

“Spiritual Service”  
Romans 1:9  
(Preached at Trinity, December 31, 2006)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, **Verses 8-15** were written with a more personal tone. Paul is writing with a mind to their mutual encouragement and edification.  
**Romans 1:12** – “. . . that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”
2. **Verse 8** begins with Paul expressing his gratitude to God for their reputation, their consistent testimony to the world. They were living their faith.
3. We can see in this section that Paul is a man of prayer.  
**Romans 1:9** – “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;”
4. As I pointed out when I began this section, Paul purpose here is not to teach doctrine, yet he is being very doctrinal. Paul lived and breathed doctrine.
5. In **Verse 9** Paul makes a statement that demands our attention.  
“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel”
6. There is much theology here. What exactly does Paul mean by serving with his spirit?
7. First, we need to remember that human beings are God’s unique creation created distinct from every other living creature.
  - A. Unlike the animals, we were created in the image of God.  
**Genesis 1:26** – “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”
  - B. We were also created with a soul that can never die.  
Our bodies are mortal just like all other living beings upon the earth. They age and then die. It is our soul that separates us from the animals.  
Our soul or spirit is immortal.  
**Matthew 10:28** – “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”  
**Ecclesiastes 12:7** – “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.
  - C. We need to be careful about drawing a strict division between the body and spirit or mind and spirit. We are talking about the whole man.
    1. We are able to know God through our spirit but it occurs on the level of the mind.
    2. This false division of body or mind and spirit has led to such things as praying in the spirit – that is, praying in a language totally unknown to our mind.
8. It is our spirit that enables us to commune with God.

- A. Adam was created to enjoy God, to fellowship with God. God spoke with him and led him. Adam knew God, he was able to comprehend God.
- B. When Adam sinned he died spiritually. He no longer had a desire to seek God. He became blind to the things of God. He could no longer please God. Every man since Adam has been born spiritually dead.  
**Ephesians 2:1-3** – “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; <sup>2</sup> Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: <sup>3</sup> Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”
- C. The lost man is alienated from God. He is completely unable to comprehend God on a spiritual level.  
**1 Corinthians 2:14** – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”
9. When God saves us we are spiritually restored. We become spiritually alive.  
**Ephesians 4:24** – “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”
10. As I’ve said, we must not make a strict division between the body and soul. Paul is not saying here that he is doing something with his spirit that his mind is completely removed from. He is stating, however, that there are things that the believer is able to do that the unbeliever is totally incapable of because he is spiritually dead.  
 Paul is talking about a spiritual life:  
**Romans 1:9** – “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son”
11. The lost person being spiritually dead is only able to live according to the flesh
- A. He is actually worse off than an animal
1. Animals live according to the flesh but they are morally neutral – they do not possess the ability to either please or displease God. They are not under the law. They only seek to satisfy their physical desires and needs. There is no spiritual dimension to their lives
  2. Lost human beings also live according to the flesh – in other words they also seek to satisfy their physical desires.
  3. But human beings are not morally neutral. They have consciences. They have the law of God written upon their hearts – but they suppress it. It is worse than just having a comprehension problem. Lost humanity is in open war against God. They hate God and despise His rule.
- B. Human beings were created with the image of God written upon them. That image was marred but not totally obliterated. All men have an understanding of the divine. There is a mark of God upon them but they suppress the truth. We’ll see this more as the chapter progresses.  
**Romans 1:18-19** – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; <sup>19</sup> Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.”
1. This tells us that all men know God and all men sense God’s displeasure
  2. Men all over the world seek various means of satisfying the wrath of God.

12. So what does Paul mean here that he served God with his spirit?  
I think he is giving us the great contrast of humanity – the difference between those who serve God spiritually and those who serve Him after the flesh.
- I. Lost men are prone to become religious
- A. God has left the image of Himself upon our souls
1. Man is incomplete without God. He was created in the image of God
  2. The existence of God is all around us
  3. The lost man tries to suppress the reality of God but he cannot.  
He tries to deny the judgment of God, but he cannot.  
He tries to deny God's wondrous grace, but he cannot
  4. *Calvin* – “The wicked, though they exalt themselves against God, and though, in contempt of his grace, they please themselves in obtaining their desires, are yet not able to despise that grace altogether.”
- B. Man naturally seeks to fulfill the image of God within himself
1. Instead of following the one true God he seeks to satisfy his need in other ways  
**Romans 1:21-23** – “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup>  
Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”
  2. The lost man comforts his conscience with the vanity of human religion
    - a. He assumes he is being accepted by his righteous deeds
    - b. As Paul described of the Jews, they set out to establish their own righteousness.  
**Romans 10:3** – “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”
  3. The religious lost man's righteousness is motivated by his fear of God. He strives for good deeds and moral behavior but nothing is enough to bring him peace – and none of it satisfies God
  4. This is an obedience that is only servile in nature – service out of fear
    - a. The Law is grievous
    - b. They serve out of duty, but find it demanding
    - c. There is no love for God
    - d. Doubts and fears are frequent because the law cannot bring peace  
A lack of assurance is sometimes due to a servile obedience to the Law
- II. Paul's service was in stark contrast to this carnal obedience  
**Romans 1:9** – “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son”

