

## CHRISTIANITY 101 – Going Back To Move Forward – Part 2

Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023 - 10:00 a.m.

Pastor Chris Micks, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

### WHAT DOES SERVING REALLY LOOK LIKE?

#### **Romans 12:1 - 13**

My father-in-law, when he was alive, loved to do jigsaw puzzles and I remember that he would always be working on a puzzle. Because he loved to do so many jigsaw puzzles, he would often buy them second hand because buying those nice ones from the store can get pretty expensive. So he would buy them at garage sales, second hand stores, places like that. But how many of you know that whenever you do that, you run the risk of one of the ultimate experiences in frustration? You run the risk of putting together 999 pieces of a 1000 piece puzzle only to discover that the last piece is missing. How frustrating!

When you're left like that, with just one or two pieces missing, you can still see the overall picture of the puzzle but somehow it's spoiled, isn't it. It's incomplete. It's potential hasn't been fully realized and isn't it true, that one empty space stands out more than all the other pieces, no matter how colourful or beautiful the picture may have been.

And church can be exactly like that. When members are missing, and when I say missing, I'm not just talking about your physical presence in the building, but missing in terms of playing your part. When people are not locked in to serving God in the church, it's noticeable, we lack something. The picture, no matter how good is somehow incomplete.

You might say to yourself, "If I'm not involved, who's going to notice?" Well, the first person who comes to mind is the one who will always notice, Jesus. He notices because the bible says, if you recall, that he's the good shepherd and I recall him saying that even when 99 sheep are securely in the right place, he notices the one who's missing. And in context of course it means that he has come to save the one which is lost.

But the principle is Jesus knows every sheep, and you can be sure he notices when you're missing in action. This morning, I want to talk about serving and what does it mean to really serve in the church. So Romans chapter 12 starting in verse 1.

**Romans 12:1-13 – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. [3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to**

our faith; [7] if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; [8] the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. [9] Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. [10] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. [11] Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. [12] Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. [13] Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

What a great passage and there's a lot for us to consider this morning, so let's just jump right in. I've got four things that I want to talk about this morning so we are going to start with number one.

## 1) THE MOTIVATION TO SERVE: REMEMBERING

Our motivation to serve in the body of Christ is remembering. Look at the first verse of Romans 12: **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”**

Note the word, “therefore.” That's how he starts this chapter, **“I appeal to you therefore.”** There was an old thing I was told in Sunday school years ago and maybe you heard to and remember it. “Whenever you see a ‘therefore,’ look what it's there for.” When you see therefore, it means that he's been saying something before that. The word “therefore” here, links what Paul is saying in this chapter with what he had already said in the previous 11 chapters.

**“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God...”** If you want to translate that literally, it's “in view of the mercies of God.” In the previous chapters of Romans, all the way up to chapter 11, Paul has been outlining the doctrines of grace. All that we have been given as Christians is by God's grace. Everything we've received is by the mercies of God.

So let me just very quickly tell you what Paul has listed as mercies of God because we are not going to read the whole 11 chapters of Romans. In the previous chapters, he's talked about justification, that we have been justified because we put our faith in Jesus, it's just as if we'd never sinned, we're right before God and we can come into his presence.

Identification, no longer are we considered the children of Adam, who fell but we are the children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ the righteous. We are under grace, not under law. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, he talks about that in Romans chapter 8, about the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

He talks about how we have help in every weakness by the Spirit's power. We have divine election, God has chosen us, he's come to and pulled us out of our sins in such great grace. We have coming glory which is beyond comparison with any trouble we might go through in the present life. We have no possible separation from Jesus' love, nothing can ever take us out

of the love of God, that's our privilege and finally, we have confidence in God's faithfulness, he will never fail us.

All of these things are in the first 11 chapters, all the mercies of God. Paul says "Look at these mercies, the grace that God has lavished on us in Christ, in view of these things, keeping these things always before you, I implore that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice." No wonder he says, it is your reasonable service. It's only right that we give ourselves to serve God when we remember all that he's done for us.

