

Romans (79) **Practical Words of Exhortation (Part 5)**

We are working through this section of Romans in which we read of a number of directly worded commands that are to govern our faith and practice. We addressed verse 13, which introduced the theme of financial stewardship, which we will continue to consider today. Romans 12:13 reads, “*Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality*” (Rom. 12:13).

Now as we stated last week, much of what the New Testament teaches about Christian stewardship is in the historic context of *a collection of money for the Christians in Palestine who were suffering due to a famine*. We have recorded for us a ministry of the early churches in which they pooled their resources to help one another in need. Through the record of this effort to raise money from many churches, we find much instruction regarding our stewardship.

This famine was widespread. It happened in the days of Caesar Claudius, who ruled from 41 AD to 54 AD (cf. Acts 11:28). Paul made several references to raising support among the churches for the relief of the starving Christians in Palestine. Paul wrote of this special offering in Romans. Later in Romans 15 we will read:

²⁵But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. (Rom. 15:25-28)

Later Paul would write again of this offering in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. As we look over these two chapters we may see a number of important points that the Apostle Paul gave. Here we read of principles of stewardship that we apply to us as individual Christians, but also to us collectively as a local church.

1. Encouragement to give generously (2 Cor. 8:1-7)

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in this act of grace also.

The apostle sought to encourage and exhort the church at Corinth to take up an offering for the suffering saints at Jerusalem. He held forth before them the example of the churches in the region of Macedonia. These churches would have included the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Those churches had given a great deal toward this collection that the apostle was gathering to take to Jerusalem. It was not because they had a great deal of wealth, but it was because they had a great deal of God’s grace bestowed upon them. God had enabled them to give greatly even though they had few resources. Paul had known of their limited means; it appears that he had initially been reluctant to take receive their money. But they had insisted, “begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.”

This is what it is to experience or practice “grace giving.” Grace giving happens when God enables you to have sufficient money to give to His work. Often, but not always, God does so some unusual or unexpected way. He does this so that His people may be affirmed in the truth that He is their Provider.

But we see that in order for one to receive this gift of grace from God, that is, the money sufficient to give to a cause, one must first give himself to the Lord. Verse 5 reads, “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” The Lord enables them who are wholly given to Him to be able to support His work in remarkable ways.

2. Jesus Christ is our example of giving sacrificially for the well-being of others (2 Cor. 8:8f)

⁸I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.

This was a voluntary offering that Paul had been collecting. He was not commanding them to give to this cause. He appealed to them to prove the genuineness of their love by participating in this offering. He speaks of the preincarnate Christ who impoverished Himself that we might be enriched. The eternal Blessed One, the Second Person of the Godhead, surrendered the “riches” of His power and glory in His incarnation, willing to lay His “riches” aside, becoming “poor”, in order that His riches could be bestowed freely on us. This condescension of Christ is sometimes referred to by Christians as Christ’s *humiliation*. More specifically, what is involved in Christ’s humiliation? The 27th question and answer of *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* declares the matter well:

Question 27. Wherein did Christ’s humiliation consist?

Answer: Christ’s humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition,¹ made under the law,² undergoing the miseries of this life,³ the wrath of God,⁴ and the cursed death of the cross;⁵ in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.⁶

Christ humbled Himself in order that we might become rich in all that God has given us and promised to us through Christ. Christ impoverished Himself of His glory so that He might bestow the riches of His glory us who believe in Him as Lord and Savior. Jesus expressed to His Father in prayer, “The glory which You gave Me I have given them...” (John 17:22).

¹ **Luke 2:7**, “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” **2 Corinthians 8:9**, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” **Galatians 4:4**, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”.

² **Galatians 4:4**, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.”

³ **Isaiah 53:3**, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” **Luke 9:58**, “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” **John 4:6**, “Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.” **John 11:35**, “Jesus wept.” **Hebrews 2:18**, “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.”

⁴ **Psalms 22:1**, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” **Matthew 27:46**, “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” **Isaiah 53:10**, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” **1 John 2:2**, “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

⁵ **Galatians 3:13**, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” **Philippians 2:8**, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

⁶ **Matthew 12:40**, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

Jesus Christ set before us a model, an example to follow. If we loved other believers as He loved us, then if we saw one or some of the brethren impoverished, whose health and life was threatened, as these Christians living during this famine, we would be willing to impoverish ourselves if it meant that they could be relieved of their suffering. That is why the apostle stated what He did here. “You know what Jesus Christ did for you, should you, therefore, not also be willing to do so for another?”

