

Sermons through

Romans

How Christians Behave

Romans 12:9-13

Part Five

Patience, Prayer, Helping and Reaching

With Study Questions

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Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹ not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³ distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (Romans 12:9-13).

A Reminder

There is a consensus among those I would consider sound ministers (both now and through history) that it is best to preach sermons going through various books in the Bible. Although an occasional topical series may be appropriate, to exegetically, verse by verse, develop an understandable exposition of the flow of the text through entire books keeps the pastor from grinding the axe on his favorite theological topics and somewhat forces him to **“declare the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).**

One downside of this verse by verse method is that one might find himself in the midst of passages, even chapters, that focus only on the law (what God requires of us) or gospel (what God provides for us in Christ). One can easily make the point that the first eleven chapters of Romans is gospel focused (certainly with some exceptions) while chapters 12 through 16 tend to emphasize how we should live-law.

This type of transition is seen in a verse like Romans 12:1 which reads: **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...”** where we see the Apostle appealing to what he had been writing about, the mercies of God-the gospel-as that which should be foundational to and motivational for the keeping of law, with which he completes the sentence, **“that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1).**

This might not be a downside for someone sitting down and spending an hour or so reading through the epistle to the Romans. It might only take a

person 45 minutes to get to chapter 12 and then 20 more minutes to get through chapter 16 and they will have seen how nicely the law and gospel work together. But even the most succinct preachers will not succeed in getting through Romans so rapidly. So the congregation might find they go months or even years without either the law (what God demands) or the gospel (what God provides in Christ).

I would argue that it is therefore incumbent upon preachers to ever remind their listeners of the gospel while preaching through the law and vice-versa. Without the law the gospel can appear unappreciated and perhaps even unnecessary and without the gospel the law becomes a **“ministry of death, carved in letters of stone” (2 Corinthians 3:7)**.

Please keep this law/gospel relationship in mind as we complete our short series entitled *How Christians Behave* based upon Romans 12:9-13.

Review

In these five verses we began by examining what it means to love **“without hypocrisy.”** As much as we’d like love to feel a certain way, to love without hypocrisy has more to do with our convictions than our feelings; a hypocritical love means my convictions are not convictions at all but a mere show for the benefit of others.

We then discussed what it means to **“abhor what is evil (and) cling to what is good”** and how abhorrence is not entirely synonymous with hatred. It means to shudder or bristle—to be horrified. This is not mere contempt but a recognition that the consequences of evil can be devastating. Along with abhorring what is evil, we are to **“cling to what is good.”** Obedience to this requires an understanding of what goodness is then being committed to hold tightly to it.

We must be careful as we engage in this (what the Apostle Paul elsewhere calls) **“warfare”** (2 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Timothy 1:18) that we don’t become harsh and overly militant but we are to be **“kindly affectionate”** to one another—giving others honor and priority over our own selfish interests. None of this is an easy task so we see the call to **“diligent”** and **“fervent (zeontes-boiling) in spirit”**, knowing in the final analysis when we are loving and serving others, we are loving and **“serving the Lord.”**

In our last meeting we discussed what **“rejoicing in hope”** means. Though we are called to take joy in various things material and immaterial, temporal and eternal, the true anchor for Christian joy is found in the hope of

Christ. Though we are called to take joy in all things (even in our trials-James 1:2), our hearts are to be focused, settled and comforted in our eternal Sabbath rest, a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory (1 Peter 1:8) – we rejoice in the hope of a happiness that is beyond and superior to this world.

The Apostle continues:

...patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer (Romans 12:12b)

Patient in Tribulation

We have discussed in some detail how the Apostle had taught how we can “**glory in tribulations**” (Romans 5:3) because we know the final product of that tribulation will be the very hope that will keep us strong and secure in our faith—a hope that “**does not disappoint.**”

We see a glorious, albeit sometimes painful, cycle of tribulation (tribulation *thlipsei* may be due to faithfulness or the simple travails of the life of a sinful creature in a broken world) resulting in character and hope which aids in our being more patient. I find it easier to be patient in tribulation if I know there is a holy design.

The word is used to describe the anguish of giving birth.

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish (*thlipseos*), for joy that a human being has been born into the world (John 16:21).

A few years back I was informed that one of my former students who was about to give birth to her first child. There were some somewhat minor complications when she had come to term which necessitated a C-section. In this day and age C-sections are not terribly dangerous. But she had been on a medication which, if mixed with the necessary anesthetic for the C-section, would have been harmful for the baby so she opted out of the anesthetic. They literally put a belt in her mouth, which she bit down on while they performed the C-section.

