

God's Workmanship

Our Contribution to Creation

July 25, 2021

Today we're looking at loving and serving our *Father* by loving and serving His *children*.



But before we get to *that*, take a look at *this*. **Which side of the spoon would you rather be on: server or servee?** Because with each encounter in our day-to-day life, **we choose between the two sides of the spoon.** We're always either *consuming* or *contributing*. And we won't find peace until we find our place in a proper balance between the two.



Now I've been saying how God's Spirit is like a tugboat, and we're the tanker that He's slowly turning around with each little nudge to which we rightly respond. But I *wasn't* aware that our ship has a *name*.



For we are *God's workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus to *do good works* [For "by *one* sacrifice He has *made* perfect forever" (Heb 10:14a) *God's workmanship*] ... brought near through the blood of Christ. ["those who are *being made* holy" (Heb 10:14b)] ... no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and *members of God's household*, [ready to join the family to display our *faithworks*! Because *that's* how faith works.] – Ephesians 2:10, 13, 19 NIV



You *are* the light of the world ... [so] *let* your light *shine* before others, so *that* they may see your good works and give *glory* to your *Father* who is in heaven. – Matthew 5:16 ESV

[But] Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people *in order* to be seen by them, [rather than *helping* them "give *glory* to your *Father* who is in heaven"] for *then* you will have no *reward* from your *Father* who is in heaven. – Matthew 6:1 ESV

We're spiritual siblings in "God's household" because we share the same Father. You, me, and all the other tankers are only strangers in the sense of separated siblings who've never met.

But when they do, **they immediately sense the bond of blood they share**, which motivates them to care *about* and to care *for* each other. Because we're intuitively motivated to joyfully serve and support others, to the degree that we see them as sisters and brothers.

And **this doesn't stop with our fellow believers.** Imagine how your heart would *change*, toward the lost souls you know, if you were to discover they're a long-lost sister, or long-lost brother!

So don't get *tired* of doing what is good. Don't get *discouraged* and give up, for we *will* reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time. Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to *everyone*, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters. [Because *we* share a unique *bond of blood* like no *other*!] – Galatians 6:9-10 NLT



Years ago I was in my office, really needing the restroom, and waiting for a “sister-servant” to finish cleaning it. And the *moment* she did, and closed the door and left, I raced in and went about my business ... *until* she suddenly rushed back in *right* behind me, without *noticing* me, and went back to work on something she’d forgotten to finish. What do you *do*? I’m a *statue*. There’s no way out. So I *very* quietly recompose myself, slowly turn, and softly say, “**I’m sure glad we’re family.**” She basically *died* – first from the *shock*, and *then* the embarrassment.

But I *gladly commend* her as a sister-saint and first-rate *servant* of all us *siblings*. Like *Paul did*:



I *commend* to you [Roman believers] *our sister* Phoebe, a *servant* of the *church* in Cenchrea. [Corinth’s eastern seaport] I ask you to *receive* her in the Lord in a way *worthy* of the *saints* and to give her *any help* she may *need* from you, for *she* has been a *great help* to many people, including *me*. – Romans 16:1-2 NIV



“Sister Phoebe” is the *first* person mentioned in Paul’s letter to the Romans, and the *only* one “commended” rather than *greeted* – which makes her, most likely, the one entrusted to deliver what most consider to be the *greatest* declaration of *inspired* Christian doctrine *ever* created. It was in good hands with *our* sister Phoebe.

Somewhere among these Corinthian ruins was an ancient church *dedicated* to our Phoebe. Notice, Paul *doesn’t* say she’s a servant of *God*, but “a servant of the church in Cenchrea”. We can serve *God* without serving in a *church*; but we can’t serve in a *church* without serving *God*. Because **whenever we’re serving others, we’re serving our Lord**. Unless we’re serving out of a sense of *guilt* or *fear* rather than *love* and *joy* and *gratitude* for *God’s* *greater* love for *us*.

In the verses just prior to naming our tanker “God’s workmanship”, Paul writes:

Because of *His* great love for *us*, *God*, who is *rich* in *mercy*, *made* us alive with *Christ* even when *we* were *dead* in transgressions ... [so *keep this* in mind, and it’ll *keep you* from getting tired of doing good] For it is by *grace* you have been *saved*, through *faith*— and this *not* from *yourselves*, it is the *gift* of *God*— not by *works*, so that *no* one can boast. For *we* are *God’s workmanship*, created in *Christ* Jesus to *do* good works, which *God* prepared in *advance* for *us* to *do*. – Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-10 NIV

I just want to make sure we *really* understand that **we aren’t saved by works**, (*that* comes as a *gift* by *God’s* *grace*) **but we are saved for works**. And *those* come by joyful desire as *we* come to more and more see our eternal salvation as our most undeserved gift by our all-loving Creator.

[Last Sunday we read *this* part that Paul wrote to those Romans] Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to *impurity* and to *ever-increasing wickedness*, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. – Romans 6:19 NIV

Look what’s available to us: **instead of a vicious cycle, we’re offered a victorious cycle!** Because *you* were *created* to be an integral *part* of something much *bigger* than *yourself*.

