

## Life Is Service (Part Two)

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America's relationship with slavery is a checkered one, to say the least. Slaves were actually among the very first to settle on and work the new land that was America. In fact, indentured servanthood was the ticket that a lot of people used to be free. And so they came over here to America as a servant and they carved out a new life for themselves after they finished their contract with whoever had bought it. It was a huge factor, slavery was, in the early prosperity of America. And though Americans look on slavery with unfeigned horror these days, they just cannot imagine that a country like America had once been a slaveholding nation.

Contrary to popular belief though, slaveholders were generally not harsh and cruel to the slaves. They had to treat their slaves well, keep them healthy and strong, and keep them alive to make the most profit from their labor because that is what they were interested in. They were plantation owners, they were factory owners, they wanted to make a profit. And if they allowed their slaves to get ill and die or beat them or what have you, it just did not make any business sense. It was not for the right reasons that they treated them well, obviously. But they did, most of the time, treat their slaves fairly well.

Of course, Americans fought a great civil war over that and other issues. Slavery was one among many of them, but it is the one that gets the most press: that slavery was the reason why we fought that war. And the winning Union side outlawed slavery even in the middle of the war and granted freed slaves the right to vote just after that.

But chattel slavery as it was practiced in America, whether it was done well or not, was still slavery. It was still bondage, it was still forced labor of a person or a human being against his will. It was still a total lack of freedom, or nearly so. And the effects of it, even though it was practiced not terribly

badly here in America, still reverberate today within our society. You could probably trace a lot of our social conflicts back to the fact that we held slaves, or at least part of them, part of those problems.

Now, if you listen to the progressive folks out there, the liberals, the leftists, you would think that America invented slavery. As a matter of fact, when Beth was going through some of her classes for public health, that was kind of the impression that they gave, that America was the first nation to ever enslave other people. And of course, that is wrong. Obviously, anyone who has ever read any kind of history is aware that slavery is an ancient and widespread human practice. Every ethnic group has practiced slavery at one time or another and every people has also suffered from slavery, been slaves at one time or another. So generally, as human beings, we are both guilty of slavery and the victims of it, or at least our ancestors were.

If you go to the Bible, you find that slavery was widespread throughout the Middle East. Israel practiced slavery throughout its existence as a kingdom. And Judah did too. Abraham had slaves and servants. And as we know, the Israelites fell under bondage to the Egyptians for maybe as much as 200 or 215 years. And later they were at various times oppressed or enslaved by Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans. It just seems like their whole existence was a roller coaster ride of freedom and oppression and slavery, and then freedom again and oppression and slavery, and on and on it went for over 1,500 years almost between Moses and Jesus.

The two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, both fell to stronger empires, one to the Assyrians, the other one to the Babylonians. And their people, what happened to them? They were carried off into exile and slavery. So the people of Israel have a long history with slavery.

We go into the New Testament era and the time of the church, many slaves were called into the church and even some slave owners and even some slave owners of slaves who were in the church already. So they had to exist in a relationship within the church as owner and slave. And Paul has to deal with this in a few of his epistles. The short version of it, if you want to know what Paul said about slavery, is in I Corinthians 7:20-24. I will not go there. I will just kind of paraphrase what he says.

He says, stay in the situation in which you were called. He said, if you were called a slave, okay, that is fine. Work with it. Remain a slave. But if you can be freed, great! It does not really matter a whole lot. God can work with you in whatever situation you are in. And if God called you as a slave, there is no reason to try to get out of that because that is how He called you. But you know, work with it. And so he gave them instructions about how to be a servant of the Lord while being a slave. And he told masters too how they can be good masters to their slaves because he says, essentially, you have a greater Master in heaven and He is watching you and what you are going to do, so you better treat them well. If you want the scriptures for that, Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 4:1.

So what we see from the apostle Paul in the New Testament (this would be in the 50s and 60s AD) rather than push for the abolition of slavery, which probably 99% of us would be compelled to do, we would think that that is the right way to go, Paul instead argued for making the best of it. It is kind of a Christian accommodation of the practice. Maybe it was not the best thing, but it made it into the Bible. And so we have to honor that God was thinking that way, that that is how He would work with it at the time. So, God does not seem to look at slavery in the same way that we do.

