

Romans 12:13-15 "Consider Others As More Important Than Yourself"

Romans 12:13-15 ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Paul has sometimes been accused of simply conveying dry Doctrine and complex Theological issues which have little to do with real life. The truth of the matter is that Theology and doctrine are essential to real life.

Theology is the study of who God is and without a proper understanding of who God is and how He has revealed Himself in His word, in His creation and in His Son, we are left to ourselves as to determine who God is and what He has for us.

This is why people through the ages have created their own gods in their own likeness. They create gods who will meet their own expectations instead of humbling themselves to the One true God, Creator.

As far as doctrine, it's a word which simply means a teaching or a belief. I think few of us would want to deny the teachings or beliefs which God has put forth for our good in His word. And so Theology and Doctrine are vital, but they are not ends in themselves.

Doctrine and Theology are designed to help us live to God's honor and glory in a real world which wants to deny both. And so our beliefs and our understanding of who God is should prompt us to demonstrate that in a way where the world can see and taste so that they would desire to know this loving God as His love is shed abroad in our hearts.

Doctrine and Theology are found in the one place which God Himself has given us and that is His word. But if Doctrine and Theology are not practical they offer us little real substance so we can live in this world.

Our text this morning, as always, is to show us how practical God's word really is. And as we submit to Him in the power of the Holy Spirit we may be able to walk in the ways which God clearly shows us in His word.

Paul deals with a very practical area as we come to our text.

Rom 12:13 "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

The world is full of people who are in need in a variety of ways. But in our text the needs implied are physical needs. People who need food, clothing and so on. Paul's exhortation is to meet these needs as they come up. And so he encourages the believers, who have the ability, to help those who are in need. This is very practical stuff.

And by the way, this is one of the reasons that God gives people in the church the gift of giving as we see in this same chapter in verse 8. This is not to suggest that only those with this gift of giving are required to give as the needs arise, but these people are often the ones who take the lead so that others may follow in meeting needs.

Though Paul had very little in a monetary way, I believe he had the gift of giving as is demonstrated in giving of his entire life to the service of the saints. And as such he would take the lead in helping to meet the needs of Christians in different parts of the world.

We see one instance when he writes these Christians in Rome.

Rom 15:25-28 "Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. 28 So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way."

Paul was willing to travel hundreds of miles just to bring a collection of money to these poor saints in Jerusalem. His Theology and doctrine was very practical and very loving.

In light of this command in Romans 12:13 to contribute to the needs of the saints he also adds, "practice hospitality." In other words, don't just talk about it, practice it or as the Greek implies, pursue it.

Hospitality isn't just having the ability and the desire to have people over for coffee and cake and stirring conversation.

Hospitality, in light of "sharing with God's people who are in need", also takes into account meeting needs which might require putting someone up for the night.

Other practical ways of being hospitable could include taking in an unwed mother for a time and meeting her needs as you share Christ's love with her. Being hospitable, may make yourself available to go to other people's homes to meet needs there.

There may be a shut-in who would love to have some company or maybe an inmate at a local jail who would be blessed by your hospitality as you take the time to visit and bring some encouragement.

Hospitality comes in many forms and as the Lord directs and prompts we can be used by our God to be there for people who can see, in a practical way, the love of Christ.

I'm reminded of what Jesus said in Mat 25:34-40 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Keep in mind too that these practical commands from Paul are in the context of him saying in verse 9, "Let love be without hypocrisy." Love for Christ and for one another should always be the motivating factor in our service for the Lord.

Now most of us don't have a problem with wanting to help meet the needs of those we love and who love us. But as Paul is about to show us our love is not limited to those who love us.

Rom 12:14 "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

Now, I don't about you but this has been one of the toughest areas over the years for me because it's hard to love those who want to see you face down in the dirt.

It's hard to love someone who makes fun of you for your faith, or who goes out of his or her way to hurt you because of your faith in Christ. In Paul's day this was much more prevalent than it is in America today.