You may not see it, but you've been "factory loaded" by our Father-Creator to offer a gift only *you can give* – because the gift *is you*, transforming into a reflection of God's glory. (2 Cor 3:18)

Therefore, I urge you ... in view of God's mercy, to offer *your* bodies as *living* sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is *your* spiritual act of worship. – Romans 12:1 NIV

[Because] God, who is *rich* in *mercy*, made us alive *with* Christ – Ephesians 2:4-5 NIV

[Who said] "Who is *greater*, he who *sits* at the table, or he who *serves*? [That's a question we answer with *actions*, not *words*] Is it not [in *your eyes*] he who *sits* at the table? Yet *I* am among you as the One who *serves*." – Luke 22:27 NKJ

So, if we're not growing in serving, is it because we don't actually *believe* that the serving side of the spoon is the *greater* way? Or do we just not *want* to be like *Jesus*? Whatever the case, there's a *greater* reality you *need* to face: **you weren't saved to sit and wait to be served**. Polar opposite, in fact. **You were saved to wait on those who need what only you can serve**. Offering *yourself* as an act of worship is like tithing – giving a *consistent* portion of your *income* as an *offering* – to do your *part* to advance God's *kingdom*.



But **we seem to be less inclined to consciously consistently offer, say, 10% of our tongue, or time, or actions, to encourage and edify others**, to advance God's kingdom, by growing in God's glory, by doing some good. Right after Paul commends Phoebe, He says:

Greet *Priscilla* and *Aquila*, my *fellow workers* in Christ Jesus. [FYI: In Paul's day the husband's name came first, indicating Priscilla's more prominent role] They risked their lives for me. [And *that's* Christ-like *serving* and *giving*, which must outweigh our *craving* for *sitting* and *waiting* to be served] Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are *grateful* to them. Greet also the *church* that *meets* at their *house*. – Romans 16:3-5 NIV

[Paul met this couple under difficult circumstances] A Jew named *Aquila* ... had recently come [to Corinth] from *Italy* with his wife *Priscilla*, because *Claudius* [the Roman Emperor] had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because *he* was a tentmaker as *they* were, he stayed and worked with them. – Acts 18:2-3 NIV

So they get kicked out of Italy, wind up in Corinth (where Phoebe's serving at Cenchræa), cross paths with Paul, and end up with **a church in their house, and a ministry in their tent-making business!** When it comes to our faith and our spiritual act of worship as God's workmanship, **if all you've got is what you've got at church, you don't got much!** Our *home* and our *workplace* – as much as is appropriately possible – *must* be at *least* as much about "our spiritual act of worship" as *church* is. This is where the "training wheels" are on. We need to take 'em off, and **be willing to risk, if not our lives, at least our vanity and pride and the praise of unbelievers**.

And *you* get to discover what serving *looks* like in *your* life. It doesn't have to be anything *formal*; and it doesn't have to look like anyone *else*. But if you find you have *no* desire to serve, because of a consistent desire to *be* served, **you need to take a long, hard look at why you're not more-and-more on the serving side of the spoon**.

Because Jesus pretty much *demands* that we follow *His* example; but it's more than *that* even: **He demands that it be our desire to be like Him.** And He came to do two basic things:

The Son of Man ... [came] to serve, and to give His life – Matthew 20:28 NIV

A key indicator of maturing, is finding ourselves less-and-less asking **“Who can meet my needs?”** and more-and-more asking, **“Whose needs can I meet?”** There'll be times when we're on the receiving side of the spoon, but there's a balance we need to strike in our life.



Know why the Dead Sea has no life? Salt. Know why it has so much salt? No outflow. Only inflow. And **with no outflow, the salt of the earth stagnates and poisons itself.** (Mt 5:13) So we need to be intentional about allowing the Lord to continue turning His workmanship into a living sacrifice by taking the time to *turn* to others with *words of support* and *encouragement*, as well as *helpful actions* and *listening ears* and *prayers*.



What do you say we practice offering ourselves ten times a day till next Sunday? Put ten dimes in a pocket (that's our ten/per cents). And move each one to *another* pocket each time you turn on a dime. And at the end of the day, reflect with Dad on what you've done; and reset your dimes.



It takes *effort*, because we're a *nation* of consumers. We hold *contests* to see how much one human is *capable* of consuming. Isn't that *adorable*. I *suffer* from choice *paralysis*. I'm overwhelmed by *too many* options. So I try to educate myself about all the various pros and cons of frozen burritos or *whatever*. And so we have websites and magazines committed to training us to be better *consumers*, so **we can get the most for ourselves.** Yet we *all* know, at the end of the day, that the *pleasure* of *consuming* is fleeting, and that *truly fulfilling*, long-lasting, *joy* only comes when **we can give the most of ourselves.** So get a grip on that spoon!



[There is] one God and Father of all ... who gave some to be *apostles*, some to be *prophets*, some to be *evangelists*, and some to be *pastors* and *teachers*, [Know why?] to *prepare God's people* for works of service, – Ephesians 4:6-12 NIV



You've hired me to prepare *you* to serve as only *you* can *do*. Let's not turn into an "NFL" church – where a few trained professionals run around (in dire need of *rest*), while being watched by screaming spectators (in dire need of *exercise*). **You're on the team, so get in the game!** Because a *huge* part of your created purpose is *your* contribution to our Father's creation.



After all, who's greater: the one sitting down, or the one standing up to serve? No need to answer with your *words*. We'll answer *that* question with our *actions*.

So get a grip, and serve your heart out!