Now, how can I say that? Well, because it is consistent throughout the entire Bible that that is the way He looked at it. What I gave you that Paul said was essentially the Old Testament view on slavery or the Old Testament position on slavery. You know, Israelites coming out of Egypt, God could have said right there, "No slavery. We are ending it right here and it won't happen again." But that is not what we see in the book of Exodus. If you will turn to Exodus 21, instead of forbidding slavery when they were starting fresh there at the Red Sea, God *included* its practice in the Old Covenant. And instead of just saying, "Okay, you can keep slaves," what He does is He *regulates* how the Israelites were to practice it. And remember, they were carnal people, so instead of just simply outlawing it and treating them like Christians would, you might say, as if they were Christians, he treats them as people of this world and regulates the practice.

Now notice this is in Exodus 21, which is just after Exodus 20 where the Ten Commandments are. And once you get into Exodus 21 this is the beginning of the Old Covenant. God is giving the laws that He wanted the Israelites to

follow under the Old Covenant. And slavery is essentially the first thing that He mentions, that He broaches. So let us read verses 1 through 6 here.

**Exodus 21:1-6** "Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them [speaking to Moses]: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever."

So we see one set of laws here on how the Israelites were to deal with slavery and it is put right into the Old Covenant. Now, this makes a whole lot of sense that He would broach this immediately. Since He was making this covenant with newly-freed slaves, it was on their mind. They were probably thinking, "Have I just traded one master for another? And it's going to be just as bad under God that it was under the Egyptian system." So He gives them a fair shake here when He describes how slavery will be dealt with within Israel.

It is: an Israelite slave can be made to serve only six years and he is supposed to be treated, not really as a slave, but as a hired servant. You might say, that is not much difference there. But generally they would treat a hired man or a hired woman much fairer than they would a slave. And that after his time was up, he was able to leave a free man and he would not have to pay anything for the price of his freedom. It says there in verse 2, "He shall go out free and pay nothing." Actually, for the times this was exceptionally liberal, you might call it exceptionally generous and fair.

Let us go to another one in Leviticus the 25th chapter.

**Leviticus 25:39-40** And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him

to serve as a slave. As a hired servant and a sojourner, he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee."

Now notice, this is instructions about an Israelite who gets into debt and makes himself a slave in order to get out of that debt. It is slightly different from the one that is there in Exodus 21. So the instructions here are a little different.

**Leviticus 25:41-48** "And then he shall depart from you—he and his children [at the Year of Jubilee] with him—and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. [That means he gets his land back and he could use it again.] For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God. And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have from the nations that are around you [those ones that they would get in war and such], from them you may buy male and female slaves. Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren and the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor."

So slaves of a foreign country were treated differently from slaves that were Israelites, but it is still highly regulated here compared to the way it was in other nations.

Now to Deuteronomy 15, where we see a final one of how God deals with slavery in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant.

**Deuteronomy 15:12-18** [a lot of repetition here] If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed [this adds to what was said in the

Covenant in Exodus 21]; you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what the Lord has blessed you with [with his labor, I will add], you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today. And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant, you shall do likewise. [So it could it could be a man or a woman who asked for this.] It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do."

On our modern Western ears, this still sounds harsh, still sounds like something we would not want to be involved in. But by the standards of the times, this was really progressive and liberal. And I would imagine that in the times following these, people wanted to be enslaved by Israelites rather than anybody else in the whole world because they would know that they would get the best shake from their masters.

But notice here in these passages, that normally it was only for six years and then the seventh year they would go free. The only seeming difference was that if a person sold himself into slavery by choice because he was poor and then he could serve as long as 49 years. But even he would have to be let go at the Jubilee.

Of course, here in Deuteronomy 15, it says that when you do set them free, the slave owner is supposed to give them a great deal of stuff to take with them. And it mentions specifically that they are supposed to go away with animals from the flock. It says they are supposed to go away with grain and they are supposed to go away with wine. So he was given all of this produce to keep him alive, for one thing, but also probably to set him up so that he would then prosper in his freedom because he would not kill all the animals that he was given. He would probably use them as money or make them the beginning of his own flock or herd and then be able to have a living from them.

