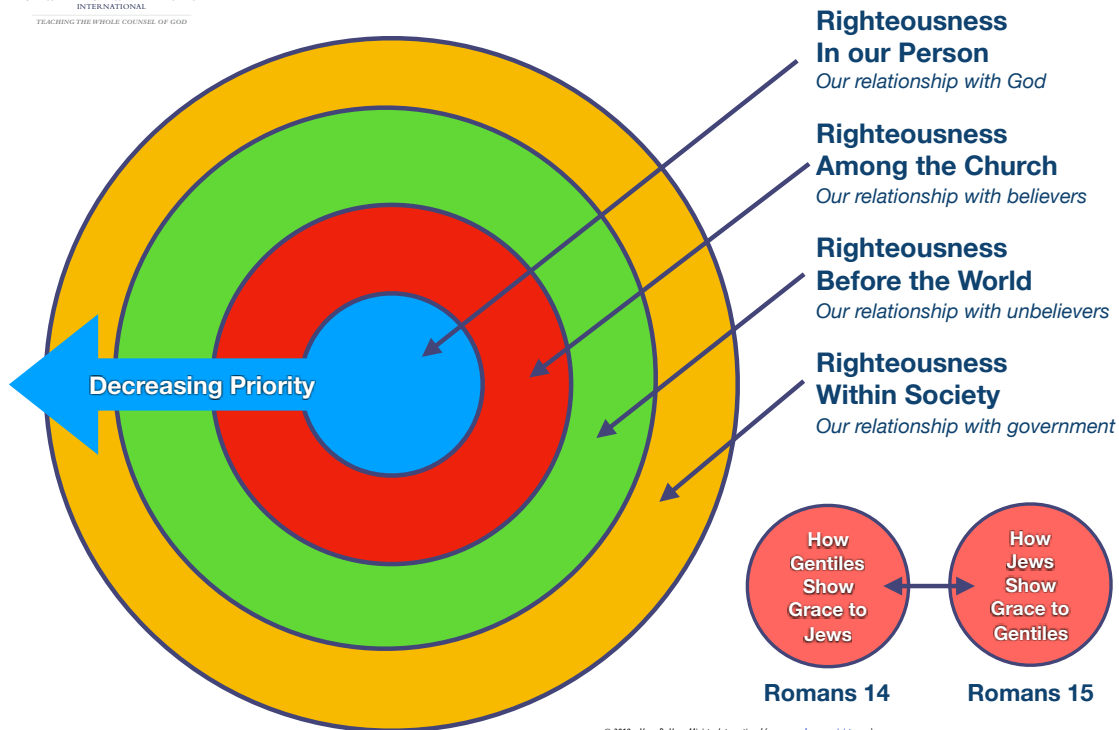


Romans 12B (2017)

- Let's move to the next "ring" in Paul's priority for our sanctification
 - Last week we began studying Paul's bull's eye of pursuing personal righteousness in our relationships



THE PRIORITY OF SANCTIFICATION ROMANS 12-15



- Remember, we're talking about our righteousness lived out before people, not our standing before God
 - Our righteousness before God is obtained solely by our faith in Christ
 - When we believe in Jesus, we receive His righteousness by faith, which is a perfect righteousness
 - So from the standpoint of God's judgment, we are already 100% righteous by faith alone
- But the question remains how closely do our lives reflect Christ's righteousness

- Are we righteous in our thoughts and actions and in the way we conduct our relationships?
- Does our thinking and behavior comport with the perfect standard that Christ set for us?
- Of course, the answer to that last question is no, since none of us will live a perfectly sinless life, given the sin nature of our flesh
 - But that doesn't mean a Christian should concede to the inevitability of our sin or turn a blind eye to it
 - While we may not be able to live sinlessly, by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit we can get close
 - As someone once observed, Christians aren't sinless but we should sin less
- Over the centuries, many Christian men and women have made the pursuit of godliness their life's priority
 - Some have succeeded in conforming their lives so closely to Christ's example that the world saw them as blameless
 - Their lives became such testimonies to godliness that whatever sin remained in them was barely noticeable
- If this sounds like an impossible goal to you, then perhaps you haven't given enough attention to the task Paul outlined in vs.1-2
 - Paul said our life goal should be to make ourselves a living sacrifice for the needs of serving Christ and His glory
 - We make this sacrifice daily by rejecting the world's priorities and seeking the mind of Christ
 - We renew our thinking through God's word and allow that new thinking to generate new righteous behaviors
 - Our new behaviors demonstrate to the world what God's will is concerning what is good and perfect
- This is the starting point for our pursuit of sanctification, and it makes the rest of the journey possible
 - We all begin by working on our personal righteousness in our relationship with God