What does God want? Paul tells us, "**present your bodies as a living sacrifice.**" Did you ever stop to think about that? A living sacrifice. Paul lived at a time when the idea of sacrifices was very common. He grew up as a Jewish boy in a culture where the religious life revolved around the offering of sacrifices. They would go up to the temple and they would bring their lambs and oxen, turtledoves and other things as sacrifices to God. And Paul is writing this letter to the church at Rome and there were Jewish people in that church at Rome and they'd grown up in the same culture as Paul, surrounded by sacrifice.

Even the romans themselves, who were not Jewish and didn't have the same religious system, they understood Paul's language also. Because before they converted to Christianity, they no doubt were involved in offering sacrifices to their pagan gods. This was common in the first century in all the religions including the roman religion, that they offered sacrifices.

However, while the language of sacrifice was not new to them, the idea of a living sacrifice is a brand new idea. Because the one thing common to all sacrifices in all religions is that the sacrifice lies dead on the altar. But what is Paul talking about? Living sacrifices.

God doesn't want us to come to Christ and say "All right, well I've come to this place that God has made, so kill me now." Some of us might wish with all that we've had to pass through in our lives and all that's going on in the world around us, we wish the Lord had taken us right from the baptism tank straight into glory. But God says he has a purpose for us in living our lives, being living sacrifices.

Let me put it this way for you. Jesus did the dying for us so we could do the living for him. Jesus did the dying for me so that I could do the living for him and this is our great motivation to serve him and to serve in the church body that he set us in. To serve remembering all the mercies that God has purchased and poured into our lives so wonderfully. That's the motivation to serve.

## 2) **THE ABILITY TO SERVE: GIFTING**

The ability to serve is because again of God, it's God's gifting. God has gifted us. Look at Romans 12 and if you scan from verse 3 down to verse 8, you see all about some gifts that are present in the body of Christ. You can find these gifts in every congregation on earth because God has given them to people so wonderfully.

We were talking about doing jigsaw puzzles before, but have you ever tried doing a jigsaw puzzle with a small child?? I'm not talking about one of those ones that have four pieces, I'm talking about doing an adult jigsaw puzzle and some young child comes and sits next to you and wants to join in. If it's a difficult puzzle, you'll quickly see them start to get frustrated and it can be really funny to watch a young child trying to make a piece fit that obviously doesn't belong there. They're turning it and banging it with their fist, determined they're going to make it fit when it doesn't fit.

Again, all too often, that's how it is in the church. Certain members sometimes can be sure that such and such a role in the church is for them and they're determined to make themselves fit in that job but you can see they don't quite fit. And they can never fully feel comfortable there either because it's always a great stretch for them; they really don't have the ability for it.

But here's the wonderful news from Romans chapter 12, there is a place and a vital role for every single member. The place that God intends you to fill, a place where you can be fruitful and reach your potential of doing all that God has called you to do with your life. Imagine a church, led by people with leadership gifts, taught by people with teaching gifts, administered by people with administration gifts, and on and on and on. Everyone in their place. How strong would a church like that be?

Well you know, that's exactly what God intends. Sometimes though, especially in early days, churches don't have a naturally gifted person for a role and so someone has to humbly step in and do their best until we do have somebody. And God can give extra grace for that, so I'm not saying you could never ever fulfill a role outside your gifting, God can do that. But ultimately, Romans 12 tells us that God wants the whole body to play their part according to how he's gifted us.

To get to that point, look what it says here in verse 3, **"I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."** (Romans 12:3) This is a very important verse. Paul gives 3 directives in verse 3 so that we will rightly think about ourselves because there are three great blockages to us really finding our place of effectiveness and fruitfulness in the church. Let me give them to you.

### **A) BLOCKAGE #1 IS PRIDE**

This will block the church in its pursuit to see people serving in their giftings and Paul addresses this. He says, **"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..."** (Romans 12:3).

We need to come to the task of serving in the body with humility, we need to come at this without being puffed up with pride. Giftings and abilities do have that possibility that they can puff us up with pride. God says don't let that happen, don't think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think.

## B) BLOCKAGE #2 IS IMMATURITY

The second blockage that stops the church is immaturity because he says something else, he says “think with sober judgment” (“**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment...**” Romans 12:3)

“I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.” The word sober means with restraint, with self-control, with sanity. Some people want to think they can do everything and that they should be doing everything. They end up living driven lives and that’s a mark of immaturity. There’s no shame in admitting that we are not gifted in some area and finding someone else who is to stand alongside them.

