

Love

📖 Romans 12:9-13

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Last time we began in Rom 12 to look at *what* the Christian life looks like. Paul already taught us *how* to live the Christian life in Romans 6-8 and he reviewed *how* in Rom 12:1-2. Briefly, *how* are we to live the Christian life? By personally, consciously, dedicating ourselves to God. What do we mean by dedicating ourselves to God? We don't mean walking an aisle. That has nothing to do with it. By dedicating ourselves we mean presenting ourselves to Him, making ourselves available to Him to be used for His purposes. This was Paul's terminology for the way we are introduced into living by the Spirit. John uses different terminology. John says to confess our sin and in confession we are coming before God to acknowledge our sin. But that is very much the same as Paul's concept of dedication because as we confess what are we also doing? We're also presenting ourselves to Him to be used for His purposes. If we weren't we wouldn't be confessing our sin. So the concept of dedicating ourselves and confessing are probably linked if not the same. We need to understand that the human authors had different vocabularies and that the Holy Spirit used each author's vocabulary to express truths. So in one author a concept may use one vocabulary and in another a different vocabulary, but they are speaking of the same thing. In both cases what Paul and John are teaching is that the way to be introduced into living by the Spirit or abiding is by presenting ourselves to God. We are doing this as we confess our sin. Then, to maintain living by the Spirit Paul says we should consciously resist being conformed to the spirit of our age and continually be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Our minds need to be renewed and this occurs only by interacting with the text that is God's breath. We are not being renewed by singing kumbaya, holding hands, having a warm fuzzy, going to church or any other nonsense. Renewal of the mind occurs through Scripture only. And as we are transformed by mind renewal we gradually approve of God's will revealed in Scripture over greater and greater areas of life and live by the Spirit more continually and effectively. That's a brief review of *how* to live the Christian life.

What Paul is doing in Romans 12:3ff is not teaching us *how* to live the Christian life but *what* the Christian life looks like when we are living it. In other words, these sections are portraits of what it looks like when we are living by the Spirit, living in fellowship. They are to be viewed as general parameters and not strict legalistic structures. The first general parameter in 12:3-8 was humility. Paul was trying to instill humility in his audience by

teaching truths about the spiritual gifts. We made a few general remarks about spiritual gifts. For example, a spiritual gift is not a natural talent but a supernatural ability. All believers have at least one spiritual gift and possibly more than one. Some have to be developed while others are more spontaneous. The way to discover your gift is by growing to maturity not taking a spiritual gifts inventory. They are to be exercised in love for the purpose of encouraging unity. We noted that there are only a few gifts mentioned here but the reason is because each list of spiritual gifts are illustrative and not exhaustive. Paul is illustrating that each believer is a part of the one body of Christ that is a multi-generational organism that began on the Day of Pentecost and will be complete on the Day of the Rapture. This means that since you are one part and I am one part and all believers of this generation are one part and all believers of every generation back to Pentecost are also one part of the same organism then each of us has a part to play, a function to fulfill in maintaining the well-being and development of the body of Christ. This viewpoint fosters humility because it makes each of us realize that we are only one among millions and millions of parts of this organism that Christ is building. So there is no place for arrogance, no place for thinking that we ought to do everyone else's part because we can do it better than they can. If they are not functioning they are not functioning. We don't need to do their function. We need to simply drop doing it. This is the old quip, 80% of the work gets done by 20% of the people. Well, if that is the case then I think Paul is saying that the 20% of the people doing 80% of the work need to stop doing the work. That is only trying to function in a way that you are not equipped to function and eventually you will become frustrated and tired and bitter. This means there are going to be things that don't get done. I am okay with that. It is better to leave the gap until others in the body are mature enough to recognize their spiritual gift and fill that role. Just don't try to do it all. J. Vernon McGee recounted how in his early years of ministry he kept getting asked to be on this board and on that board and after a while he was on 12 or more boards. But he said that he was only becoming frustrated because he realized he did not have the spiritual gift of administration. And so one day he sat down and he wrote 12 or more resignation letters. He says, "That was one of the happiest days of my life. And today I am not on anybody's board. I have several friends who say to me, "Oh, won't you be on my board?" I say, "No, I wouldn't help you. I have no gift for it. I'm for you, I'll even pray for you, but I cannot be on your board." My friend, we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. We need to recognize our inabilities and do the things *God* wants us to do. It is a joy to get into the slot where *God* wants you to be!"¹ That is where I want to be, in my slot, and only in my slot. I don't want to be in your slot and I hope you understand that. My slot is pastor and teacher and not giving and helping and administering and showing mercy. I can only be of very minimal help in those areas because I am not supernaturally gifted in those areas. That is what you must understand about me and my role. I am not trying to put off responsibility. I am trying to say that the body of Christ functions a particular way and that way is not the American church way where the pastor is the one who ministers and everyone else is ministered to. In fact, many consider the gifts not to be abilities per se but ministries and from this model we see that everyone is responsible to minister in their gift. That is what makes a healthy body. You are to look to minister. Where can I minister? Can I give? Can I help the weak? Can I show mercy to those in the nursing homes? How can I minister? Well, the answer to that question is, what gift do you