- If we don't pursue righteousness in our relationship with God, our fellowship with Him will suffer
- We will feel distant from Him, not because He moved away from us but because we moved away from Him
- Our prayer life will evaporate, our interest in God's word will wane, and our resistance to Satan's schemes will weaken
- We will become weak spiritually, our sin nature will reassert itself, and as a result we'll have little spiritual strength to tackle the outer rings
 - As Jesus spoke

John 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

John 7:38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

- The spiritual strength the Spirit brings to our spirit becomes the source for us to bless others in the name of Christ
- But if we are not pursuing personal righteousness under the Spirit's guidance, then how can we instruct or encourage others?
- That's the principle underlying this entire system represented by the bull's eye
 - The strength we gain in one ring becomes the means to bless the next ring
 - Which is why we can't "skip" a ring
 - We can't ignore our personal relationship with God and expect to prosper in our relationships within the church
 - And we can't neglect our relationships in the body of Christ and expect to be a powerful witness for Christ in the world
- So with that understanding, let's press on into the second ring, our relationships within the body of Christ beginning in v.3

Rom. 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Rom. 12:4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,

Rom. 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Rom. 12:6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

Rom. 12:7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;

Rom. 12:8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

- Paul begins his teaching on relationships in the body of Christ with a lesson on spiritual gifts
 - He says that by the grace given to him by the Lord, Paul now instructs the body of Christ on how to maintain a proper perspective of self
 - Paul says we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought
 - Notice Paul didn't say shouldn't think highly of ourselves at all
 - Nor he didn't say that everyone in the body of Christ are equal
 - Instead, Paul instructs each person in the church to appreciate his or her degree of importance in the body
 - So avoid false humility and self-importance
 - Some members of the body are called by God to play more important roles in the body than others
 - But these differences are entirely spiritual, not personal
 - So they cannot become the basis for valuing one member more than another
 - Notice Paul began his command saying "by the grace given to me"
 - In other words, Paul is following his own command even as he instructs the church in v.3

- Paul is saying that by God's grace he was made an apostle, and as an apostle he had authority to give these instructions to the church
- And therefore, this is the same standard by which we also may consider our own importance in the body
- God has assigned a degree of His grace to each believer so we might assume an appropriate position of authority and service in the body
 - To some, God has assigned greater grace to assume greater positions of authority or service, like an apostle
 - To others, God has assigned lessor positions of authority or service
 - Nevertheless, no member of the body is more or less important to the body, nor is anyone expendable
 - Paul is calling for us to respect God's decision concerning our assignment within the body and serve Him in that place
 - And to be content with God's choice for our sake
 - Paul calls such thinking sound judgment, in contrast to thinking too highly of ourselves
 - We think too highly of ourselves when we presume to take a place in the body other than that which God has assigned to us
 - Pride generally drives us to seek for something greater than we ought to have or to be jealous of another's place in the body
 - But pursuing sanctifying relationships in the body of Christ depends on each of us serving contently in our assigned place
- So how do we know what our assigned part is within the body of Christ?
 - Paul says that our place and prominence in the body is determined by the "measure of faith" God has allotted to us
 - The term "measure of faith" is a bit deceiving in English
 - It suggests that the degree of our personal faith in God determines our place in the body
 - Which if this were true would mean we could aspire to higher roles as our faith grows