So pride will block us, immaturity will block us, the third thing that will us is inferiority.

## C) BLOCKAGE #3 IS INFERIORITY

This is kind of the flip side or the other extreme to pride. Paul says you should approach these things not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought to, but think with sober judgment, according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. “**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**” Romans 12:3

Serving the Lord in your gifts is a matter of faith, it’s a matter of trusting him, being dependent upon him. Some people walk around with their shoulders slumped down saying “I’m nothing, I’m nothing” and they think that’s humility. “I can’t do anything, I’ve got nothing to offer.” Do you know that can be just false humility? Or it can be inferiority.

Listen to me this morning, whoever you are today, you are someone, in Christ. It’s not about you being filled with pride, “look at me and what I can accomplish.” In Christ, you have all the power and strength to fulfill a great purpose with your life. Stand tall! Not with pride, but stand tall and say, “I’m going to do what God has called me to do.”

So three things will block us from serving in the body, pride, immaturity or inferiority. They’re right here in verse 3. What Paul then gives us is a list of gifts in the body of Christ and it is an extraordinary list of things. These gifts in Romans 12 apply to everybody here, there’s not one exemption clause. Every person has at least one of these gifts in their life and this is what it says in verse 6, “**Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...**” (Romans 12:6).

And then from verse 6 down to verse 8, he lists seven gifts. These seven gifts are what we call

the Motivational gifts from the Father. These are gifts that are resident in every believer, everybody has at least one of these gifts. Some people have more than one, but everyone has at least one of these seven gifts and you can look into your life and you can find them. Why do we call them the motivational gifts? Because these are gifts that kind of motivate the way we live and the way we like to serve and the things we like to do in life. They're motivational gifts and they come from God the Father because you were born with them.

I believe that you can even see some of these giftings in people who aren't even believers yet but you can see certain giftings in their life and they're in this list because God is lovingly as a father given all people these wonderful gifts. So here they are, I'm going to go through them really fast.

The first gift that he mentions is prophecy. Now what we have to be careful of here is that the Greek work for prophecy is "prophetes" can actually have three different meanings. It can be a prediction of the future, which is foretelling. It can be preaching God's message, which is forth telling, it's declaring. Thirdly, it can talk about a spontaneous message inspired by God as you read about in 1 Corinthians 12. All are called prophetes, prophecy, and what determines which one is being referred to is the context.

In Romans 12, looking at the characteristics of this gift list and the motivations that are in every person, clearly the word here means forth telling, it means preaching. It means to stand up and declare God's word. Let me give you a definition: The capacity to proclaim God's truth with a powerful effect upon the hearers. That's the gift of prophecy. It can be studied, it can be prepared, it can be a person pouring over the word of God and coming together, it's not always spontaneous, this is someone who gets up, prepared and delivers God's word.

We have many examples of that in the Bible of people standing up and preaching. Peter, look how he changed overnight, when he stood up and began to declare but he always had that ability, I believe, but it was now God by the Spirit, was bringing that out of him and he stood up and preached on the day of Pentecost. You'll see many other occasions where people stood up and preached God's word in the book of Acts.

If you have the gift of prophecy in you, if it burns in you to hold forth with the truth and to speak for God, then preach. Not arrogantly, but confidently. Speak up and speak out for the Lord! But let me say this, you don't need a pulpit on a Sunday morning to do that. I believe there are people right across the body of Christ who have the ability to engage others and to speak out the truth in many different settings. If God put this gift of prophecy in your life, you can speak up for God and do that. That's a gifting that the church needs to see in operation.

Number two, the gift of ministry. Sometimes this is called the gift of serving or the gift of helps. Here's a definition: The capacity to see practical needs and to meet those needs. This is the gift that ensures we don't have too many bosses and not enough workers, where everybody's trying to be in charge. The gift of ministry is to come and do the work. A wonderful example in the New Testament is seven men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom in the book of Acts,

chapter 6, including Stephen and Philip by the way, these seven were set aside to oversee the mundane things of the church, things that were so important. Caring for people, looking after various needs. That's the word ministry, to serve, to help. People who set things up and are there all the time, they're ushering, welcome team, and doing other things. This is not a gift to be overlooked, this is so vitally important.

