

Romans 12:9-12 "Be Fervent In Spirit, Serving The Lord"

Romans 12:9-12 ⁹ *Let love be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ *Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

As we come to our text this morning we must keep in mind that it's in the context of how Paul starts this portion of his letter which we know as the 12th chapter.

He has reminded these Christians to present their bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God. In other words, every fiber of their being, which would certainly include their physical bodies, but certainly can't be divorced from their spiritual being, which has new life in Christ.

He then contrasts how being a new creature in Christ we should not be conformed to this world and its wisdom and its desires and its ungodly passions, but rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

You might remember that the word transformed in the Greek is *metamorphoo*, which is where we get our English metamorphosis, which is the process a butterfly goes through changing from one type of thing to another.

We once were lost, but now we're found, was blind but now we see. We are new creatures in Christ and our ability to grow in this new life is connected to being renewed in our minds.

Christianity is not to be a mindless approach to life. In fact Jesus Himself tells us in Mat 22:37 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with ***all your mind.***" [Deut. 6:5]

Paul's exhortation to the Colossians verifies that our minds must be constantly engaged so that we may learn of what it is to have a relationship with the living God and then to make conscious choices to glorify God in the power of His Spirit.

Col 3:2-3 "***Set your minds on things above***, not on earthly things.
3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

With that in mind Paul then shares in this 12th chapter of Romans of how the Body of Christ is made up of many members and that those many members are to be serving one another and the Lord. And that's where we've been for the last few weeks as we've looked at the Gifts of the Spirit.

But as with any service to God there must be a proper motive and a proper biblical means of accomplishing what He desires for us which brings us to our text this morning.

Rom 12:9 "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."

The connection here to what Paul was saying on the gifts of the Spirit in Rom.12:6-8 is that love must be at the forefront as it relates to the gifts or any area of life. Without love we're simply a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

But, the beauty of this passage in verse 9 and following is that Paul gives us some very practical ways in which love is to demonstrate itself in our lives.

He begins in verse 9 by saying that love must be sincere. The KJV puts it: "let love be without dissimulation." Now dissimulation is a good English word which means to conceal one's true motives by some pretense. And so the idea is not to be hypocritical. In fact the NAS and the NKJV uses the word hypocrisy. "Let love be without hypocrisy."

Hypocrisy is one of those things in the church we can do without. Some people are saying one thing when in fact they are pursuing something entirely different with the idea of fooling people. And that may take on a variety of forms. But, hypocrisy is a form of evil or sin, and in verse 9 Paul goes on to say... "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."

The word hate here in the Greek means to utterly detest. Unfortunately, there's a tendency to entertain evil instead of utterly detesting it. Pastor Chuck Smith says, "One of the major weaknesses of the church is a great tolerance for evil. We've practically established a peaceful coexistence with the works of darkness."

And though evil would certainly mean overt sinful behavior, evil can also include those things which would undermine the true Gospel of Jesus Christ or to undermine the word of God so as to pervert the truth by which we must live.

This is why I taught last week on being discerning. If we are to discern we must have a standard to go to by which that discernment can be measured.

1Th 5:21-23 "Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And so, if love is to be without hypocrisy, evil in all its forms must be hated, and in its place we must cleave to what is good. I like the imagery Paul gives us here in the Greek because the word cleave or cling is literally translated to glue. Hate and detach yourself from the things you used to practice which dishonor Christ and now glue yourself to the good things which glorify God.

And the things which glorify God are things which are done in His love. And Paul tells us what kind of love that is in Eph.5:2... "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God."

This is why Paul starts this portion of Rom 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."

Walking in love means that love has legs. Love is an action, it's a verb, something we do, not something we merely talk about. If love is only talk, it's hypocrisy.

Had Christ's love not accomplished its purpose through action we would still be in our sin. Love took Christ to the cross and our love should take us to His cross and behold His love and then in turn love Him as we love each other.

Glue yourself to that kind of love which is sacrificial and desires to put feet to your love. Glue yourself to Christ.

Well, how does this love work in the real world? I'm glad you asked that. In the next few verses Paul gives us something which is likened to the Proverbs. Short, one sentence jewels to consider in our lives.

And with each sentence comes volumes of teaching as the Spirit of God places those truths in our hearts and then enables us to walk in those truths to God's glory.

Rom 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."

Paul says, 'you want to know how your love should show itself?, let me give you some practical advice.' And keep in mind that this practical advice is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Don't ever think that living for God has no practical value as it pertains to real life.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Now, I don't mean to clutter this study with a Greek lesson, but there are so many good things to glean from the original language here. The word devoted in the Greek is a word which is reserved for family. In fact, it could be translated family affection.

You and I are family in Christ. We're blood, because of the blood of Christ, and that makes us family. And because we're family there is a devotion we should have for one another. We should be devoted to helping and building each other up in Christ.

We should be devoted to seeing that each of us walk in that love so that we can grow in this family with the express purpose of being able to bring others into this family of Christ and helping them grow in their faith.

To do that we must have a different attitude towards one another. An attitude which the world does not seem too eager to pursue. But Paul spells that attitude out here which is motivated from a love for Christ.