- But that thinking contradicts Paul's central point, which was to not think too highly of ourselves
- In reality, Paul wasn't referring about our personal faith in God; he's speaking in a euphemism
 - In Greek, the phrase "measure of faith" could be translated as the "poetic meter of faith"
 - So we could say God has allotted to each of us a measure of a larger artistic work
 - Like playing an instrument in a symphony or a stanza of an epic poem
 - God has allotted each of us a certain place in His production
 - And if we all play our parts properly, we produce beautiful musical or poetry
- Notice in v.4 Paul reminds us that each part in the production has a purpose and value all it's own
 - We are members of a single body called the Church, the body of Christ
 - And we are called to operate as a whole, like an orchestra or like the individual members of a human body
 - You may feel like your big toe isn't very important to your body, but try walking without it (you can't)
- Likewise, if an orchestra is going to produce a sound pleasing to the director, each instrument must play its part properly
 - The wind woods can't become jealous of the strings and try to play their part or vice versa
 - If they did, the orchestra would deteriorate into a cacophony of noise
- So each of us must play the part we've been assigned by God within the body
 - We cannot think too highly of ourselves by assuming roles we haven't been assigned

- Nor should we think too lowly of ourselves by neglecting the role we have been given
- We should serve humbly in the station God assigns to us
- In v.6 Paul explains what he means by a “measure of faith”
 - Specifically, Paul is talking about the spiritual gift we received from God when we come to faith
 - He says we have gifts that differ according to the grace God has given us and we must operate within the body accordingly
 - Simply put, the spiritual gift we received from God determines our role and place within the body of Christ
 - From here Paul moves into giving a brief list of spiritual gifts and how they should be used in the body
 - Before we look at the list, we need to spend a moment consider the topic of spiritual gifts in general
 - This list is one of three such lists Paul gives the church across his letters
 - The other two lists come in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians
 - All three lists were written by Paul, and yet all three lists vary slightly one from another in the gifts included
 - Therefore, we know Paul never intended each list to be definite on its own, because he mentioned other gifts in other letters
 - Some have combined these three lists to arrive at a single definitive inventory of spiritual gifts
 - But I don’t believe that’s how Paul wanted us to use his lists
- When you consider the surrounding context in each letter, it’s clear that Paul listed a few gifts as examples in each case
 - Paul gave examples of spiritual gifts in each letter to support his overall argument in that letter
 - Since the context of each letter was slightly different, the corresponding list of gifts was also different

- In Ephesians, Paul explained the ultimate purpose for spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, which is to encourage unity
- In 1 Corinthians, Paul explained the proper regulation of spiritual gifts operating in the corporate gathering so they are edifying
- And here in Romans, Paul is explaining relative importance of different spiritual gifts when serving others in the body
- So Paul gave us three different lists of spiritual gifts as examples in support of three different points
 - No single list is a definitive inventory of all possible spiritual gifts,
 - And therefore combining all three lists won't arrive at such an inventory either
 - For all we know the actual list of spiritual gifts God appoints within the church may be infinite
- So as we look at his list here in Romans 12, let's understand it in its context
 - Paul's explaining how we should serve in the body based on how we've been gifted (so that we don't think too highly of ourselves)
 - Paul begins his example list with the gift of prophecy
 - Notice Paul assigns a descriptor to each gift to emphasize how we must embrace our assigned role wholeheartedly
 - For the one with the gift of prophecy, he should use it according to the proportion of his faith
 - The gift of prophecy is the gift of speaking the revelation of God, something unknowable apart from that revelation
 - All scripture is the result of a gift of prophecy
 - In Paul's day the gift of prophecy was still at work authoring the New Testament through the apostles
 - After the final apostles died, the canon closed and no scripture was authored thereafter
 - So many believe this spiritual gift has met its intended purpose and therefore it has ceased to be available in the body of Christ

- Others believe that a lesser form of prophecy of foretelling future events or revealing special revelation from God (apart from scripture) continues to operate within the body
- My personal view is that all prophecy ended with the closing of the canon, and therefore this particular spiritual gift has ceased to operate in the body
- But regardless of your view of prophecy today, we know in Paul's day the gift was still operating in the Church
- Which is why Paul writes about the gift still operating in his day
- And to those who have this gift, Paul says they should use it in proportion to his faith, which means according to how God leads the prophet
 - Some prophets received greater revelation (or "faith" as Paul calls it) from God, while other prophets received less
 - So a prophet in the church was to stick to prophesying and to do it as the Lord directs
 - The prophet didn't need to always have a "word from the Lord" in order to bless the congregation
 - They just needed to prophesy according to the Lord's leading
 - Likewise, we all serve the Lord best by serving His people with the gift He's given us
 - So if God gifts you with a gift of service, you serve Christ best by serving
 - If you have the gift of teaching, you serve God best in teaching others
 - If an exhortation gift, then exhort others
 - If a giving gift, then give generously
 - Etc.
- So our place and role in the body is determined by our spiritual gift, not by our preference or by a specific opportunity or need in the body
 - There are a lot of things we *could* do to serve Christ, but there is only one service we *should* focus on

