is the pathway of blessing for me*”.

Our focus this morning is on being a servant of Christ.

1. Serving others is a significant part of a life that is true.
2. Serving others is an important part of yielding glad-hearted allegiance to Christ.
3. Serving others is an essential part of striving to please the Lord.
4. Serving others is a major part of the pathway of blessing in this life.

We’re going to see the truth of these statements from our text in Romans 12:1-8 under three headings:

1. The servant’s motivation
2. The servant’s attitude
3. The servant’s gifts
4. **The servant’s motivation**

The following illustration of two different wars is taken from Donald S. Whitney’s book “*Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*”. On Sunday 7th December 1941 the Japanese launched a surprise aerial attack on Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, the base for the US Pacific fleet. Over 2,400 Americans were killed, 1,300 wounded. Many ships and aircraft were destroyed or damaged. At first it looked like a brilliant victory for the Japanese, having crippled the naval power of the US in the Pacific. However, it proved to be a colossal mistake. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbour, America tried to stay out of the second World War, but afterwards this all changed. On Monday 8th December 1941, volunteers lined up to join the armed forces, tens of thousands reported late for work or school, saying that they would be going to military boot camp in a few weeks. Teenagers lied about their age so that they could enlist. Middle-aged men wept when told they were not fit to fight. People wanted to serve their country and were willing to leave behind the comforts of home to risk injury or death in so doing.

The Vietnam war 25 years later was very different. Almost nobody volunteered, many were compelled into service through the military draft. Many went to college or left the country to avoid being enlisted.

The contrasting responses to these two wars was a complete difference in motivation.

Motivation deeply affects how we serve. The motivation to serve Christ is found in the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans which contains many highly significant terms and phrases which carry deep theological significance e.g.

* *“The righteous shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17b).*
* *“Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).*
* *“Those whom he predestined he also called” (Rom 8:30).*
* *“Those whom he called he also justified” (Rom 8:30).*
* *“You were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy” (Rom 11:30).*

One of the most highly significant words in the book of Romans is in our text. It is the word ‘therefore’. ‘Therefore’ links the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans to what follows; the response of those who have received the love and mercy of God in Christ in how they live. Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*” (Rom 12:1).

Like those who eagerly volunteered to serve their country in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbour, those who have received many mercies from God eagerly desire to serve their Lord. Like someone going straight to the recruitment officer they present themselves for service (that is the meaning of ‘present your bodies as a living sacrifice’). They are motivated by love for Jesus who first loved them and serving them in giving up His life so that they would live. Jesus spoke of the motivation to live for Him in willing service when he said: “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (John 14:15).

The mercies of God include eternal life, justification and a new nature which enables a person who has been granted saving faith to become more and more like Christ in his character. The Holy Spirit then changes the person so that they think like a child of God, not like someone in the unbelieving world. They want to know what God’s good, acceptable and perfect will for them is. They want to do the good works which God has prepared for them. They want to serve the Lord, above all else. They want to ‘live for Jesus a life that is true’. The nineteenth century Reformed Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once said “*He is no Christian who does not seek to serve His God*”.

The word translated ‘worship’ in verse one literally means ‘service’. It was used of those hired for pay to work in the 1st century Greco-Roman world. Should we then present ourselves for service to Christ for the rewards which come from that labour? Certainly not if we think that we can earn our salvation, our acceptance by God, our place in the Kingdom of Christ, yet there are rewards for serving the Lord. There is a deep pleasure and satisfaction in pleasing God. David knew this when he wrote in Psalm 40:8 “*I delight to do your will, O my God*”. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts believers to actively serve the Lord“*Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God*” (Heb 13:16). Serving Christ from a foundational motivation of love, not duty, gives greater assurance to the person serving that they do belong to Jesus.

Willingly presenting yourself for Christian service out of love for Christ and thankfulness for God’s mercy towards you is one of the ways in which you can gain greater confidence that you are a new creation in Christ.

Let’s now focus on the attitude of a servant of Christ

1. **The servant’s attitude**

This is the Cadet Code: “A cadet must be reverent, obedient, compassionate, consecrated, trustworthy, pure, grateful, loyal, industrious and cheerful”. Notice that many of these words speak of the attitude of the Cadet or GEM: e.g. reverent – an attitude deep respect; grateful – an attitude of thankfulness; loyal – an attitude of committed allegiance.

In verse 3, the Apostle Paul writes about the central attitude of Christian service: “*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned*”. The faith which believers share in common is the standard against which we are to measure ourselves.

This faith is trust in Christ Jesus as the Saviour who came ‘*not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*’ (Matt 20:28). This faith believes that Jesus, who is God the Son, became a human being and that he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8). The person who has this faith understands that Jesus is the One who has served them by laying down his life so that they can have freedom and live. The person who has this faith thinks of themselves with a mind which is being transformed to become more and more the mind of Christ.

The key attitude is that of humility, not pride. The servant of Christ has an attitude to service which is like that of his or her Master. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciple’s feet, he demonstrated the attitude and aspect of a lowly humble servant. He said, “*For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you*” (John 13:15). Jesus was not teaching that we must physically wash one another’s dirty feet (although we may do this!) He was teaching the principle of humble service to others, especially to those with whom we share our lives as disciples of Christ.