But notice especially that in both Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15, that it is mentioned that an Israelite slave can refuse to be set free after those six years and ask to remain a slave of his very kind and fair and just master. The reason is because he loves them, that there has become between them such a close relationship that he does not want to leave. He likes the prosperity that is under this particular master. He likes the living that he has even though he has to work. Then he gets fed and he gets everything that he needs. The master is a good provider, and kind, and shares his prosperity with his servants. So when this happens and he says that he wants this done, then it is formalized before the judges and he is then marked through the ear, like a sheep almost. You know how shepherds mark the ears of their sheep to show that they are theirs. Each one has a particular marking. And so, he becomes that master's servant forever.

(And I just wanted to give credit to reminding me about this to Mike Huell of Hartsville, South Carolina. He brought it to my attention and I thought, Uh huh! I can use that in the next sermon.)

But does that last bit remind you of anything? It has happened to you. If you are called into the church of God, if you are called into God's Family, that very thing has happened to you because that is what we have done in coming to God. Let us go to Romans 6. We have been here in the last two sermons and I want to touch on it again today.

**Romans 6:16-22** Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness [or to sanctification]. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then of the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things

is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness [or to sanctification], and the end, everlasting life.

God has called us out of a corrupt, sinful way of life. And that way of life was for all intents and purposes slavery because we were enslaved to our carnal minds, we were enslaved to this world's way of life, and we were enslaved to Satan in his broadcasts of his attitudes. But when God decided to pluck us out of the world, when He decided to turn on whatever it is that He turns on in our minds, we tasted a bit of life under a new Master, a better Master, a much fairer Master—God Himself. And we, like the slave back in Exodus 21 or Deuteronomy 15, voluntarily decided to say something like that Israelite slave said, "I love my master. I wish to stay with Him forever." And so we took His mark on us by baptism and the laying on of hands and we became His slaves forever.

Our job now is to serve Him as His servants, as His slaves, with reverence and godly fear, as we saw last time in Hebrews the 12th chapter. And our job is to pursue righteousness unto sanctification, unto holiness. We think that it is hard, but it is actually not all that difficult because God does so much of the work with us. But in that way, in that harness as slaves of a new master, we will be made complete for the Father's use in the future. And that is where we stand as Christians.

On the one hand, we are no longer servants, but children of God promised an inheritance of all things with Jesus Christ. And that is a wonderful thing! Yet, despite being sons and daughters, we are still servants of Christ, servants of God, because of our redemption. He bought us, He owns us, and thus, we owe Him a suitable response, which is labor in His work, in His way. So we live a life of service toward God and toward each other and the end result is that we are prepared as Jesus was through His life of service for eternal life and for a position in God's Kingdom.

So today, I want to consider some of the ways that we are instructed to serve as Christians. But I want to start off by making, by showing a comparison and to do that, I want to read the following. It is a rather long quote but I think it is very interesting so that we can get a little bit of an idea of how good we have it by comparison to what I am going to read.



The following is from a book called *Fifty Years In Chains* or "The Life of An American Slave." This book is the autobiography of a man named Charles Ball. He was a slave during the early 19th century and he gives an account of a slave's typical day of work on a South Carolina cotton plantation. And I believe when he was doing this work on this plantation, it was somewhere around 1820 or so, so long time ago, nearly 200 years. And this is how life one day was for him.

See, I had no other bed than the blanket which I had brought with me from Maryland and I went to sleep in the loft of the cabin which was assigned to me as my sleeping room and in which I continued to lodge as long as I remained on this plantation. The next morning, I was waked at the break of day by the sound of a horn which was blown very loudly. Perceiving that it was growing light, I came down and went out immediately in front of the house of the overseer who was standing near his own gate, blowing the horn. In a few minutes, the whole of the working people from all the cabins were assembled. And as it was now light enough for me distinctly to see such objects as were about me, I at once perceived the nature of the servitude to which I was in future to be subject.

The overseer then led off to the field with his horn in one hand and his whip in the other, we following, men, women, and children, promiscuously [That means they were just not following any kind of order.] and a wretched looking troop we were. There was not an entire garment among us. We walked nearly a mile through one vast cotton field before we arrived at the place of our intended day's labor. At last, the overseer stopped at the side of the field and calling to several of the men by name, ordered them to call their companies and turn into their rows. The work we had to do today was to hoe and weed cotton. About seven o'clock in the morning, the overseer sounded his horn and we all repaired to the shade of some persimmon trees, which grew in a corner of the field, to get our breakfast.