If you have the gift of ministry, the gift of serving, how we need you to play that vital role in the church today. You may never get a lot of accolades for it, but do it joyfully as unto the Lord because it is seen by God and the commendation from him will be worth it all. "Well done, good and faithful servant." We need those with the gift of ministry to be doing their part.

Number three, the gift of teaching or instructing. Let me define it: The capacity to instruct others in the truth through clear explanation and application of God's word. In the New Testament, think about that wonderful couple, Aquila and Priscilla, and when the great preacher, Apollos, came preaching, he was marvelous but he had a few things that weren't quite right yet. His doctrine wasn't all that it should have been when they first heard him preaching. It says that Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and showed him more perfectly the way of salvation. He learned from those teachers in the body and was then able to go out and exercise his ministry.

If you have the gift of teaching, play your part! We have so many ministries and classes where we need people to teach others from God's word, BLAST, Christian Ed, Wednesday Connections are some. You can start off by using discussion questions and that sort of thing but as you grow in it, God will use you to teach the Bible.

Number four, exhortation, another word you could use there is encouragement. How many of you love a word of encouragement? How many of you think we have too many encouragers in the church? We could never have too many encouragers. This is the capacity to come alongside others with encouragement, comfort or gentle rebuke and motivate them to move forward.

Do you know what the word exhortation here is? It's the word "parakaleo", the Holy Spirit is the "paracletos", the helper. This is the same root word. It's the person who comes alongside to encourage people forward, correcting where necessary but moving them forward in their calling. A great example in the bible is a man by the name Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement" because that's what he did all the time. He was responsible for restoring people to ministry who otherwise would have been lost. An amazing man, Barnabas, read his story in the book of Acts. That's exhortation.

The next one is giving, contributing. I'll give you a definition: The capacity to joyfully give resources to meet needs and advance the cause of the kingdom sometimes coupled with a special ability to get a lot of resources. You may know some people who have been blessed and they're kind of entrepreneurs and they're able to generate that. The bible says that it's God who gives us the ability to get wealth and there's some people who have that ability and then

it's coupled with this gift of giving to be able to resource others. Barnabas is another good example of this, he was a great giver, he led the way in giving in the early church in a marvelous way.

If you have the gift of giving today, cheques can be made out to Cedarview Community Church and also Chris Micks. Seriously though, some things in the kingdom just might not get done until you resource them. Go out and work hard and generate it and worshipfully bring it to God. Find some needs and meet them. You might look at a brother or sister in need and you meet that need, anonymously, spontaneously but you've got the gift of giving and you just want to help others. That's an important gift in the body. We all should be givers by the way as we all should be encouragers but some have a special capacity for that.

Another gift is the gift of leadership or administration. The capacity to plan a course of action then influence people and organize resources to accomplish the plan. A great example is the Apostle Paul, an amazing leader in the early church. How he set structure in church after church after church and he went from one to the other and when he left them, they were healthy churches. They didn't always remain that way, but when he left them, they were in good shape and sometimes he had to circle back and help them again. He had the gift of leadership. If you have the gift of leadership, please lead something, come and use that gift for God's glory.

Finally, one more gift, the gift of mercy, that is compassion, comforting. The capacity to bring consolation and healing to the hurting. Jesus' story is a wonderful picture of this, the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10. How that one had such mercy, others should have gone to the dying man but his heart was moved. Even though he was very different, he was cross-cultural to that dying man, he didn't let it stop him, he went with God's mercy and bound up his wounds and cared for him. That's the gift of mercy.

There are so many hurting people today, if you have the gift of mercy, don't hold back. Sometimes it's a tough job, sometimes it's wearying but we need that gift in the body. Again, we should all show mercy, we should all be merciful but for some, that's how you're wired, to just be merciful.

So what a great list, right? The motivational gifts here in Romans chapter 12. Now to use the word differently, the motivation to serve, all of us, no matter what gifts we have, the motivation to serve is that we remember all that God has done for us, we look back, we remember and that should spur us on to serve. The ability to serve is our gifting, God wants to use you and he's given you at least one gift. What are you passionate about today? What could you do and find fulfillment in that?

