

The Gospel in Romans: Romans 12:9-16

INTRODUCTION

1. There may be no paragraph in Romans or the entire NT more straightforward and easy to understand than this one.
 - Its contents are so plainly stated even a child listening to the text read-aloud could understand what is said.
 - Yet the clear call to sincere love as a follower of Christ is enough to convict even the most mature saint.
2. This paragraph requires little explanation, though it is my hope and prayer this exposition will be helpful.
 - But while it may need little explanation, it deserves serious and extended meditation and diligent application.
 - This brief summary of concise statements of the Christian life would be a worthy subject for memorization.
3. John Stott helpfully summarizes the entire paragraph under 12 main headings; I have divided it for our study into 15.
 - Stott: Sincerity (9a), Discernment (9b), Affection (10a), Honour (10b), Enthusiasm (11), Patience (12), Generosity (13a), Hospitality (13b), Good will (14), Sympathy (15), Harmony (16a), Humility (16b)
 - My aim is to offer some assistance in focusing on and thinking about these simple yet powerful commands.

LET LOVE BE GENUINE (9A)

1. Literally: "The love without hypocrisy." ἀνυποκριτος – *without hypocrisy* (NASB), *without dissimulation* (KJV)
 - We often emphasize that biblical love (*agape*) is not an emotion, *per se*, but a decision which acts.
 - This is true, but an important and necessary safeguard is erected here: it must be sincere, not forced or feigned.
2. It might be easier to simply reduce our responsibilities to a set of tasks which can be completed regardless of spirit.
 - There is truth in the saying one does not have to "like" a person in order to love them biblically. **Mt. 5:44-45**
 - But the danger is so reducing biblical love to a behavior that it becomes insincere, meaningless actions.
3. Hypocrisy is pretending or play-acting; it comes from a Greek word used to describe actors on the stage.
 - That must not be the love we live and share as brothers; it may not be deeply heartfelt, but it must be real.
 - The key to sincere love is recognizing the genuine love God has shown to us and living every day in light of it.

ABHOR WHAT IS EVIL; HOLD FAST TO WHAT IS GOOD (9B)

1. Paul uses two very strong words here, one to indicate *hatred* or *abhorrence* and another for *strong attachment*.
 - The first is only used in the NT in this verse but is used in classical Greek literature; *to shudder*, i.e. *abhor*.
 - The second means literally to *join or fasten firmly together*; e.g. marriage (Mt. 19:5), sexual union (1Co. 6:16).
2. We cannot afford to be passive or indifferent toward either sin or righteousness; these are important matters.
 - It is not enough to disapprove or abstain from evil; we are to *hate* and *abhor* it, i.e. want nothing to do with it.
 - How might this inform or influence our home life, entertainment choices, moral values, etc.? **Php. 4:8; Psa. 101**
3. We need an active commitment to good that is as strong as our disdain for evil. **De. 10:12-13; Am. 5:14-15; Mic. 6:8**
 - We are not merely rejecting what is wrong, but we are repenting and running in the direction of what is right!
 - There may be some things we need to let go of or throw away and others we need to hold onto and bring closer.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITH BROTHERLY AFFECTION (10A)

1. This exhortation is a byproduct of having the proper, biblical perspective on my brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - Some brethren are easier to love than others; some I more naturally relate to; some are less obnoxious.
 - But whether easy to love or natural friend, every fellow believer is a brother in Christ and deserves love as such.
2. This doesn't mean every Christian must become your closest chum or that you can never disagree or even dislike.
 - As noted before, you *can* love a person biblically without liking them much or at all, but that is not desirable.
 - If we keep in view the love shown us and the grace of fellowship in Christ, brotherhood will become natural.

OUTDO ONE ANOTHER IN SHOWING HONOR (10B)

1. There is a textual question here whether Paul is best understood to say *outdo* (ESV) or *give preference* (NASB).
 - Either appears to be possible as a translation, and the difference is more semantic than actual or significant.
 - In either case, the real import is that we are to be more concerned for our brothers' needs than our own.
2. This same selfless and sacrificial devotion is modeled by Christ in the Incarnation to which Paul points. **Php. 2:1-8**
 - What kind of transformation might we see in fellowship and local churches if this spirit of selflessness prevailed?
 - What if the only attempt to outdo one another was in serving and showing love rather than self-advancement?