I here saw a cart drawn by a yoke of oxen driven by an old black man, nearly blind. The cart contained three barrels filled with water

and several large baskets full of cornbread that had been baked in the ashes. The water was for us to drink and the bread, each cake about three quarters of a pound in weight, was our breakfast. We worked in this field all day and at the end of every hour or hour and a quarter, we had permission to go to the cart, which was moved about the field so as to be near us, and get water. Our dinner was the same in all respects as our breakfast except that in addition to the bread, we had a little salt and a radish for each person. We were not allowed to rest at either breakfast or dinner longer than we were eating. And we worked in the evening as long as we could distinguish the weeds from the cotton plants. When we could no longer see to work, the horn was again sounded and we returned home. I had now lived through one of the days, a succession of which make up the life of a slave on a cotton plantation.

That was a rigorous life in the humidity and the heat of South Carolina, which is sometimes almost unbearable. We are blessed that this kind of service is not our lot. God is a much kinder, gentler, and loving Master. He does not give us just three quarters of a pound of cornbread and maybe a radish and a little salt, but He provides for us abundantly and He does not make us work from daybreak to sundown with rigor like this. But the work that He gives us, the burden that He gives us, is very light by comparison. And Jesus tells us that straight out. Let us go to Matthew 11.

**Matthew 11:25-30** At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for it is it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

He does not take the lash to us. He does not make us work with such rigor that we fall in the traces or fall in between the rows. He provides for us very

abundantly and gives us only those tasks that we have the ability to do or those temptations or trials that we can overcome. He never gives us any more than we can handle. So He is very kind and helpful and generous, and He promises to supply everything that we need to do whatever it is that He has asked us to do.

So, indeed, His yoke is easy and His burden is light. And it really is shameful when we complain about even our light burdens that He gives us. We just have to remember Charles Ball and the work that he did every day for years on end, picking cotton, planting cotton, weeding cotton, and what have you, down there in that plantation in South Carolina.

In a way, I want to pick up from where I left off last time I spoke in Romans the 12th chapter because my last sermon was mostly about the fact that we are servants. That is what we have been called to do. We have been called to serve. And so I read Romans 12:1 to show us that.

**Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

As we saw in the last sermon, the apostle Paul here instructs us to become living sacrifices, that is, giving our lives to God for His use. But you know, most sacrifices were dead sacrifices. Their throats were cut and their blood was placed there on the altar and that was that. They were not really much useful except for eating after that. God got a portion and the priest got a portion, and in some cases, the offerer got a portion. But the animal was dead, the sacrifice was dead.

But God does not call us to die. He calls us to live and be sacrifices. And that means we have to sacrifice who we thought we were. We have to sacrifice our time. We have to sacrifice our pride, which we should be doing anyway, and many other things in order to live the life that Jesus Christ lived. And so, giving our lives to God Paul calls a reasonable service and this really means reasonable, rational. It is only logical and rational that we should work willingly and tirelessly for the One who has redeemed us from sin's death penalty and offered us eternal life.

We owe Him that because of what He did. He gave the most precious thing in all the world—in all the universe—for our redemption. There is nothing more costly than the life of the Creator God, Jesus Christ. But that was willingly given by both the Father and the Son so that we can have forgiveness of sins and the opportunity to have eternal life, to have grace given to us. So we did not merit that at all. We did not deserve it by any means, but He gave it and He gave it willingly.

And so because of that tremendous cost that was paid, a tremendous price that was paid, we have to respond in this way. It is only logical when you put everything down and see what was done for us that we have to give our all back to Him. That is why He says it is only logical. It is reasonable that we serve God with our lives.

Now, Paul here does not say just that this is what we need to do. that we need to give our life to God and then move on to something else. Because obviously this idea, this concept that we are living sacrifices would beg the question, how do we do this then? Yes, we are supposed to make ourselves a living sacrifice because it is rational to do so. But what does this entail? And so what he does over the next several chapters is that he defines more closely with instruction about what we need to be doing. And that is what the rest of chapters 12, 13, and 14 and so on are about. They are basically a response to this opening salvo in Romans 12, verse 1 about being a living sacrifice. How do you do this? And so he gives the answers as he goes on here.