- A. Paul makes two statements about his service
    - 1. He is serving with his spirit. This is possible because of the new birth. He is serving through the gospel. He is spiritually alive. He is able to perform spiritual service
    - 2. Second, he is serving through Christ Jesus – his service was motivated through the Gospel of Christ.
  - B. Paul’s obedience was what we call Gospel obedience, or evangelical obedience
    - 1. Evangelical obedience is motivated from a love for Christ and a desire for communion with Him
      - a. We obey and serve God because we love Him  
**1 John 5:3** – “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”
      - b. David described his attitude towards the Law  
**Psalms 119:97** – “O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day.”  
**Psalms 119:165** – “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”
    - 2. Samuel Bolton describes the difference in  
*The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*  
“In servile obedience the man does things in a legal spirit, either hoping to get rewards by it, or fearing punishments if he omits the duty. The godly man, on the other hand, goes about duty for the sake of obtaining communion with God, and knows it to be his reward and happiness to have that communion, while the lack of it is the greatest punishment he can endure.”  
“The one kind of man looks for his satisfaction in the duty by the performance of the duty, the other looks for satisfaction in the duty as he finds Christ thereby.”
  - C. Pastors are often saddened by a lack of commitment among their congregation
    - 1. Many people in churches offer a half-hearted commitment at best
      - a. They attend with a lack of enthusiasm. They seem bored by the whole affair.
      - b. Some seldom read their Bibles, Bible study or Sunday School has little appeal
      - c. They seldom pray
      - d. They seldom serve in the church
      - e. They give little regard to the matter of holiness
      - f. For some this apathy and deadness is simply because they are serving in the flesh  
It is servile obedience rather than evangelical obedience
        - a. Servile obedience is simply religious activity – they are spiritually dead, they are not in love with Christ, and they will perish in their sins.
        - b. Gospel obedience is driven by a new heart, a love for Christ
- III. The best religious reforms of the lost man are only partial reforms
- A. The lost religious man does only selective obedience
    - 1. His heart is not in it – he despises obedience but fears to disobey

2. He always sets his own standards of selective obedience
  - a. He may forsake some of his more scandalous behavior  
*Matthew Henry* – “Carnal hearts are apt to think themselves as good as they should be, because perhaps, in some particular instance, they are not so bad as they have been.”
  - b. He may give up certain vices –  
Drinking, smoking, listening to rock music
  - c. He may take great pride in a few particular religious views or positions and then zealously condemn other who do not hold their position.
  - d. All of these things do nothing to change the heart – They are still just as wicked as before
- B. Only evangelical obedience results in consistent obedience
  1. Only a heart for Christ will lead us to obey
  2. Our heart will determine our behavior  
**Matthew 6:21** – “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
  3. Genuine repentance is a hating and forsaking of all sin. False repentance is to hold on to our darling sins.
- C. To toy with partial commitments with God is to risk losing our soul
  1. Repentance is a gift from God. Nothing but a full turning from our sin will suffice.
  2. To continue in sin is to make a mockery of the death of our Lord.  
**Hebrews 6:4-6** – “For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, <sup>5</sup> And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, <sup>6</sup> If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.”

#### Conclusion:

1. What is the nature of your obedience? Why are you here this morning?  
Why are you serving Christ?  
Is your service lukewarm? Are you bored with religion? Is Christ insufficient to garner your love?
2. Paul said he was motivated by Christ whom he served with the newness of his heart.  
**Romans 1:9** – “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son”
3. This is spiritual service. Are you spiritually alive? The lost man will always be inconsistent in religion. He just simply doesn’t have the heart for it.  
Our life must be driven by Christ. Love Him, serve Him, follow Him.
4. Jesus said His highest goal, His greatest delight was the will of the Father. May God grant us to have the mind of Christ – to serve Him with our spirit.  
**Psalms 16:8-9** – “I have set the LORD always before me: because *he is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved. <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.”