

Ministry Focus for 2016

Romans 12

Introduction

In the context of Romans, chapter 12 is the transition point between Paul's first 11 chapters of theology, arguably the most important theological treatise in the entire Bible. Basically, chapter 12 begins the "now that you know the theology, here's how to practice it" section, and he begins with a chapter full of instruction that fits well our focus for ministry this coming year.

Background Passage:

Rom. 12 – ¹I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.* ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. ³For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly:* if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. ⁹Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS UPON HIS HEAD." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This passage has so much we could spend the entire year on it! But for today's purposes, there are three focus areas I want us to think about today, and keep in mind in the coming year: Ministry, Leadership, and Righteousness.

Ministry: It's Time to Do

Paul begins by contrasting the constant nature of our "reasonable service" with the occasional service of the Jewish sacrificial system. This constant ministry focus "encompasses the totality of bodily conduct." (Gundry)

Rom. 12:1 – ¹I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice**, acceptable to God, **which is your spiritual service of worship.**

In the light of all God has done for you, it is your reasonable service.

Then Paul gives us a great metaphor that destroys the idea that followers of Jesus can just sit on the sidelines and watch others do all of the ministry. The body metaphor.

It's usually very apparent whenever someone has a part of their body that isn't pulling its weight. Disease, disability, even death. The same is true in the Body of Christ.

Rom. 12:4-8 – ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly:* if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

You have a gift. Use it.

How many of you know what your spiritual gift(s) is(are)? _____

God not only gave you your spiritual gifting so you could serve with supernatural abilities, but also so you could know where to serve.

And then further exhortation for ministry to one another:

Rom. 12:10-13 – ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, **serving the Lord;** ¹²rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³contributing to the needs of the saints, **practicing hospitality.**

Whose job is it to do ministry in the church? _____

Is it the paid staff? _____

Eph. 4:11-16 – ¹¹And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹²**for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;** ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. ¹⁴As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by

the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up** in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to **the proper working of each individual part**, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

In the same context as Romans 12, Paul, speaking of our spiritual gifts, says that ministers are there to equip the saints for the work of ministry. It is our job to minister, not our “ministers!”

I really appreciated what our new pastor said last week. In response to the question he was answering, “Can you help us grow”, he said, “Yes, I can – with your help.”

And then Paul returns to that same metaphor of the body. Note the phrase “proper working of each individual part.” **Are you properly working?** _____

How do you get involved in ministry?

1. Discover your spiritual gift.
2. Ask God to show you a place to serve.
3. Ask God to show you if there’s something that needs to be done that no one is doing.
4. Do it.

Other insights? _____

Leadership: Develop It and Exercise It

I am so excited to have Dr. Hull as our new pastor. His leadership skills, experience, and teaching could totally transform us as individuals and as a church. So often ministry doesn’t happen or doesn’t happen well, and we can frequently see the root cause was a lack of leadership. **But a great leader will automatically develop and attract leaders around them. That’s exciting for our church!!!**

Leadership is influence. Leadership is making things happen. Leadership is having an impact.

What does our passage today say about leadership?

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

Being a leader does not make a person more important.

Matt. 20:25-28 – ²⁵But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶It is

not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

What does this passage say about leadership?

Rom. 12:6-8 – ⁶And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; **he who leads, with diligence**; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

There is a gift of leadership (or administration). Paul says that people with that gift should use it earnestly, diligently.

Earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything

Does that mean that we can’t be leader if don’t have that gift? No! Everyone can be a leader. Everyone can have impact. Everyone can have influence.

Later in our passage, Paul says to everyone:

¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; **¹¹not lagging behind in diligence**, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

Relating back to his earlier instruction for spiritually gifted leaders, he tells each of us to have that same earnest diligence of a leader.

“Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve....You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Most of us have a potential far beyond what we think is possible.” – Wooden

You can become a leader.

How do you develop and exercise leadership?

1. Become a good follower. (Servant!)
2. Read leadership books. (*Developing the Leader Within You*, John C. Maxwell; *Wooden on Leadership*, John Wooden)
3. Ask God to make you a leader.
4. Find good leaders and hang around them.
5. Find opportunities to do something that will have impact.
6. Do it.

Other insights? _____

Personal Holiness: It Starts With Your Heart

All of this talk about ministry and leadership is good and important, but we can easily miss the fact that what is most important for us as Christian servants and leaders is that if our heart isn't right with God, we are no different than the Pharisees and Sadducees. And remember that the only people Jesus ever attacked were those. We must have godly hearts to properly serve God.

Rom. 12 – ¹I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Our bodies as consecrated sacrifices and our minds as vessels transformed by God's Word – That is holiness!

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

We must resist temptation. We can. It's always our choice.

1 Cor. 10:13 – No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

We must actively and aggressively replace sin with good.

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Psalms 51 really ties all of this together. Notice how David after confessing his sin and asking God's forgiveness and restoration, he then notes that the outcome of his heart made right is effective ministry.

Ps. 51:1-13 – ¹(For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him.) (after he had gone in to Bathsheba.) Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge. ⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. ⁶Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom.

⁷Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. ⁹Hide Thy face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from Thy presence, And do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit. ¹³**Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, And sinners will be converted to Thee.**

To have God-empowered ministry, our hearts have to be right. Further, effective leadership requires integrity.

How do you develop and maintain personal holiness?

1. Daily ask God to reveal areas of disobedience and confess them.
2. "Draw near to God." (James 4:8) – Spend time in God's Word, with memorization and meditation.
3. Worship and pray.
4. Find a godly accountability partner.
5. Avoid sin.

Other insights? _____

Conclusion

Lord willing, these will be our three areas of focus for 2016.

Let's seek ways to pursue all three.