- And that area of focus will always be tied to our spiritual gift
- It is the best way we can serve God
- In my case, I've been gifted by God to teach His word, so I teach His word to exclusion of virtually anything else I could do to serve the body
 - I'm not excluded from working in other capacities on occasion, but I should not seek for permanent stations outside my assigned role
 - For example, if I pursued a service or mercy role instead, I would be thinking more highly of myself than I ought
 - I'm assuming I can please God by serving in ways I prefer rather than submitting to His calling and gifting
- Remember, when you serve in your spiritual gift, you serve with the greatest strength and joy and will obtain the most spiritual fruit
 - This only makes sense, of course
 - A spiritual gift is a God-given supernatural ability
 - It's an ability to do spiritual things we couldn't do on our own, so that as we bear fruit, God will receive the glory
 - So if we spend our time working outside our area of gifting, we won't accomplish the work God intended and our results will be far less fruitful
 - If you've ever sat in a Bible study led by someone who wasn't gifted to teach the Bible, you know how painful the experience can be
 - That kind of situation is an example of someone thinking too highly of himself
 - Even a pastor can get this wrong
 - A pastor who assumes a teaching role over the congregation when the Lord hadn't given him that spiritual gift won't edify the body
 - A pastor must be able to teach, but that doesn't mean his spiritual gifting is teaching

- And if not, he should not think too highly of himself by assigning himself a teaching role over the body
- He isn't using sound judgment to assess his place in the body
- Paul's teaching on serving in our gift leaves us with three important principles that guide our relationships in the body of Christ
 - The first principle – and probably the most important – is we are not permitted to live as “islands” isolated from other Christians
 - Paul's instructions anticipate that we are joining ourselves to a body of believers
 - Spiritually speaking, we do not exist apart from the rest of the Body of Christ
 - So neither should we try to live that way in practice
 - Hebrews warns us against “forsaking the gathering together” for this reason, because we weaken our own walk and the walk of others
 - Secondly, our participation in the body must take the form of service in some capacity
 - Each of us has an assigned role within the body as Paul said based on a gifting God gave us
 - The very presence of a spiritual gift presumes we will direct our energies toward serving the body of Christ
 - So we have a responsibility to live up to that responsibility, both to Christ and to our fellow brothers and sisters
 - After all, don't we have assigned roles in our homes or work place or on sports teams?
 - And don't you feel an obligation to fulfill our role?
 - Doesn't it bother you when a teammate or family member or coworker fails to live up to their responsibilities?
 - Then shouldn't we strive even harder to play our assigned part in the body of Christ?
- Finally, we must adopt and maintain an attitude of humility in all our relationships in the body of Christ

- Firstly because we know that our place in the body was assigned to us by God and therefore it isn't a reflection of personal merit
 - Therefore, we have no reason to assign ourselves greater value compared to anyone else
 - How can we assume we are inherently more important than another believer when we were all assigned our place by God?
- And secondly, because when we achieve good results, we understand it was due entirely to the Lord working through us by our spiritual gifting
 - Therefore, we have no basis for crediting ourselves for any spiritual achievements
 - All glory belongs to the Lord
- So all relationships in the body of Christ must be built on a foundation of a commitment to the body and to serving in humility in our assigned place
 - From these three principles, we move into a series of exhortations that guide the nature of our relationships in the body
 - The passage is only five verses but it contains 13 commands for how we live with one another in the body
 - And the list is quite convicting

Rom. 12:9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

Rom. 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

Rom. 12:11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

Rom. 12:12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

Rom. 12:13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

- The list of exhortations begins with love of course
 - As you probably could guess, the Greek word for love is agape, which means self-sacrificial love
 - We say that biblical love is a verb, not a noun
 - Which means Christian love is an action, not a feeling, and the action is making sacrifices for the sake of others