DO NOT BE SLOTHFUL IN ZEAL, BE FERVENT IN SPIRIT (11A)

1. Unfortunately *slothful* is probably a fitting description of the devotion of the average church-goer in America today.
 - Whereas we may be very diligent in our education, career, or recreation, our religion is often a mere formality.
 - Zeal is the natural and inevitable result of seeing the world with a biblical perspective. **Jn. 2:13-17; Ac. 17:16-17**
2. How do we stir up zeal when weighed down? Preach the gospel to ourselves again! **2Ti. 1:3-14; 2:1-13; 2Pe. 1:3-15**

SERVE THE LORD (11B)

1. So simple, so obvious, so straightforward, yet how often do we need to be reminded? Just serve the Lord, Christian!
 - This little exhortation helps so much when we face the drudgery of mundane, earthly tasks. **Eph. 6:5-8**
 - In those moments when we'd rather do something "important" we need to remember who we really serve!
2. Even slaves in the first century church could find comfort and encouragement in this principle. **Col. 3:22-25**
 - We serve the Lord Christ; He is our true Master; He will ultimately judge our work; He will give us our reward.
 - Everything has meaning when you're a Christian, even scrubbing toilets, folding clothes, and balancing accounts.

REJOICE IN HOPE (12A)

1. What enables us to *rejoice always*? Hope in Jesus Christ. Hope because of what He has done, what He promised.
 - Joy is not an option for the Christian; it is not even a perk. It is both command and promise. **Php. 4:4; Ro. 15:13**
 - You can rejoice; you are commanded to rejoice; you will rejoice the more Christ occupies your mind. **Co. 3:1-4**
2. People who have hope can always rejoice because their happiness is not confined by immediate circumstances.
 - There is no reason for a Christian ever to feel hopeless; we still may feel so at times, but we never have to.
 - The promises of God are a strong anchor with which to secure our soul against the storms of life. **Heb. 6:9-20**
3. Too many Christians live more by sight and by feeling than by faith, but the Bible commands otherwise. (2Co. 5:7)
 - Faith comes from the word of God, and our feelings must be brought in submission to our faith in Him.
 - In your darkest and most hopeless hour, lean on the promises of a sovereign God who cannot fail. **Rom. 8:28-39**

BE PATIENT IN TRIBULATION (12B)

1. We use the term *patient* to describe putting up with minor aggravation; Paul uses it to indicate *perseverance* in trial.
 - The original word means literally *to remain, to stay behind, await, endure* (ὑπομενω). This is a weighty word.
 - Jesus *endured* the cross (Heb. 12:2). Job *endured* trial (Jas. 5:11). Paul *endured* physical persecution (2Ti. 2:10).
2. This doesn't simply mean "put up with it;" it means we hold on no matter what; dig a foxhole and prepare for battle.
 - Don't think for a moment you are in this fight alone. The Lord made precious promises. **Heb. 13:5-6; 1Co. 10:13**
 - Neither giving up nor giving in are options for us; we are God's children, His people, and we will stay the course.

BE CONSTANT IN PRAYER (12C)

1. All Christians would be well-advised to have a structured prayer-life, but a step beyond that is this: a *life* of prayer.
 - I think we make a mistake when we interpret this (or 1Th. 5:17) as meaning a running conversation with God.
 - We *should* be calling out and speaking reverently to God throughout the day; this is part of living *Coram Deo*.
2. But constancy in prayer is more than merely chatting with God throughout the day as if He is a friend or neighbor.
 - It refers to a continual commitment to prayer, a steadfast pursuit and practice of the discipline of prayer.
 - This does not mean I am literally praying at every moment, but it means prayer becomes the rhythm of my life.
3. Ironically, the chatty conversation approach to prayer can often be irreverent and superficial, an empty experience.
 - By contrast see the discipline of saints in Scripture: **Psa. 5:3; 55:17; 119:164; Neh. 1:6; Dan. 6:10; Ac. 3:1; 10:3, 9**
 - Constancy in prayer should never be an excuse for anything less than reverence and gratitude for the Creator.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEEDS OF THE SAINTS AND SEEK TO SHOW HOSPITALITY (13)

1. While we certainly ought to "do good to all men" as we have opportunity, our first priority should always be saints.
 - We should first be concerned for the poor among God's people, then the rest. **De. 15:7-11; Mt. 25:40; Gal. 6:10**
 - The Bible's concern for social justice is loving and serving as disciples, not covert evangelism or culture change.
2. Paul does not merely say to *practice* hospitality; he instructs us to *seek* opportunities for it!
 - How many of us show little hospitality because we are too busy to notice or create opportunities? **Mt. 25:41-45**
 - The proper attitude is of great importance; it is easy to get caught grumbling while acting hospitably. **1Pe. 4:9**