Sometimes people serve which attitudes which are not like Christ, for example:

1. With an attitude of **guilt**. I know that I should serve the Lord, I know that it is my duty. How little can I serve in order that my conscience doesn’t bother me too much?
2. With an attitude of **superiority**. I would like a prominent role in Christian ministry so that I can have the respect of others. In a leadership role I have influence and can direct other people to do what I want. The Scripture warns elders not to be ‘domineering over those in your charge, but to be examples to the flock’. Examples of what? Amongst other things, humble service.
3. With an attitude of **self-serving**. I’ll only serve in ways which benefit me. Too many ministries have failed because in the end the person was serving their own interests in things like financial gain, prestige, power over others, opportunities to sin without being detected (e.g. in sexual misconduct). An attitude of self-serving often means that a person will ‘serve’ when and only in ways that are convenient for them, but not otherwise.
4. With an attitude of **fear of possible consequences** which limits how they will serve. I don’t want to serve if doing so is going to cost me too much loss, discomfort or difficulty. I also don’t want to become too bored with the work.

Ask yourself, do any of these non-Christlike attitudes fit you? There are somethings which are very clear from the example of Christ and others who have imitated him in his service. If you serve the Lord for long enough you will be underappreciated by at least some people some of the time. Jesus was. If you serve the Lord consistently, there will be times when the work is likely to become mundane. If you serve the Lord faithfully, there will likely be times when it seems like your work is making no difference in the lives of others. If you serve the Lord as Christ as He served you then it will cost you in ways that you had not anticipated. Christian serving costs the server.

If your motivation is not love for the Lord and your attitude is not progressively modelled more and more on Christ, then you will likely find the work of service increasingly burdensome and you are very likely to become more and more disillusioned and may well quit in the end.

So, here’s a message for us all, myself included:“*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think with sober judgment, each of us according to the measure of faith that God has assigned”.* Or to put it another way, serve with the mind of Christ, in humility count others as more significant than yourself (Phil 2:3*).* We’ve looked at the motivation to serve and the attitude of the servant of Christ, now we look consider the different ways in which we serve.

1. **The servant’s gifts**

The Cadets and GEMS are in uniform today. They are clearly identified by the clothes they are wearing. They are all in the same club and therefore have much in common, but they are clearly not all the same! They have different personalities, are part of different families and are skilled in doing different things.

Part of their training in Cadets is doing ‘badge work’. Often Cadets enjoy some badges more than others, and are more capable in some activities than others. This is true of all of us. In our text from Romans 12, the Apostle Paul speaks about the church as being like a human body with different parts. “*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another*” (v4-5).

We are not all capable of, and skilled at, the same tasks, we have complementary gifts which when used together bring great strength to families, churches and nations. This truth is reflected in the Cadet Pledge: “*Thankful to God for his gifts to me, I pledge myself to be ready to serve God, my parents, my country, my church, my neighbour and my corps*”. In v6 we hear the exhortation to exercise the gifts which we have been given: “*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them*”.

What follows is not an exhaustive list of different gifts, nor does it suggest that if someone has one gift they don’t have another one. Paul mentions ‘prophesy’ in v6 – speaking the truth of God’s revealed word. Service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and acts of mercy are also mentioned. The message is clear, each one of us is called to diligently and faithfully use the gifts we have been given, especially in the body of Christ, the church. We have different gifts and we are to serve Christ by using these for the glory of God and for the good of others.

We should not be thinking “How little can I serve in the church without my conscience bothering me? But “How much can I serve without neglecting my other responsibilities to family, work and other commitments”. I am thankful for the ministry of Cadets and GEMS in our churches and to those who serve as Counsellors. As with any active, consistent, faithful work of service, it is not always enjoyable, not always well received, not always well supported by others, not always comfortable and not always equally interesting. Congregation, how can you and I serve and support the Counsellors in our club with the individual gifts we have been given?

Cadets and GEMS use the club nights to actively develop your God given gifts so that you can be active in service now and in the future. As you study God’s Word and learn more about how much mercy God has extended through the work of Christ on behalf of God’s people, then believe that Jesus died in your place and that you have life in Him. Many of you, perhaps all, do believe this already. Praise the Lord!

If you have not yet done so, commit your life to serve the One who first served you by laying down His life, suffering the fierce and just wrath of God in your place, and who has been raised to new life. Serve Him not first and foremost out of a sense of duty and obligation, but because you love Him. As you get to know Him more and more through the pages of the Bible, your love for him and thankfulness for what He has done for you will increase. Serving will become more and more a joy, despite the times when it is difficult, discouraging and even dangerous.

Serving others humbly gives glory to God and demonstrates both to you and to others that your heart has been changed and that you desire to be a servant because you love God. Serving others humbly demonstrates that you do not use your gifts in the church because you feel guilty, nor because you want to be looked up to and be in a position of power, nor because you are actually trying to serve yourself.

The goal for each of us should be to serve in the church in such a way that the body of Christ is stronger because we are actively, faithfully and consistently using our gifts.

Eventually most people retire if they live long enough. This often means that at some stage in their lives they stop full-time work. For you Cadets and GEMS that’s a long way in the future! However, for our older members here it’s worth remembering that there is no retirement from service for Christ. Rather the Word of God encourages us to continue to serve for as long as we live: “*As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good*” (2 Thess 3:13).

Occasionally in churches older people have said things like: “*We’ve served our time, now we’re going to leave it to the younger ones*” The ways in which we serve may well change as we grow older, but we are all called to continue to serve with the gifts we have. Without naming names, there are a number in this congregation who are actively and faithfully serving the Lord even though they are technically ‘retired’. Their work is a great encouragement to us all and in this they also serve us.

So, to conclude, in the words of text: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers (and sisters), by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”.*

Brothers and sisters, serve Christ, the Servant King who served you by giving himself up for you unto death. Serve Christ with the attitude with which he lived and died: humility. Serve Christ willingly with the gifts which God has given to you. Live for Jesus a life that is true, strive to please him in all that you do; yield your allegiance to Christ, glad hearted and free. This is the pathway of blessing for you.

AMEN