- Just as Jesus lay down His life for us, which was the ultimate display of love
- Paul is asking the church to maintain a self-sacrificial attitude
 - Thinking of others before ourself
 - Letting someone else have the better seat in church
 - Letting someone else have the last donut
 - Taking out the trash without waiting to be asked, etc.
- But Paul adds an important caveat to this command: we must love without hypocrisy
 - Hypocrisy is portraying ourselves in a way that is not in keeping with reality
 - It means seeking to gain credit for selflessness without actually making the required sacrifice
 - Like volunteering for service projects, but never showing up
 - Promising to support missionaries financially, but never writing a check
 - Assuring sick members of the congregation we will pray for them, but never following through
- That's hypocritical love, which is no love at all of course
 - It's self-serving and it's corrosive to the unity of the body
 - Paul's bull's-eye chart teaches that we can't prosper in an outer ring if we haven't done the hard work required by the inner rings
 - So we won't show the world the love of Christ (which is a self-sacrificial love) if we haven't disciplined ourselves to show selflessness to our own brothers and sisters in the body of Christ
 - I've never met a successful evangelist who wasn't also a selfless servant to the body of Christ
 - Conversely, the worst ambassadors for Christ are usually those Christians who have a self-serving hypocritical attitude in the body of Christ

- If we can't adopt a loving sacrificial attitude among our spiritual family, how will we show that kind love to strangers?
- Next Paul says we must abhor what is evil while clinging to what is good
 - The Greek verb translated abhor appears only here in the New Testament
 - It's a particularly strong word for "hate"
 - And the Greek word for cling literally means to be glued
 - So we are to hate evil the way God does, and we are to be affixed to what is good
 - Knowing Paul is teaching how we should live in the body of Christ, these instructions should be a relatively easy commands to follow
 - After all, the Church community should share in these goals and encourage us in these convictions (if not, seek a new church)
 - On the other hand, we know the world will mock these convictions and tempt us to go against them
 - The world calls evil good and good evil, so these instructions become much harder to follow outside the safety of the body
 - Therefore if we cannot resist evil things while surrounded by likeminded believers, how can we resist when we are in the world?
 - And if we choose a church community that doesn't obey these commands, we won't have the support we need to resist temptation ourselves
 - We must practice resisting evil in a safe place so that we will have the strength to carry it out under more trying circumstances
- Paul's next couplet says be devoted to one another like brothers and sisters, but to give preference to one another in honor
 - The first half of Paul's command, being devoted to one another, is easy to understand
 - He says be devoted in love, and this time Paul uses a different Greek word for love: philadelphia or brotherly love
 - Paul wants us to recognize that our true brothers and sisters are the believers in the church

- So as the saying goes, blood is thicker than water
 - You should favor family relationships over other friendships
 - But in this case, we're not talking about a physical bond of blood but a spiritual bond of faith in Jesus Christ
 - That spiritual bond is far greater than any physical bond
- Because in a day to come, your body will die and any blood bond between you and your physical relatives will be dissolved
 - The definition of earthly brothers and sisters is someone whose body originated your mother's mother
 - So literally speaking, the moment your body dies you no longer have earthly brothers and sisters
 - Once your physical body is gone, all you will have left is the spirit
- In that moment, the only relationship you will still have will be your spiritual relationship with Christ
 - And in eternity, you will be surrounded by others who share that same spiritual relationship with Christ
 - Therefore, Paul asks us to see with eyes for eternity now
- We must recognize that our spiritual brothers and sisters in the Church are truly the only real brothers and sisters we have
 - We can still honor and enjoy our family relationships too
 - But those earthly relationship must come second to our spiritual relationships in the church
- Practically speaking, this means that when my relationships in the church come into conflict with those outside the church, I must give preference to the church
 - Notice this agrees with the bull's-eye chart
 - The inner ring of church relationships takes priority over relationships with unbelieving family members
 - So if our parents are unbelieving, we honor them as scripture expects unless honoring them comes into conflict with the needs of the body