"Honor one another above yourselves." The literal translation is "Outdo one another in showing honor." Now, the outdoing isn't intended to be a "one up" on each other attitude, but rather putting our personal interests to the side in favor of placing one another in a position of being lifted up.

'How can I lift you up so that you can be a better servant for Christ?' attitude. 'What can I do to assist you?' attitude.

This attitude is best summed up in the letter to the Philippians.

Phi 2:3-5 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:"

Now the problem with all of this is that that's not the message we're getting from the world. We're bombarded every day with "Do your own thing", "Get while the getting is good", "Look out for #1".

And often times this is the baggage we bring with us when we come into the family of God. 'Okay, I'm in the family, now what's in it for me? What do I get out of this deal?'

'Oh, you get to serve others!' Boy, that's an exciting prospect.'

Paul says take God's love and put feet to it. Serve others without complaint. Serve and love others, not under compulsion, but out of gratitude that someone thought enough of you to serve you with His very life and shed His blood so that you might have eternal life, and who rose from the dead so that you don't have to live a life of death separated from your God and creator.

It's all perspective.

Rom 12:11 "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Do you ever lack zeal? You ever feel like a soggy, limp noodle who's encouraged to be a steel girder? You just kind of slink on the ground as the world steps on you and makes mush out of an already soft noodle.

Soft goey mush doesn't seem to be a very effective servant for the Lord. You ever notice that? But where does zeal come from, especially when you don't seem to have any?

Zeal, as we know, is that burning desire, that fervor which comes to the surface and goes where no man has gone before. But for a variety of reasons there are times in our lives when we don't want to go anywhere.

The flame which once burned bright is now this wimpy little glow coming from an ember which is on its last leg and doesn't have enough heat to move a cold thermometer one degree. We've all been there. But Paul doesn't recommend that we simply have a zeal. He says "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

The NAS puts it, "not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

It's easy to find ourselves lagging behind. When I played football I remember there were always a few guys who just couldn't keep up when running laps or wind sprints. They were always lagging behind.

The problem was that when they were doggin' it the coaches would take it out on the rest of the team. And so we'd end up having to run more. You can't imagine some of the things that were said to those guys by the rest of the team to encourage them to run harder and faster.

Believe me, it wasn't brotherly love. I'm sure they felt like spit. And sometimes we feel like that. But we don't have the option to stay in that situation. But, it's not as though God asks us to do something that can't be done.

I would say this, that it can't be done in our own strength or in our own wisdom or in our own schemes, but as we humble ourselves before God, and confess that our strength is not what we want to run this race, God is able to lift us up out of the mud and set us on the course He has for us, and give us His supernatural strength of the Spirit to not only run the race but finish it as well.

One of my favorite passages in the word of God is found in Isa 40:29-31 "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

And this is where Paul is going in his message to the Romans. He reminds them that this relationship we have with God through Christ is based on God's love for us. And in turn our love for Him will enable us to trust Him and to come before His throne with thanksgiving.

In return God lifts us up. But, what we find is that the thing that enables us to go on is a hope that only God can give. We can fall down with our face in the mud and we may try to depend on the hope the world gives for a while. But it will ultimately show itself to be lacking, because the world offers no hope.

And so in verse 12 of Romans 12 Paul says, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

When your hope grows weak, your faith grows weak and your spiritual life grows weak. We need to constantly go back to our hope found in Christ alone.

And that hope is the same hope Abraham longed for as he wandered in a land that was promised to him but never realized in his lifetime. And yet he always moved forward toward the only hope that gave him the purpose in going forward and that was to be with his Lord and Savior in a world where the curse and sin was finally vanquished.

Hebrews 11:8-10 ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

This is the inheritance that you and I should long for with each step or crawl that we take in this world. And as we see more clearly what this promise is all about we can straighten ourselves up in the power of the Spirit and instead of walking at a crawl's pace we can mount up with wings as eagles and run the race that is set before us, because at the end is the prize of Christ Himself and the new earth and new heavens that He will fashion for us.

Revelation 21:1-5 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

I mean what's the alternative? You gonna go back to the world? Sometimes that happens. And that usually happens because it's a familiar and sometimes comfortable escape. But you can only escape for so long before the Spirit, whom we grieve, who loves us

so much, begins to point us back to our hope, our life who is our Savior.

A relationship with God is one which is being constantly refined and sometimes that refining is hard and sometimes the heat seems to be more than we can bear. But, like Shadrach, Meshac, and Abednego, if we can look beyond the heat and by faith hope in the One who saves, we will find ourselves with Jesus Himself, with us in the middle of the heat, and He will bring us through.

But, even in the heat there's a purpose. Paul brings this out earlier in this letter to the Romans.

Rom 5:1-5 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

He alone is our hope. And as we are loving and serving each other in Christ we must always encourage brothers and sisters in Christ to never take their eyes off of their hope; Jesus, who has loved us with an everlasting love, who will never forsake us or leave us. No way.

If you ever seem to lose your hope then get on your knees and lose yourself as you seek the One who promises to renew our strength and bring us to Himself because we are His very children whom Jesus purchased with His blood and who secured that relationship in His resurrection.

Let me close with an encouragement from a man who once even denied Jesus three times, but who knew where his hope really was.

1Pe 1:3-9 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7

These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."