You and I, for the most part, don't know what real persecution is. Chinese Christians, Russian Christians a few years back, and many Christians in Muslim countries know what persecution is. Many of these Christians have been hunted down and killed simply because they have embraced the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

Jesus knew what it was like to be persecuted. In fact He promises us in Joh 15:18-21 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."

And yet, even as Jesus assures us that there will be people who will persecute the Body of Christ this same Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Mat 5:44-48 "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

I suspect that Paul had this teaching of Jesus on his mind when he wrote to the Romans. After all, even Paul had to learn this. You see he had been on both sides of this issue. He had been a persecutor of the church.

In fact, Jesus Himself came to Paul to make Paul aware of what he was doing.

Act 9:1-5 "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,*" he replied."

Jesus reminds Paul that 'whatever you do to the least of these brothers of mine, you do to me.'

But after Paul comes to Christ by faith for forgiveness he learns what it's like to be hunted and persecuted for his faith. And so, he too had to learn to love his persecutors. And instead of hating his persecutors he had to learn to bless them and not curse them.

A classic example of this is found with a Christian man who was stoned to death for his faith in Christ and with whom Paul, formerly Saul, was personally involved as he held the coats of those who killed him.

Of course we know that man was Stephen.

Act 7:59-60 "While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep."

That's the ultimate example of what it is to bless those who persecute you and not curse them.

But, what I find interesting about this portion of Romans 12 is that Paul goes from verse 14, which instructs on the general teaching of how to deal with those who persecute you, to verse 15 which goes in an entirely different direction.

But then he comes back to this issue in verse 17 which we'll deal with next week as he gets into the specific areas which show us what not to do regarding those who do evil to us.

Our initial reaction is to curse those who persecute us and not to want to bless them. Verse 17 and on deals, not so much with the initial reaction which we're all tempted to do, but well after the fact, a well thought out plan to get even.

Paul is saying, don't let it fester to that level, but if it does he has something to say about that as well. Again, all very practical Theology and doctrine.

But, let's move to Rom 12:15 "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

Now, what does this have to do with loving as Christ would have us love, as Paul points out in verse 9, "let love be without hypocrisy.?" And is this limited to only dealing with two groups; those who rejoice and those who mourn?

Well, as we consider life in general it seems that there are two ends of the spectrum which have extremes. When something in life lends itself to standing out as a special occasion we see people rejoicing.

On the other end of the spectrum when tragedy hits, and here the inference is the death of someone, though it might not be limited to that, we see that mourning or grieving takes place. Most of life deals with the middle of the spectrum. We're not perpetually rejoicing through life and we're not perpetually mourning through life.

But Paul recognizes that when there is reason to rejoice we should join in with their rejoicing. And when there is reason to mourn we should join in with their mourning.

Many people are comfortable with the middle of the spectrum where most of us are in life. And I think this is one reason why Paul would have to remind us to consider others in these instances. It's all designed to remind us that we should be building one another up and encouraging one another.

There's the tendency to concentrate only on ourselves. Paul is saying get your eyes off of yourselves and be there for people in whatever circumstance they find themselves. If they've got a reason to rejoice; let's say there's answered prayer; then take the time to join in rejoicing before God for that answered prayer.

If the Lord has used them to lead someone to Christ join in on that rejoicing. That allows people to see how others in the Body of Christ are useful in the Kingdom, and in encouraging them it builds them up to be more useful for the Lord and each other.

Unlike the camp of psychology, this is not to be mistaken for an opportunity to foster someone's self-esteem. No, self is not the one

we point to in joining in on this rejoicing. All rejoicing in the Christian life must ultimately point to the One who has put a new song in our hearts, and given us reason to rejoice.

It doesn't deny the one who is rejoicing, but it doesn't place the emphasis on the person, but rather it points us back to Christ.

Of course rejoicing with those who rejoice is much easier than having to mourn with those who mourn. Rejoicing is fun, it's energetic, it's a delight.