BLESS THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU; BLESS AND DO NOT CURSE THEM (14)

1. This remarkable and challenging teaching echoes Christ's own in His Sermon on the Mount. **Mt. 5:38-48**
 - Paul will go on to elaborate and further expound this responsibility of non-retaliation in 12:17-21.
 - His argument will demonstrate that God's promise of and provision for justice eliminates our need to avenge.
2. Once again the instruction goes beyond simple patience or abstinence from evil and calls for active goodness.
 - We are not only to "not kill or take vengeance on" those who persecute us; we are to bless them!
 - How? By recognizing this is what God did to us. We may not like them, but we can pray and do good for them.

REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE, WEEP WITH THOSE WHO WEEP (15)

1. Have you noticed how children often try to attract attention when the focus is on another's joy or sadness?
 - We don't change much. We still tend to talk about ourselves too much when another experiences something.
 - But Paul reminds us that sympathy is not about relating or inserting ourselves; it is about presence and support.

2. Be present, not so you can share what you have experienced, but so you can share *their* experience.
 - This is a generalization; there are times when personal experience *can* be helpful or appropriate to another.
 - But selfless service more often involves setting aside our own story in order to enter and observe theirs.
3. The best thing Job's friends ever did was sit with him in silence for a week. When they tried to explain his suffering....

LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER (16A)

1. Harmony does not require perfect agreement; we won't be always on the same page, but we have peace in Christ.
 - Our fellowship should reflect the peace with God each of us enjoys in the Son. He is our peace. (Eph. 2:14a)
 - When the church is torn by gossip, factions, and in-fighting, we poorly display the gracious work of Christ.
2. We must actively work for peace; it doesn't just happen. **14:19; Col. 3:15; 1Th. 5:13; 2Ti. 2:22; Heb. 12:14 Jas. 3:18**
 - Some people always create problems, some are just passive, and others are peacemakers. Which am I? **Mt. 5:9**
 - Some conflicts are unavoidable, but how much more peace might the church enjoy if we all worked for it?

DO NOT BE HAUGHTY, BUT ASSOCIATE WITH THE LOWLY (16B)

1. A more literal translation by Alfred Marshall: "Not the high things minding but to the humble condescending."
 - It would be easy to lose sight of the simplicity of devotion to Christ in the complexity of the last eleven chapters.
 - But these verses remind us what simple, pure, gospel-driven religion looks like, how it behaves. **2Co. 11:3**
2. Knowledge is important, truth matters, and the *doing* of Christianity is based on its *doctrine*. But it is not everything.
 - Good deeds without the gospel are worthless, but so is knowledge without humility. **1Co. 8:1-3; 13:2**
 - We should intentionally cultivate humility, remembering we are but dust, and gladly associate with the lowly.

NEVER BE WISE IN YOUR OWN SIGHT (16C)

1. It is too easy and tempting to become impressed with our own understanding, maturity, or piety. **1Co. 10:12**
 - The Bible everywhere warns against thinking too much of ourselves and our knowledge and ability. **Pr. 16:18-19**
 - We are to imitate the example of Christ who condescended to bless those truly beneath Him. (Php. 2:1-11)
2. Ironically, there are two ways people often fall into pride which can also serve to protect us from it.
 - First is reading and associating with the "great and wise" of this world.
 - But if we actually sought out those with godly wisdom to learn from them, we would see how little we know!
 - If what you are reading or listening to tends to make you arrogant, change the channel and read something else
 - Second is comparing ourselves only with those we deem inferior in our immediate circle.
 - Proud people often don't get out much. They live in a very small world where they feel like very big people.
 - But if we seek opportunities to serve and bless others, we will be blessed as well and realize how small we are.

PRAYER OF REFLECTION

O Lord, we know the way is not to be found within ourselves. It is not within man who walks to direct his own steps. We need Your wisdom, Your guidance, Your grace. Father, so often we become puffed up, even by the doctrines we read and study and learn about in your word. Forgive us, Father. Forgive us for so often losing sight of the purity and simplicity of devotion to Christ. Help us never to lose sight of the beauty of Your Son and of the work He has done on our behalf. Help us to live transformed lives. Renew our minds by the work of Your Holy Spirit through the preached and read word. Help us to grow in grace and good works, even as we grow in knowledge and in faith. Be with us, Lord, and help us.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.