3. Fulfill your commitments that you have purposed before the Lord (2 Cor. 8:10-12)

¹⁰And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹²For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

This is not saying that they had committed themselves through pledges of a specific amount that they would give. They had simply committed the previous year to set aside weekly an amount according to the amount that the Lord would make available to them. Pledge cards are commonly used by churches and “service” organizations. I disagree on principle regarding this method of fund raising. Is not making a “pledge” based upon future earnings a violation of the principle of James 4:13ff? “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” I suppose “pledge cards” would be okay if they always included something like this, “If and as the Lord enables me, I will commit to give so much...” But these kinds of fund raising methods often result in one feeling that he must give “out of compulsion”, which is to be avoided (cf. 2 Cor. 9:7).

4. Recognize that God may have blessed you with a measure of wealth so that you may have greater involvement in this kind of ministry (2 Cor. 8:13-15). But further, he would have you help others now for the time may come when your roles may be reversed and you will be dependent on their assistance when that time comes.

¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

Paul quotes the Old Testament Scriptures to substantiate his teaching. This verse is from Exodus 18. The historical context is the first occasion that God had given manna to feed His people. We read of this beginning with Exodus 16:

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. ⁵And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”

⁶Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, “At evening you shall know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt. ⁷And in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD; for He hears your complaints against the LORD. But what are we, that you complain against us?” ⁸Also Moses said, “This shall be seen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the LORD hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the LORD.”

⁹Then Moses spoke to Aaron, “Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your complaints.’” ¹⁰Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole

congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

¹¹And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹²“I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³So it was that quails came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. ¹⁴And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

And Moses said to them, “This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it according to each one’s need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.’”

¹⁷Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸So when they measured it by omers, *he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.* Every man had gathered according to each one’s need. ¹⁹And Moses said, “Let no one leave any of it till morning.”

²⁰Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted. (Exo. 16:4-21)

Paul’s use of this verse in 2 Corinthians 8 suggests several principles. Paul had already stated that God had by His grace enabled the churches of Macedonia to be able to provide a large contribution toward the relief of the Christians in Jerusalem. Just as God had provided manna for Israel, God had provided those churches with money sufficient not only for themselves, but also enough to distribute to others in need. Some were able to gather more manna than others in the same way that some churches (or individual Christians) may be able to “gather” more than others. Those who gathered more are able through God’s grace to help those who had gathered less.

5. Faithfulness and honesty in stewardship should be assured and demonstrable before others. (2 Cor. 8:16-21).

¹⁶But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. ¹⁷For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. ¹⁸With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. ²⁰We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man.

The money collected from the churches had to be carried to the ones in need in Palestine. This would have involved a number of months of travel. And security for oneself and one’s goods was not guaranteed in the roman world. On one occasion Paul described the perils of travel:

“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, *in perils of robbers*, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Cor. 11:24ff).

It was dangerous to travel in the Roman world; it was especially so for an apostle like Paul, of whom the world opposed and the devil would seek to destroy.

And so, Paul purposed to do all that was possible not only to secure the delivery of the money. But he would also put forth this great effort by being certain that the ones bearing the offering would be trustworthy men.

Everyone knew of the stellar reputation and faithfulness of the men who were collecting and transporting the collections from the churches to those in need in Palestine.

Ministries today need to put forth the same care and concern to assure donors that their gifts will be delivered to that which they were designated. Some years ago evangelical parachurch organizations sought to police themselves and show the public that they had integrity in their stewardship of finances. Not only did they commit to make their dealings public, but also they formed an organization with a measure of policing authority.⁷

Local churches should do all they can do to show integrity in their administration of finances. All things monetary should be on public record for the members. But also I believe that the practice that we have observed for years should also be in place. Annually there are several church members selected by the deacon board to do an independent audit of all of the church's accounts to assure faithful stewardship before our membership. Their report is made available in the Annual Report.

6. Paul urged the church(es) to demonstrate their love and confirm their positive reputation as a generous church toward those in need.

²²And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. ²³As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. ²⁴So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men. (2 Cor. 8:1-24)

Here again Paul is assuring the church at Corinth that their contribution would be carefully guarded and that they may be assured that it will arrive to its designated recipients. They could trust the integrity of Titus. And in addition it appears that there were some brethren from the contributing churches that would accompany the travelers to assure of a safe delivery. Paul was assuring the church that the delivering of their funds would take place. What may be possibly assumed is that Paul was removing any reason that the Christians at Corinth would hesitate to give to this cause. Some may have hesitated to give because they were not confident their sacrificial gift would be delivered. It would seem that Paul took every step possible to assure them that it would be safely delivered.

Paul urged the church at Corinth, collectively as a church, to demonstrate its love before the other churches. Not only do we as individual Christians prove our love by the manner in which we perform our stewardship, but our reputation as a church before other churches is also enhanced by our faithful and generous stewardship.