Mourning is not a delight. It's not fun, it's not energetic. In fact, it seems to drain your strength. But, just as rejoicing is a part of life, so is mourning and it shouldn't be neglected, but should be entered into with the same understanding that someone needs you to be there to share in the experience.

In fact, I believe it's often more important to be there for the mourning part of life than for the rejoicing. I can rejoice by myself in a way that I can't mourn by myself.

Mourning with someone who mourns may take extra work, but it's essential that we be there for each other. Sometimes to mourn with someone is just to be there and weep with them without saying a word.

Other times it's an opportunity to guide someone into the grace of God who promises to be with those who mourn. It might be a hug, a word of encouragement to let them know that you'll be there for them and that's it going to be okay.

But, you know often times in life the extreme parts of the spectrum, rejoicing and mourning give way to the parts of life which are just as important and which we sometimes miss.

You ever have a down time where you're not mourning but there seems to be little reason for rejoicing? I think during these times we miss opportunities to come along side someone and genuinely ask, 'how are you doing'? That's a question we always ask of each other. But often times we really don't want an answer which will involve our time and effort.

But, being part of the Body of Christ we must be spiritually sensitive enough to share in that truth which Paul brings out in 1Co 12:25-27 "so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part

rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

As members of the Body of Christ we should be concerned with every part. And if there are true needs we should do what we can to meet those needs in the love of Christ. This is why it's so hard for people who are disjointed members of Christ's Kingdom to grow in their faith.

To be outside of the Body is really an unhealthy way to attempt to grow in Christ. Because that part is trying to be a functioning member of Christ's Body and yet by the very definition it's not a viable part of the Body because there's no connection.

To sever your foot and then to boast how effective that foot is shows a misunderstanding of how a foot works. And it's the same with the Body of Christ. And when the foot is sprained it doesn't ask itself for help it asks the hand to come alongside and massage it.

But for that to happen it must be connected. And so as we are connected to each other in Christ in close proximity we can help each other and encourage each other and be there for each other first hand.

Paul talks about this attitude of personally being there for each other.

Rom 15:1-3 "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." [Psalm 69:9]

This, by the way, goes back to what Paul mentions previously in Rom 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."

All of us have needs. And most of us could list them. But we must be very careful not to always look only at our own needs thinking that until my need is met I can't, or worse, I won't meet the needs of others.

If all of us thought that way whose need would be met? No one's. Even in your need seek to meet the needs of others to the best of your ability in the power of the Spirit. I've found in most cases

that even in my need, when I was willing to reach out to others, my need invariably was met.

All of us are weak in areas of life which the enemy is aware of and he's having a field day trying to push those buttons to get us going. He knows what it takes to get you depressed about life. He knows what it takes to get your eyes off of Christ. He knows what it takes to tempt you in areas in which you're having problems.

But Christ knows what it takes to bring you through. And first and foremost it's a devotion to Him. People in the Body of Christ sometimes think that our one goal in life is to be devoted to each other.

No, that's secondary. If we are not devoted to following Christ then we will never be devoted to each other as Christ would have us be. If we think that we can slide on seeking and obeying God and loving God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, and then be an effective servant to each other, we'll never reach that point.

Loving one another; being there for each other as we rejoice with each other and mourn with each other and encourage each other in general is always in the context of a devotion to our Lord and Savior who first loved us.

If you have no other passion in life then make it your passion to draw close to your Savior. And I guarantee you that if you do that He will draw close to you and His Spirit will give you a passion for others to see them come to Christ and to have them grow in Christ as you are used by Christ.

Life may not always have us rejoicing because of blessings or circumstances which we find favorable, but you can always rejoice in our loving God who called you out of the darkness of sin into His marvelous light. And you can be assured that if He loved you enough to die for the penalty of your sins, He loves you enough to be with you all the way through this life as we look to the next.

'I will never leave you or forsake you', says Jesus. I will be with you to the very end. And we need to be there for each other to help each other keep our eyes on that promise and on the One who made it. Thank You Jesus.