We are going to be in Romans 12 for most of the sermon from this point on. We will just skip verse 2. But I want to start with verse 3 and go down through verse 8. We will kind of take this passage by passage so we can fill this out just a little bit. Now, of course, verse 2 is one of the things that we have to as an overall thing do. We cannot conform to the world, but we have to begin transforming our minds. And verse 3 then tells us how this takes place and he begins with transforming of the mind and the attitude.

**Romans 12:3-5** For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we,

being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

So he is making sure they understand a few important things here—we are all in this together. Even though we are many, we are all one. But even though we are one, we are individuals as well and individuals that have relationships with others. Actually, we are supposed to have a relationship with all of God's people because we are all connected into one body. So we have to begin thinking not just as individuals, but as members of this body that has many others within it.

**Romans 12:6-8** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

It is very interesting, I think, how this begins in verse 3. It begins with a caution that we are not to think too much of ourselves, that we need to get a grip on our pride and our self-centeredness and thinking that we are better than others. Do not get a big head, he says. Specifically, he is probably thinking here about getting puffed up over one's talents, the things that God has given you as His gifts, and that is why he continues on the way he does. "Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."

So he is saying, if you are going to do God's work, if you are going to be a servant to God, you have got to get rid of that pride and be humble. Because only a humble mind, only one that is properly set and founded with both feet on the ground and his head is not in the clouds thinking that he is something greater than he is, will be able to think soberly.

To think soberly, he says. What he means is you need to have the right mind, the right attitude, a lowly enough outlook on things so that you can look at what is going on, other people, other people's gifts, and so forth in a sane, objective, factual, reasonable way. You have got to have a humble mind in order to be able to see things as they really are. And usually when you do

that, you figure, you find out that you are really not all that great anyway, because you are able to look at yourself and see your own faults and know that even though you may have a talent in some area, you have also got a lot of problems in other areas, or weaknesses.

And then it says here that we have to do this realizing that God Himself has dealt each one of us a measure of faith in the church. This does not say that we have the *same* measure of faith. It says that God has dealt each one *a measure* of faith. Some people's faith is not as strong as other people's faith, but some people's faith is very strong, and some other people's is very weak, but they have been given what God has given them.

And we need to think about this soberly and rationally, with a humble heart, because we need to understand how other people work and how all this functions within the body. That there are going to be stronger people than us. There are going to be weaker people than us. There are going to be people that are more talented than us, some people less talented than us. There are people who have no talent in our position of talent. But there might be somebody else who has some talent that is just wonderful. Maybe they play the piano or they have a lovely singing voice or whatever, and you can barely know which one, what is a black key versus a white key. Or you do not know anything about pitch or whatnot and you cannot sing.

You have got to understand and be humble that other people have other gifts, other strengths of gifts, other strengths of faith. And they need to be looking at you in the same way and understanding that we are all in this together and all our talents are being pooled to do a certain work for God. And that we have to give each person his due, either in terms of his faith or in terms of his talents and gifts so that the work can be done properly and we are not getting in each other's way and we are not thinking "I'm better than you because I do this" or "He's better than this other person because he does that."

That is not how it works. We are all servants, but we have been gifted differently and we have different levels of faith in order to use those gifts. And so we need to recognize that and be sober about it and realistic about it and then move forward together with one another in getting the things done that we are being assigned to do.

Maybe I should also mention here in terms of talents and gifts that we all have different functions and maybe our talents and gifts support those functions and maybe sometimes not quite as well. But God has put us each in his place to do a certain function and we have to be okay with that because that is what God has assigned and that is what God has given. Because He has not done this just for ourselves. He has done this for the whole body. He has done this with a greater goal in mind than just our personal satisfaction or our feeling of pride or whatever it happens to be. It goes way beyond that.

So thinking about this, that each person is gifted differently—even though God Himself has given these gifts, they might be weak, they might be strong, they might have a lot of faith, less faith, they are being put in this particular position or have this particular function—once you understand all of that, that God is making this all work together for good, as Paul says in Romans 8: 28, how can we be puffed up about it? We are servants like the rest of them and we each have a part to play. So we need not get all big headed about our particular part, our particular function, our particular level of faith. God is working all this out and we are just a part or a piece of the whole function.