have? And if you don't know then you need to keep on growing through the text of Scripture so that you mature and discover your gift. But most churches and most Christians think that the pastor is the minister. That is a faulty view and I assure you that if you view me and my job that way, you will be very disappointed in my performance. You will just have to go on being disappointed because I am not able to do all those things well. All I am able to do well is to live in my gift. "Well, who will fill all the other slots?" That is your responsibility friend and if those slots are not filled they will simply have to go on unfilled until someone who is gifted comes along and fills them. But I am not here to fill them. I am here to live in my gift. That is the slot I want to fill and that is where God wants me to be. He wants you in a slot too and that is what you should be concerned about. Are you filling the slot where God wants you to be? That is the only question. Live in your gift.

Today in 12:9-13 we come to another general parameter that describes *what* the Christian life looks like. This time the general parameter is love. This love is a reciprocal love, mutual love, love for one another in the body of Christ. This is how we are to relate to one another in the body. This is not how we are to relate to those outside the church. That will be Paul's point in vv 14ff. But this week love within the body, that is the main idea. Moo says of this section, "Paul is not always talking specifically about love, but he keeps coming back to love as the single most important criterion for approved Christian behavior."² That is right and that is why the head of the list in 12:9 is love.

Paul says **Let love be without hypocrisy**. The fact that Paul says this means love can be with **hypocrisy**. **Hypocrisy** is the Greek word for acting. It was used in the theatre. The actor is a hypocrite because he is not acting as himself but is putting on a face, acting as someone else. In fact you almost never know who some actors are because they are always putting on another face. They are not their true person. Paul is saying we're not supposed to be like actors in our love toward one another. We're not supposed to just act like we love one another. That is something that we can do but that is not something we should do. That is not genuine love. The Greek word translated **without hypocrisy** is *αυτοκριτος* and means "without pretense, *genuine, sincere*." In some places it is translated as sincere or genuine. Paul says in 2 Cor 6:6 that he did not receive the grace of God in vain because it was manifested with *αυτοκριτος* love, "genuine love." In 1 Pet 1:22 Peter says that our souls have been purified for an *αυτοκριτος* love, a sincere love of the brethren. The point is this love is "sincere" or "genuine" and not fake.

Now the Greek word used for **love** here is *αγαπη*. It is different from the word used in verse 10 where it says "brotherly love." You may think you know what *αγαπη* love is but this is the lexical meaning of the word in this context; "the quality of warm regard for and interest in another." Do you have a warm regard for and interest in one another? There are two sides to this word. First, the quality of warm regard. Do you have a warm regard for one another? Unfortunately this is often not the case and all that is seen is some kind of contrived, hypocritical regard for others. It is nothing more than a face. Do you see that? I see that. You see that some Christians do not really have a warm regard for you or others. So you see them produce a contrived love. That is not a love