- Obviously, we should seek for ways to accommodate the needs of both, when possible
- So only when conflict is unavoidable must we choose one over the other, and those situations the inner ring always wins
- But Paul gives us an important caveat to this command saying we give preference in honor
 - We should seek to give preference to our brothers and sisters so long as doing so won't bring dishonor upon the name of Christ
 - We can't allow our preference for fellow believers to become cause to do someone that dishonors Christ
- So if we are a judge, we can't permit a miscarriage of justice in our court by showing favor to a Christian defendant
 - Or if we are bookkeeper, we can't cover up for a fellow Christian's embezzlement
 - Or if we are a hiring manager, we can't give preference to a Christian job candidate if the law prohibits such favoritism
- Next, Paul asks us not to lag behind in diligence, remaining fervent in spirit and serving the Lord
 - All three of these commands relate to our effort and commitment as we serve within the body
 - We could sum up these three commands with three words
 - Effort, desire and purpose
 - We must serve one another with a consistent effort and earnest desire for the ultimate purpose of serving Christ
 - It's hurts the entire body when someone lags behind in diligence in serving the needs of the body
 - It's like having a player on the team who isn't pulling his weight
 - Diligence means making effort consistently, which means making commitments you can keep
 - Don't promise too much or too little but always keep your promises

- Do your part to serve and support the body
- And do it in the right spirit, fervently desiring to further the mission of the church
 - Don't allow yourself to become easily discouraged because you don't see the results you anticipated
 - Or because you didn't get the personal recognition you expected
 - You are serving for the right reasons in the right spirit
- Finally, your service is directed toward the Lord, not people or projects
 - If you are serving in church because you admire your pastor, you aren't serving for the right reasons
 - If you're serving because the church pays you, you are aren't serving for the right reasons
 - If you're serving because you enjoy receiving accolades or the accomplishment of a job well done, you aren't serving for the right reasons
 - Because ultimately all those reasons will fail you sooner or later
 - Pastors will fail you
 - Churches cut their staff
 - Accolades have a way of turning into complaints
 - And then what will be your reason to serve the church?
 - On the other hand, if your reason for serving is pleasing Christ, then your commitment to serve will never waver
 - Your effort will remain consistent and your attitude will remain fervent
 - You'll be unfazed by setbacks and disappointments
 - That's the kind of consistency we seek to demonstrate while serving the body
- In v.12 Paul adds rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation and devoted to prayer
 - I love the way Paul connects rejoicing, tribulation and prayer

- So often our prayer life disappears in times of rejoicing only to re-emerge when trials return
- But Paul denies this pattern calling upon believers to maintain a commitment to prayer regardless of our circumstances
- Paul says we are to be devoted to prayer regardless of whether our days are presently filled with joy or difficulty
- But before we get into prayer, let's look at the first two commands for a moment beginning with rejoicing in hope
 - Paul says we should rejoice in the hope of our faith in Christ
 - When the Bible speaks of our "hope," it's always referring to our expectation that we will be resurrected
- Resurrection from the dead is the hope of Christianity
 - Resurrection is the promise that death will not be the end of us,
 - That because of our faith in Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, we will likewise will receive eternal life after our body dies
 - Resurrection is at the center of our faith, it's what our water baptism pictures
 - There can be no greater hope than resurrection because there is no greater jeopardy than death
- Paul says we must rejoice over this hope, which means to remain mindful of what our faith is all about
 - We can't place our hope in things of the earth or in emotional platitudes
 - We don't rejoice because Christians are always to be happy or healthy or successful or wealthy
 - Christians are often unhappy, unhealthy, unsuccessful and poor
 - But so long as we remember that we have overcome this world and one day we will receive our reward in a resurrected body, we have reason to rejoice
- Secondly, we are to persevere in tribulation

- Notice again that Paul didn't demand that the church pretend to be happy in tribulation
 - Paul was a realist and knew that trials and tribulations bring tears and anguish
 - Paul himself suffered these things at times himself, according to his own testimony
- Instead, Paul commands us to persevere in the midst of such things
 - We cannot use life's troubles as excuse to give up on serving Christ or in gathering with other believers
 - Did a previous church or pastor let you down? Move on and invest again in a new congregation without hesitation
 - Have you faced loss or rejection because you lived your faith? Press on without fear of such things
 - Did church politics or unsupportive leaders or unkind brothers or sisters treat you unfairly? Continue serving Christ
- The Lord uses difficult times to prompt spiritual growth in His people, and some growth can only happen under difficult circumstances
 - So when tough times come, we must persevere in our walk with Christ and in our relationships in the church
 - Commit to staying the course so you can learn what persevering in adversity teaches
 - Because if we give up when trials, then we lose the benefits these things were intended to produce
- Finally, regardless of your circumstances keep praying
 - Be devoted to prayer Paul says, which means think of your time in prayer the way you think of marriage
 - When someone is devoted to a marriage, they never forget they have a spouse
 - They never get tired of being faithful
 - They don't treat the relationship as expendable or optional
 - Similarly, when someone is devoted to prayer, they never forget to pray