Now, in the last half of this passage from verses 6 through 8, he urges us, now that you have the proper attitude and the proper mindset about this, that you are humble and willing to serve, he urges us to make sure we put the gifts that we have been given into practice. You know, do not hide your light under a bushel basket. Let it shine! God has given you this gift for a reason. Do not let it atrophy unused. And so he tells us here to use our gifts fittingly, or properly. Then he often gives us a Christian virtue that goes along with that. Like he says, prophesy in proportion to your faith, at the end of verse 6. Another place he talks about diligence and cheerfulness. Those are all Christian virtues that we have to use in combination with the gift that He has given.

He mentioned several. Here he starts with prophesying. This is probably, in our culture here, in our way of looking at things, this is more just preaching, because prophesying is not just foretelling something, it is also forthtelling, like what I am doing here. I am forthtelling this particular principle of Christian service.

So if you are going to preach, do it in proportion to the faith that you have been given. Use your faith to the maximum in doing the preaching. Likewise with ministry or service, serving within the congregation like a deacon. You know, do it, just go out there and serve and help people. He says the same thing with teaching and with exhortation, or probably a better word to use here because sometimes with exhortation you have the wrong idea what this is, he means encouragement here, giving counsel and help and helping people, spurring them on to greater efforts and greater overcoming.

Some people have a gift of giving. They are just very generous, generous with their time, generous with their money, generous with their things, and that is their gift. And if you are going to go ahead and be generous, be generous! He says, "he who gives with liberality." Go ahead and give because if God has given you the gift of giving, He is going to supply you with more to give. If you are liberal with or generous with the things that you have, He is going to give you more so you can continue to be generous. Now, we do not want to be silly and unwise about that. We do not want to be foolish. But you understand here, if God has given you, put you in the position of being a giver, then give because that is why God put you there. At least for this point in your life.

If you are a leader, lead. Please lead because a lot of the people in the church of God are followers. They need leaders to help them. Now, as long as you are going in the right direction and doing the right thing, that is wonderful that God has given you the gift of leadership. Use it.

He says here, and of course he ends here, with showing mercy. And that is something that is sorely needed within the church, that you can have compassion on people and show them kindness. Sometimes we are a little brusque with each other. A lot of times we do not give each other any room to make mistakes. A lot of times we do not tend to be soft enough when another person is going through a hardship. But there are some people who are able to do that. They have a gift of mercy and they can show compassion where other people may not be able to do it quite so well. But that is needed in a church congregation.



And then he lists still others, (we will not go to them) in I Corinthians 12. But things like some have been given a gift of wisdom, others have been given a gift of knowledge, others have been given a gift of faith and healing and miracles and whatnot. And he goes through several of these and he says they are all from the same Spirit. God Himself has given those gifts to us and we need to use them for the benefit of others in the church, and for the whole church.

So what we need to take from this is that there are multiple gifts that come from God the Father's hands. God gives them out, many of them, multitudinous types of gifts. Very few of them actually come with any position or title in the church. This means everybody has some sort of gift that God has given them. Even if He has not said you are a deacon or an elder or this or that within the church, there is some way, some means by which you can serve.

Also, that what we find out by observation of ourselves and what we have, once we find out what we have been given to use in service for the church, we should give it our all for the good of the body of Christ. We should be able to see, after being with ourselves for however many years we have been in the church, that there are certain things that we happen to be good at. Maybe there are certain things that come easy to us. They do not all have to be talents like singing or preaching or being at the door greeting people or whatnot. It could be other things that are more hidden that you cannot see. And so we need to figure out what it is that we do well, and once we figure that out, then we need to begin applying it to the body of Christ.

And once we figure that out, as Paul puts in Philippians 2:4, we are supposed to use our gifts looking out for the best interests of our brethren. They are not to be used for our glory or for our advancement. If we want to think of the church as a kind of hierarchy and if you use your gifts, you will get noticed and you will climb the ladder, that is not at all the approach that we should be taking. It has been done in the past and it has not worked out well. What we need to do is look out for the best interests of others and use our gifts for their benefit and let the chips fall where they may. God is in control ultimately, and He will put us where He wants us.