This is a very intense illustration and I hesitated to share it since it may ruin our concentration for the remainder of the message. Be that as it may, this mother’s desire to bring forth a healthy baby provides suitable example of how Christians are called to engage those things in this life which cause us to “**grow**

weary or fainthearted” (Hebrews 12:2). In her mind it was worth it to endure that anguish because of her love for her unborn child. We can be so casually selfish when things don’t go our way, thinking there are no consequences for our unseemly and sinful responses to our trials.

Let us be reminded that we are called to imitate Jesus...

...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2b).

Steadfast in Prayer

The above patience is no easy task and how reasonable how quickly the Apostle Paul moves to prayer and how we are to remain constantly in it. The verb (steadfastly *proskarterountes*) means to continue to do something with intense effort. For so many of us this may be the chink in our armor. How weak are we in our prayer lives!

Charles Spurgeon taught:

You will observe that the desire to commune with God is intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation.

Along with these words:

To pray is to grasp heaven in one’s arms, to embrace the Deity within one’s soul, and to feel one’s body made a temple of the Holy Spirit.

A house devoid of prayer is like a house without walls or roof. It is easily exposed to all manner of destruction. Pray for and with one another-for and with your spouse your children your parents your friends and neighbors. You needn’t be an elected officer in the church to pray. You needn’t be a tested theologian for no one truly knows **“what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26).** Calvin explained:

God tolerates even our stammering, and pardons our ignorance whenever something inadvertently escapes us - as, indeed, without this mercy there would be no freedom to pray.

If our efforts in pursuing those things brought to our hearts by the apostle in this passage (love, abhorrence for evil and clinging to what is good, kindly affection, giving honor and preference to others, rejoicing in hope, patience in tribulation) have not somehow compelled us to our knees, we have either been feeble in our attempts or ignored exhortation altogether.

It might be suggested that the final clause is the means by which we can evaluate if there has been any progress in the earlier ones.

...distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (Romans 12:9-13).

Helping and Reaching

Sin nature contains a sort of grotesque self-centeredness. It is so very difficult and contrary to our natures to engage in the adventures of this life without viewing ourselves as the central character whose wants and needs are preeminent (as that which ranks before and above).

Certainly there is a time to consider our own fatigue and weariness. Jesus had counseled the apostles...

... "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat (Mark 6:31).

But the over-arching theme of Christ's life and that which we are called to imitate was that we are to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. We are to consider others more significant than ourselves...looking out for their interests. Paul calls it an emptying of self (*ekenosen*-a removing of status or rank).

It is an ugly thing to have all your thoughts consumed with yourself. It comes from a sad and selfish heart and produces a sadder and more selfish heart.

I have often made the point that one of the reasons I enjoy weekly communion is that it serves to remind me what I should be talking about in the sermon. If I am required to change the subject when we transition from preaching to sacrament there should be a check in my area of focus. One might say the same about their Christian walk-their Christian behavior. If there is not

a natural segue from your faithfulness to your service of others, your faithfulness may need to be reevaluated.

We are to be aware of the needs of others and do something about it. We are all to have deacon's hearts when it comes to these things. A church of individuals who do not concern themselves with each other's needs-especially **"the needs of the saints"**, will not create a board which does. And we are to be given to hospitality. Hospitality is an interesting word-*philoxenian* (love of strangers). We are to make those who are strangers, strangers no longer.

If we are all to be deacons when it comes to meeting needs, we are all to be elders when it comes to hospitality-recognizing hospitality as a necessary attribute for the office (1 Timothy 3:2). My wife and I have had recent conversations with women who members of our church and have moved and began attending new churches.

These churches were selected because their theology is sound but both wives have been brought to tears due to their lack of ability to find a place in the fold-to integrate into the church family-even though they had exerted significant effort. It should not be this way. And a sincere, heart-driven effort at obeying what the Spirit of God has placed before us in this passage should rescue us from being such a place.

It's been said that when the Apostle Paul concluded with this admonition (to help and reach out to others), he had returned...

...to the duties of love; the chief of which is to do good to those from whom we expect the least recompense¹

And it is here that it is supremely helpful to consider Christ Himself, who **"came not to be served, but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many"** (Matthew 20:28).

¹ Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed., Ro 12:13). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Questions for Study

1. What are the upsides and downsides of preaching verse by verse through books in the Bible (pages 2, 3)?
2. What should always be in the mind and heart of a Christian as they seek to obey the law (pages 2, 3)?
3. Review Romans 12:9-12a).
4. What great motivational factor do we have to help us remain patient in tribulation? What are some tribulations you find yourself in today (pages 4, 5)?
5. Why is prayer important? Why do you suppose people tend to neglect their prayer lives? Do you have to be a great theologian to pray (pages 5, 6)?
6. What keeps us from helping and reaching out to others? How can you be better at this (pages 6, 7)?
7. What do we learn when we look to Jesus as an example of loving, serving and reaching out (page 7)?