7. Paul makes a personal appeal to the conscience of the Christians in this church (2 Cor. 9:1-5)

Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ²for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated--to say nothing of you--for being so confident. ⁵So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

Paul had bragged to other churches about the generosity of the church of Corinth and that he was confident that they would give a significant amount to this cause. Here Paul is subtly "pressuring" the church at Corinth to carry on and complete this collection for the saints. He had raised in their minds his and others' expectations of them.

8. God enables His people to have the means to give to His work (2 Cor. 9:6-9).

⁷ The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (<http://www.ecfa.org/>)

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹As it is written,

“He has distributed freely,
He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever.”

We are to recognize that God has given us the power to gain wealth, and therefore we are responsible to Him with what we do with what He has entrusted to us. We are not to forget that God has enabled us to attain what we currently have and enjoy. We read of Moses warning Israel of the danger of becoming complacent and presuming upon God’s provision for them. **Deuteronomy 8:11-18** read,

¹¹“Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, ¹²lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; ¹³and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; ¹⁴when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; ¹⁵who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; ¹⁶who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end— ¹⁷then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’

¹⁸“And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”

Christians should never think that it was ultimately they and they alone who have earned what they have, so that they have little pity on those in need. “It should be everyman for himself; I did it, you can to if you put forth the same kind of effort that I have.” God has given us the ability, the strength and the opportunity, and the means to earn a living and enjoy the fruit of our labor. And yes, God has given us richly all things to enjoy. But He also has given us richly all things in order that we may be able to distribute to them in need in His name.

Here we see that God has promised to bless those who are faithful in their stewardship. Moreover, to the degree that you are generous, will be to the degree that God has promised to bless you. **Verse 6** reads, “*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*” Now the health and wealth prosperity preachers jump on this verse and they argue that you are “to sow seed” to their ministry that will later bring forth “a harvest.” What they mean by that is if you give to their ministry and that if you give a great deal, God will make you very rich. They seem to be often driven by covetousness. However, there is a principle of Scripture that we should not ignore or deny. Our Lord taught His disciples,

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

God gives grace to some more than others, thereby enabling them to give more to others. But when we are miserly, then the Lord may stop bestowing His grace upon us. We may still get by, but we are of little help to others in need. We are thereby impoverished of blessing through our failure, for our Lord spoke truthfully, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Mary’s heater in her car does not work very well at all. It prevents one from freezing, but very little warmth is derived from it. I thought that it might be a valve problem, in that it fails to open through the temperature control in order to allow hot water to flow through the heat exchanger. But that checked out fine. Hot water is flowing from the engine to the heater core. The only answer is that the heater core is partially blocked with scum of some sort. Only a little hot water is allowed through, resulting in little benefit to those riding in the car. Some Christians provide little “warmth” to those cold and

hungry because they have refused to allow God's grace to flow through them, in order to help others. It stops with them. But in doing so, it frustrates the very purpose for which God has given them grace.

Paul emphasized individual responsibility. Each of us is to determine what the Lord would have you give. **Verse 7, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."** We are not give reluctantly. Having the opportunity and ability to give to the Lord's work should be a source of great enjoyment and satisfaction for the Christian. None of us should give because we feel we have to do so, but because we want to do so. Nor should we feel compelled to give. Here again, we see why pledge cards would be a violation of this principle. To make a pledge a year in advance, as is the custom of many church ministries, is to ask your people to presume upon the future. It places people in a position in which they feel compelled to give, after all, they had pledged to do so.

In **verse 8** we are told that God is able to provide you with sufficient money to give to His work. **"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."** If the Lord burdens you to give money to something that is in accordance to His cause, then He is able to send you the funds when the time arrives for you to give to that need. Here "abound" means to give substantially. God is able to give substantially to you so that you are able to give substantially to His work.

Paul then quotes another Old Testament passage to substantiate his teaching. Here he quotes **Psalm 112:9**. I would like us to read the verse in the context of the entire psalm.

Praise the LORD!

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
Who delights greatly in His commandments.

²His descendants will be mighty on earth;
The generation of the upright will be blessed.

³Wealth and riches will be in his house,
And his righteousness endures forever.

⁴Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness;
He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

⁵A good man deals graciously and lends;
He will guide his affairs with discretion.

⁶Surely he will never be shaken;
The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.

⁷He will not be afraid of evil tidings;
His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

⁸His heart is established;
He will not be afraid,
Until he sees his desire upon his enemies.

⁹**He has dispersed abroad,
He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever;**
His horn will be exalted with honor.

¹⁰The wicked will see it and be grieved;
He will gnash his teeth and melt away;
The desire of the wicked shall perish.