At this point in Romans 12, starting in verse 9, Paul launches into Christian *behavior*. He has kind of left the idea of gifts behind now and he is going to talk about how we behave amongst one another and out in the world too. It is not just within the church, but at all times. And what we can get from this is that how we treat others and how we make a proper witness to them and to the world are perhaps our areas of greatest service. Just in our everyday walk, just in how we are seen to behave by anyone: by our spouse, by our children, by the kids down the block, by the people in town, our employer, acquaintances we might have. That is a tremendous Christian service that we should be doing every day showing the life of Jesus Christ in our own walk, in our own lives.

**Romans 12:9-15** Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

I just cut this in two sections to make it a little bit more manageable here. But what we have here is the first half of this list of things that we need to do in terms of our behavior, and he starts out talking about loving without hypocrisy. And I have to say that he starts it out with a purpose by putting love without hypocrisy. Because this is kind of the foundation of our Christian behavior. We have got to show love, real love. If we do not show real love, if we are showing any other kind of love, hypocritical love, then our other actions that we do like these ones that he goes on to talk about, will not be effective. They will just be put on and it will become a show rather than reality.

He says here literally, if you notice in the New King James, there is a lot of italicized words in that sentence. Let and be being the two. But it really is literally "love without hypocrisy." Or we could say maybe even more literally, it is sincere love. He just starts out with that phrase without even making it into a complete sentence. He says either sincere love or love sincerely. That is where you start. Your love has to be sincere, genuine, not

feigned, not put on in any way. You have to be without pretense. Your love has to be given without hoping or wanting anything back necessarily. It has just got to be sincere love from the heart of the other person. It has to be real.

You know, if you try to love somebody with pretense or hypocrisy, it shows. The person can tell that it is not really real. They can tell that it is tainted, it is selfish, it wants something, and Paul says that is no way to base your Christian behavior on, a false love. So we must truly want the best for the other person. We must truly be looking out for his or her best interests. And you know how it usually shows itself that it is really true, that it is really sincere, is if we have to sacrifice something to make it happen. We have to give of ourselves so that the other person has what he or she needs.

Now that too can be pretended. It just depends on how far somebody wants to go. But either way, Paul implies here that it is not going to have the proper result if it is not done with the right motivations.

So first thing, he make sure he heads the list with all of this sincere love or loving without hypocrisy. Loving in an unfeigned, without pretense way is the foundation of all Christian behaviors. We have to love *properly*. It is almost as if all the other things down the line describe how we are to show genuine love.

Then he starts with "abhor what is evil." And also then "cling to what is good." A person who truly loves and serves God shuns all evil and sin. If you really love God, you do not want to get yourself mired in the things that He hates. So you are going to abhor the evil, the wicked, the sinful thing. And at the same time, you want to make sure you are holding tight to all the good things, those things that God approves of, and that please Him. And this is based on an unfeigned love of the Father and of the Son.

Of course, it also comes down to unfeigned love for the brethren as well. If we want to be good examples to them, such a person who has unfeigned love shows affection for the brethren because he really feels for them, he cares for them, and he gives them preferential treatment like they are kings and queens. He sees them better than himself because, remember verse 3, he is humble and he knows that he is just one of them.

He is diligent and fervent in serving God. He wants to serve God, wants to give Him his all. He takes great joy in the fact that God through Christ has given us a great hope and a great future and it shines from his face that he has wonderful positive things to look forward to. And it is infectious to those who are around him. But even in persecution, he endures, he has patience. He is willing to wait it out in hope, even to the point of blessing his persecutors because he knows that there is Christ and God the Father who are running things and he can show unfeigned love even to his enemies.

And of course, in order to maintain that relationship, that loving relationship with his Master, he prays without ceasing. He is, as it is here, continuing steadfastly in prayer. That is the kind of person who has real love for God, one who wants to be with God and speak with Him often. He looks after the needy, especially the needy among the church members. And he is very hospitable and invites them into his home and shares the things that he has.

As we finished here in verse 15, this loving person experiences and helps as he needs to in both the highs and the lows of the brethren he is with. It is not some person who always draws away, but he is there when things are good and he is laughing and joking and giving high fives and just as happy and joyous as he could be when things are going well. And when things are going badly, he is there to comfort those who are going through their problems.

Let me just interject here because my eye picked up a note. Do we really think of these things that we have gone through so far, between verses 9 and 15, as service to God, as service to the brethren? Some of them we do but others we do not really necessarily think of as service. Do we think of abhorring evil as service? Maybe clinging to what is good? Do we think that is service? Normally we tend to think of service as doing something with our hands. We are getting dirty out in the garden or we are helping somebody with a car problem or we are doing something like that.