### **3) THE WAY TO SERVE: LOVING**

Number 3 is the way to serve and there is only one way to serve and that is loving. The way to serve is in love. Let me read a couple of verses as we continue in the passage, verses 9 and



10.

**Romans 12:9-10 – “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. [10] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”**

This is how we serve, in love. Love has to be the guiding factor in all that we do now that we're Christians. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul says that the love of Christ constrains or controls us. It's the impelling drive for the way that we act. God's love has been shed abroad in our hearts so that we can meet the needs of others.

When you get to the great chapters in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 where it talks about the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, incredible power gifts that are mentioned there, notice that right between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14, Paul spends a whole chapter on the excellence of love. 1 Corinthians 13. It's become one of the best love chapters in the bible because of its beautiful descriptions of love.

But it's important to see where that chapter is placed as Paul is teaching how the Pentecostal church is to function in the power and dynamic of the Holy Spirit. It's got to be in love. He says you've got to come with God's power and God's help and amazing things can happen but it can all just be a show, a sounding gong, clashing symbols unless it is all born out of love. We must have all the gifts of the body motivated by the love of Christ.

See what Paul says in verse 9: **“Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”** When you love your church, you don't want to see anything coming in to injure or confuse people and you will have a desire to serve. You'll want to use your gifts to help the church, not to be applauded, but just so people will be blessed and so the church will be made stronger.

In verse 10 he says, **“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”** This denotes tender affection, like in a family. That's how we're to serve one another, with brotherly or kindly affection. And we show mutual and loving respect and honour to each other as we give preference to one another.

So this is the way to serve this morning, love guides the gifts.

#### **4) THE URGENCY TO SERVE: WATCHING**

And finally, number 4, the urgency to serve and that is watching. If you continue to read this passage in verses 11 and 12, Paul talks about rejoicing in hope as we serve and having endurance in trials. The great hope that Christians have to rejoice in, is the coming of the Lord Jesus. I'm sure that's what Paul is referring to. Rejoicing in hope and enduring in tribulation, that's how we serve. We're always looking to the fact that Jesus is coming back.

Now I think Paul alludes to it, Peter fleshes it out in terms of the gifts in the body of Christ in 1 Peter 4, verses 7 to 11.

**1 Peter 4:7-11 – “The end of all things is at hand therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. [8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. [10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: [11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

All of this is in the context of watching because Jesus is coming. That's Peter's thrust in this letter and in this passage. The coming of the Lord Jesus. Two reasons to serve more and more as we get closer to Jesus return: Number 1 – this is such a critical hour for the church, there's only moments left perhaps before Jesus returns and people need the church to be the church, to bring the gospel to the whole world. So we need everyone on the field and off the bench. You are not too young or too old to be used by God.

Secondly, the closer we get, we're not just closer to his appearing, we're closer to “Rewards Day”. I know some people who have said, “I don't want to think about rewards because I'm just doing it because I love God, I don't need any reward.” That's wonderful but again and again in the bible, it tells us to lay up for rewards. That God is going to delight in rewarding his people and whether or not you get a pat on the back for any particular thing you do here on earth, Jesus never loses sight of what you do and he's coming with rewards, crowns he says that he will give to all who love him and serve him.

Let me give you 4 very quick applications to this. #1 – SERVE! Every person find a way to serve! There's no one who's being overlooked in this call in Romans 12, Serve. What could you be most passionate about in the church's work? Either to minister to the body or to minister from the body outwards. Where could you use the spiritual gifts that are evident in your life.

#2 – SERVE WITH HUMILITY! The bible says in Philippians 2, verses 5 to 11 that we are to have the same mind as Jesus Christ, when he came from the glory of heaven to wash people's feet and to give himself even to the point of death. That's how we are called to serve.

#3 – SERVE WITH GLADNESS! Don't do it begrudgingly, serve with gladness. Psalm 100:2 says “serve the Lord with gladness.” We would love for everyone to serve but if you can only serve as a grouch, don't serve. God doesn't want that, he wants us to all serve with gladness.

#4 – ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO SERVE! Let's exhort each other, encourage someone else. “Hey, where are you going to volunteer this fall?” For those of you who have been serving for a while, take somebody under your wing, mentor somebody, especially let's raise up the next generation for the church. Let's pour into them as well.