produced by the Holy Spirit, that is a love produced by the flesh. It is not a genuine love but a hypocritical love. It is putting on a face because they want to be thought of as loving. The second side of this is having an interest in one another. Do you have an interest in one another? Well, let me ask you a question, "Do you ask others questions about themselves or do you just talk about yourself?" That is a litmus test for whether you are genuinely interested in others. Christians who just talk about themselves are only interested in themselves. They are self-absorbed. They really do not have an interest in you or in anybody else for that matter. That is very common because the world is very selfish and most Christians are being conformed to this world. So with this first expression Paul is saying, "Have a genuine warm regard for and interest in one another." When you see that you are seeing the fruit of the Spirit. When you do not see that you are seeing the fruit of the flesh. Let us learn to live by the Spirit so that we can see that kind of love among one another.

Next Paul says **abhor what is evil** and this goes along with the next expression, **cling to what is good**. Several of these expressions go together or are linked together. Abhorring to what is evil is linked to clinging to what is good because they are polar opposites. On one pole Paul says **abhor what is evil**. The fact that Paul says this means that a genuine Christian may not **abhor evil**. That may surprise you but there is nothing in the Bible that teaches that a genuine Christian will abhor evil. If there were Paul would have no need to say **abhor evil**. The word **abhor** means to have "vehement dislike" for. It is to have a very strong hatred for something. It may surprise you that the Christian is to hate. But the Christian is to hate. What is he to hate? **Evil**. All evil is sourced in the world, the flesh and the devil. We are to strongly hate that which comes from the world, the flesh and the devil. John says he who loves the world does not have the love of the Father in him because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful arrogance of life is not from the Father but from the world. Friend, if we don't absolutely hate the world, the flesh and the devil we don't have the love of the Father in us. Maybe you like sinning a little. If you like it a little you do not hate it at all. We should not like it even a little bit. That is what Paul is saying. We should not take pleasure in it. It is of the flesh. We should abhor it. When we **abhor** it that is coming from the Spirit of God. At the other pole Paul says, **cling to what is good**. The fact Paul says this means that genuine Christians may not **cling to what is good**. Clinging to good is not a litmus test for whether someone is a true believer or not, it is a litmus test for whether a believer is living by the Spirit or not. The word **cling** in the lexicon is listed as meaning "to be closely attached to" but also consider that it means "join closely together as in glue which joins two substances." It means to have a very attached association. In this context, attached to **what is good**. **Goodness** is all the things of God. If we are very closely associated to what is good it will mean practically that we are involved with things that are genuinely Spirit-driven and not fleshly generated. Things that are about ministering to others and not serving ourselves. If we aren't involved in ministering to others we will only become self-absorbed, interested in receiving and not in giving. We need to cling to what is good...that is of the Spirit, the rest is of the flesh.

In 12:10 Paul says, **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love**. The subject continues along the lines of **love** but this time two words used of love within a family are used. The NT refers to the Church in familial terms. We

are to view ourselves as a family. The first familial word is **brotherly love**. This expression comes from the Greek word *φιλαδελφια*. It refers to “love of blood brothers and sisters” or sibling love. When you enter the body of Christ by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone you enter into a sibling relationship with all other believers. It’s not a relationship based on physical association but on spiritual association. But our physical blood relationships do teach us about our spiritual blood relationships. And if you know anything about physical relationships between siblings, if you have siblings, you know about the kinds of struggles we have in our spiritual relationships with one another. Living with a sibling involves a lot of strife and quibbling and arguing and competition. That is not the way it is to be but that is often the way it is. And when it comes down to it often a sibling will stand up for the other one. That is the way it is to be. We are to be this way with one another. Further, this is a love that is to extend beyond our local body to all believers because they are part of our family too. It is not just our local church, it is all genuine believers in Christ that are in our family. Paul showed that the believers at Thessalonica loved the believers in Macedonia. He said, “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more...” Brotherly love for the brethren can reach beyond this local part of the body and can always excel more. The second familial word is **devoted**. This word comes from the Greek word *φιλοστουργος*. It is a *απαξ λεγομενον* meaning it is used only one time in the NT. M-M say it means “loving warmly” and they relate it to a very affectionate love within a family. The emphasis in this section is very strong on the fact that we are a family and that is another area that we need to improve our understanding of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is a real family, blood bought, whose ties should be as strong as blood ties in the physical family. Unfortunately it is not often this way. When it is not it is a signal that that group is being dominated by the flesh and not living by the Spirit.