But Paul puts all of these as parts of our Christian service. They do not seem like service. They certainly do not seem like slavery. But to do each one of these things well requires us to sacrifice ourselves and what we would naturally want to do. Unless it is a part of our gift and in that particular area, we tend to like to do that sort of thing. We would rather, most of the time,

most of the other time, we would rather read a book or watch a movie or a game or work in the garden or on some hobby. Doing something that we would rather do rather than some of these things. And so it is a bit of sacrifice where we give up our time and our efforts to do something we would rather not do, that is, our service to our brethren and service to God.

So I do not want you to get the idea that these things are free. Our service comes at a price and we have to pay it, we have to give up something. And Paul says it reaches to the point where we have to give up our lives or at least a part of our lives for the benefit of others. That is how we become a living sacrifice.

Let us go to verses 16 through 21. We will read the rest of the chapter here.

**Romans 12:16-21** Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So the list goes on. We are to live harmoniously with each other. We are to think the same thing toward one another. That is what he means. That is, our burden of service will be far lighter if we are all doing the same sort of Christian service for the benefit of each other. If we are all doing it, it makes the workload lighter. "Many hands make light work," is what I am saying. And if we are all serving one another, then we will all be helping one another and things will be wonderful, or at least better than they are now, and everybody will be benefited by it.

He reiterates at this point that we are not to get too big for our britches. We must be willing to stoop low to help the humblest among us. This next one is an important one in today's society and Internet commenting, Facebook, Twitter, all those other things where people all are putting their opinions

down. He said we should be careful not to become too set in our opinions. Notice, he is talking about opinions here, not the truth. The truth, that is set and that is good and right. But we have to be willing to admit that our opinions are not the be all and end all of wisdom. We have to be willing to backtrack and say I may be wrong because fights over people's opinions will tear up a congregation quickly, or at least make brothers who should be showing love toward one another, not talk to each other and cause all kinds of problems.

And this kind of leads Paul into the next section where he starts to talk about slights and offenses and sins and getting back at others for those things. He says, specifically, do not do it, do not take retribution into your own hands. End the cycle, consider what is good for that other person and do that instead, he says, and that will put us in good standing with all people. And this will also help tremendously in living peacefully together in our community, in the church, and all of society if we act as peacemakers, so that these things will not blow up into bigger problems. And this too requires us to put the brakes on our normal human desires to get even at those who hurt us. And he says here, doing so will not be very easy. It is going to require the character of Jesus Christ in you and a lot of sacrifice. But in the end, this is the way that it will produce the best fruit. And if you cannot do anything, just leave it in God's hand and let Him take care of it because He will repay.

Now, we could go on into chapters 13 through 15 for more instruction. But I think this is enough to show us what Paul is getting at when he is talking about what our reasonable service is. We are expected to act the way that he talked about here in this last half of the chapter all the time toward our brothers and sisters in the church, as well as to the world, and even toward our enemies. In this way, we serve God, we make a witness of His way of life and we move along the path of becoming sanctified and prepared for life in the Kingdom of God. If you want to write down Matthew 25:31-40. That is the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, just the half on the sheep. You see the great king there rewarding those who served others.

Let us finish in Luke 17 and we will read the first ten verses here.

**Luke 17:1-10** Then He said to His disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do

come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." And hearing this, the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." [They understood that they would require a great deal of faith to be able to forgive like this.]

So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the fields, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what is our duty to do.'"

Notice this parable follows the idea that we are to forgive one another and how tough it is and how much faith we need to be able to do this. But we have the faith, Jesus says. That is what He basically tells us in verse 6. We have the faith that has been given to us. Remember God has given each one of us a measure of faith. We just have to use it, and work at it, and be diligent about living it, and we will be able to do whatever it is that Christ has commanded us to do.

But as the parable implies, in doing this, in doing what we have been commanded to do, we have done only what is required of us. We still have a long way to go to become truly profitable servants of our Great God. We have a lot of growth ahead of us and it is going to take a great deal of faith to get to that point.

But never fear! God is working with us and will complete our training because He wants us to be prepared for the life that He will give us in His Kingdom.