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**

- Righteousness In our Person
  - Our relationship with God
- Righteousness Among the Church
  - Our relationship with believers
- Righteousness Before the World
  - Our relationship with unbelievers
- Righteousness Within Society
  - Our relationship with government

- Decreasing Priority

- 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?

  o 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

  o 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

  o 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

  o 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
  o 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?
  o 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 we shouldn’t think highly of ourselves at all
    • Nor did he say that everyone in the body of Christ is 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 lesser 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

  o 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 music or poetry

  o Notice in v.4 Paul reminds us that each part in the production has a purpose and value all its 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)

  o Likewise, if an orchestra is going to produce a sound pleasing to the director, each instrument must play its part properly
    • The woodwinds 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

  o 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

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• 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”
  
  o Specifically, Paul is talking about the spiritual gift we received from God when we came 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
  
  o 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 to 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
  
  o All three lists were written by Paul, and yet all three lists vary slightly from one 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
  
  o 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

  o 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

  o 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

  o 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

  o 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 lessor 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 he writes thus

• 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

  o 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

  o 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

  o 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
  o 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
  o 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 fellows brothers and sisters
  o 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
  o 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.
  o 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
  o 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
  o 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 of love to strangers?

• Next Paul says we must abhor what is evil while clinging to what is good
  o 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
  o Knowing Paul is teaching how we should live in the body of Christ, these instructions should be 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
  o 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
  o 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 from your mother’s body
- 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 relationships 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 in those situations the inner ring always wins

  o 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 something that dishonors Christ

  o 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

  o 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

  o It 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
  o 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
  o 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
  o 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?
  o 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
  o 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

  o 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

  o 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 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

  o 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, 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 come, 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
  o 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
  o 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
  o 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
  o 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 non-Christian 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
  o 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
  o 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
  o This principle explains why your 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
    o Which is where we go next week…