Note that the verse which is quoted, Psalm 112:9, speaks of God dispersing to His people. Paul uses it the context of the Christians dispersing to the poor of Jerusalem. It is clear that God disperses to the poor through the giving of his people. He is to be glorified, that is, given the credit and the praise for what He enables us to do in His name.

9. May God be glorified through all of our stewardship (2 Cor. 9:10-15)

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹²For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift! (2 Cor. 9:1-15)

In addition to Paul commanding Christians, “*Contribute to the needs of the saints*”, he also included this exhortation: “*and seek to show hospitality*.” The setting of this command was the important responsibility for someone to provide lodging in their home for travelers. To find a safe place to stay in a city for a night or for several nights was not an easy matter. Christians were to make available their homes for strangers. The command is given in Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” This does not mean that you should entertain strangers because you never know when you might entertain angels. It may simply be suggesting that you just know whom you might be providing important service.

Hospitality was to be characteristic of church leaders. An elder had to demonstrate this practice: “An elder then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, *hospitable*, able to teach” (1 Tim 3:3). Also we read in Titus 1:8, “For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but *hospitable*, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined” (Tit 1:6-8).

But not only were church leaders to practice hospitality, but we see here in Romans 12:13 that all Christians are to be hospitable. We should be willing to open ourselves and our homes to entertain and provide for others. As 1 Peter 4:9 instructs us, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

The early churches supported some Christian widows who met certain qualifications. These had been faithful women through their lives. We read in 1 Timothy 5:9ff:

⁹Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, ¹⁰and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, *has shown hospitality*, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

Here, it is specifically referring to her showing hospitality to “strangers.”

Invitations to come into your home would be extended to friends, strangers, and even enemies. Hospitality was commonly extended to strangers. To extend hospitality to ones to stay in your home, you were assuming the responsibility to protect them as well as feed them. In the ancient world, particularly in Old Testament times, strangers could expect that someone in a town they were passing through would open their home to them. And to extend hospitality to ones to stay in your home, you were assuming the responsibility to protect them as well as feed them. Invitations to come into your home would be extended to friends, strangers, and even enemies.

One remarkable feature of Oriental hospitality is that sometimes an enemy is received as a guest, and as long as he remains in that relationship, he is perfectly safe and is treated as a friend. There are certain Oriental tribes of tent-dwellers who have the rule that an enemy who has “once dismounted and touched the rope of a single tent, is safe.”⁸

Failure to show hospitality was regarded as a great sin in the biblical world. If an invitation were not extended to a stranger who had come into town, it was regarded as a reproach upon all of the inhabitants of that town. Consider the account in Judges 19 in which a man was traveling near ancient Jerusalem, before it had been

⁸ Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Moody Press, 1953), p. 70

inhabited by the Jews. The man chose rather than to lodge in Jerusalem for the night, he chose to travel past sundown so that he could stay in a city inhabited by Jews, that being Gibeah, a town of the tribe of Benjamin. Here is the account of Judges 19.

¹⁰However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine was also with him. ¹¹They were near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, “Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it.”

¹²But his master said to him, “We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who are not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah.” ¹³So he said to his servant, “Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah.” ¹⁴And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. ¹⁵They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into his house to spend the night.

¹⁶Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also was from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place were Benjamites. ¹⁷And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, “Where are you going, and where do you come from?”

¹⁸So he said to him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I am from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; now I am going to the house of the LORD. But there is no one who will take me into his house, ¹⁹although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man who is with your servant; there is no lack of anything.”

²⁰And the old man said, “Peace be with you! However, let all your needs be my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square.” ²¹So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

We will not rehearse in detail what happened to this traveler that night in Gibeah, but the crimes committed were aggravated because they were shown to have been a failure of the town to extend hospitality to them. The inhabitants duplicated the sins of Sodom recorded in Genesis 19. This event shows that Benjamin, a tribe of Israel, had become as wicked and deserving of judgment as had Sodom.

One reason that I brought this matter up is to address how some who try to legitimize homosexual behavior claim that the Bible does not teach against it. We might respond, “But the Bible clearly relates that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of its great sexual sin, as illustrated in the account of Lot and his family which is recorded in Genesis 18. You may hear this response, “God did not judge or condemn Sodom and Gomorrah for sexual sin, and certainly not for homosexual behavior; rather”, they claim, “God judged those cities severely for having violated laws of hospitality.” The failure to provide hospitality was sin, but the sin of sodomy was an abomination that warranted God’s wrath both upon Sodom, as well as upon Gibeah, which is in the extended passage from which we just read.

May our Lord continue to give us grace so that we will be enabled to be faithful in helping one another in need. And may we also be given to hospitality, opening our homes and sharing meals with one another. In this way we may encourage one another and assist one another in our walk with the Lord.

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (2 Thess. 3:5)