- They don't grow tired of praying
- And they don't see time in prayer as optional
- Like marriage, it's part of who they are, not merely something they do
- If you lack an appreciation of how important prayer is in your walk with Christ, it's a sign you aren't praying enough
 - While we all understand the mechanics of praying, you can't fully appreciate how God uses it in your life until you really devote yourself to it
- You could compare understanding prayer to understanding how to ride a bike
 - I could explain to someone how to ride a bike, and they would understand the mechanics easily enough
 - But they would have no idea what it's actually like - much less how to do it properly - until they wrestle with a bike for a while
 - Only then at some point would they get it too
 - Devote time to praying regularly and earnestly for a while and see what you discover about yourself and about God
- Finally, in v.12 Paul connects two acts of mercy asking us to contribute to the needs of the saints and practice hospitality
 - The first command concerns the needs inside the church
 - We are to give money to the needs of the body
 - This is the New Testament obligation for every believer
 - It's not tithing technically speaking
 - Tithing is an Old Testament term that comes from the Law and applies only to the Jewish nation
 - A tithe was a specific amount required for specific needs, and there were three distinct tithing requirements in the Law
 - Altogether, Jews gave between 20-30% of their income as tithes
 - Tithes were paid to the temple and they were not optional or flexible

- None of these rules apply to the Church since we are not under the Law given to Israel
 - The guideline for us is to give to the needs of the saints
 - It's general and without specific requirement
 - In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul gives a few more guidelines for how a believer should give
- But for today, there are two main points to note about our giving
 - First, our giving in the church is for the believer
 - We are called to support fellow believers with our giving
- And more specifically to fund the work of believers who serve God in evangelism, teaching, pastoring, etc.
 - We also fund the physical needs of believers who are worthy of that support (not all needs should be met by fellow believers though)
 - We may wish to support nonchristian charities too, but that support does not meet the requirement to support the needs of believers
- Secondly, the giving details are left completely to the giver to decide based on the leading of the Spirit
 - We may give any amount we desire and to whomever we like
 - There is no biblical requirement to give specifically to an institutional church
 - There is no requirement to give a certain amount or on a certain schedule
 - The test for every believer is whether we are responding to the leading of the Spirit
 - Are we giving what He asks and when He asks?
 - No one may be our judge concerning our giving
- Paul's final command addresses the needs of unbelievers
 - A believer should maintain a heart of hospitality toward the world

- Hospitality in Paul's day looked very different than it does today
- In Paul's day, culture demanded that strangers be given accommodation in homes when no alternative was available
- So when a traveler stopped in your town overnight and was sitting in the town square, someone would invite that person to stay the night
 - To be caught outside at night could be very dangerous
 - So everyone took it upon themselves to be hospitable to strangers
 - To do otherwise would bring great shame upon the town and any who refused to give the stranger a place to stay
- So the emphasis in this command is on being willing to help strangers, which in this context refers principally to unbelievers
 - We should open our homes or make other accommodations to unbelievers whenever practical
 - This creates opportunity for the church to fulfill its mission
 - So we give our money to believers and our hospitality to unbelievers
- This principle explains why you church leaders advise against giving money to unbelievers who come begging for church benevolence
 - The money the church stewards is for the needs of the saints
 - But the church doors or the doors of church members remain open to providing shelter or food or other types of hospitality to the unbeliever
 - These are meaningful ways of providing care and charity, but they also hold the possibility to establishing opportunity to share the gospel
 - Putting a \$20 bill in their pocket won't win them for Christ and probably accomplishes little more than getting them high for another day
- I think Paul put this command at the end as a transition into the next ring on our relationships with unbelievers
 - Which is where we go next week