The next expression in 12:10 is the most difficult for expositors. It probably relates to what goes before about family love and devotion. He is probably showing an expression of that kind of love when he says, **Give preference to one another in honor**. The difficulty revolves around the word translated **give preference to**, *προηγεσθαι*. There are two common views. The first view is that it means “try to outdo one another in showing respect.” This view makes it a kind of contest among believers. I do not think that view is consistent with the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not want us to compete with one another. The second view is that it means “consider others as deserving more honor than one’s self.” This view also does not seem consistent with the work of the Spirit. We are not to falsely deprecate ourselves. We are to simply have a humble estimation of ourselves. My view is a third view that simply takes the first meaning of the word in the lexicon, that of “to go first and lead the way, go before and show the way.” Paul is saying “go first and lead the way in showing honor to one another.” We are to learn this in our families with our siblings and then apply the same principle here in the church family. In other words, don’t wait on someone to show you honor, go ahead and lead the way by showing them honor. That is being a true leader. That is showing the way. The word **honor** is *τιμη*. It is an

economic term for making a valuation, setting a price. In this context it means “to show value of someone by naming a *price*.” It is often used in contexts where a commendation for performance is given. Thus it means that we should go first and lead the way in commending others for their work or performance in the Lord. We should not wait for others to go first. We should go first.

In 12:11 Paul says, **not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord...** These three expressions probably all fit together. The first, **not lagging behind in diligence** uses two speed words. The first, translated **diligence**, is *σπουδή* and means “zeal” or “haste” and refers to “optimum devotion.” The second, translated **not lagging behind** is *οκνηρός* and means “not shrinking back, not hesitating, not idle, not lazy, not indolent.” Paul is saying don’t shrink back from optimum devotion to the Lord. Constable says, “It is natural for Christians to slack off in our diligence in serving the Lord when we have been Christians for some time.”³ We get comfortable and we slow down in our serving. That newfound excitement and vigor wear off and we tend to fizzle out. Paul is saying don’t let that happen. Keep showing optimum devotion to the Lord. If you have already fizzled out you need to become vigorous again. You do this by getting into the word of God and learning all that He has done for you. That way you can truly appreciate Him and appreciation of Him is the essence of worshipping Him. Now if you’re not interested in getting into the word of God, if it is not number one then you are obviously more interested in something else. That something else has got your attention, that something is your idol, that something else has enslaved you, that something else is keeping you from true life. You are not running the race well. You are trying to find self-fulfillment outside of God’s plan. You are not going to find it. You are going to keep searching but never finding. You need to put that aside and put the Lord first because that is the only way you will find fulfillment and meaning in life. So Paul is saying by **not lagging behind in diligence** is do not shrink back from optimum devotion to the Lord. I’ve given some application to help you if you already have.

The second expression in 12:11 describes what it looks like to be optimally devoted to the Lord. Paul says it is **“fervent in spirit.”** The word **fervent** is *ζέω* and means “to be enthusiastic, excited, on fire, full of life.” We might say “be vibrant in spirit.” “spirit” is lowercase here and refers to the proper attitude toward the Lord and His word. You ought to have an enthusiastic attitude toward the things of the Lord. You ought to be enthusiastic about His word. It’s a bad sign if you’re not enthusiastic about the Lord and His word. There is nothing more exciting than the truth. Sadly many Churches don’t teach much truth, they never dig deep, they only stay on the surface, they are a mile wide and an inch deep, the people get bored, turn aside from the Lord and turn into social organizations. That will fade, that is a very boring life, but the word of God will never fade. There are so many riches yet to mine in this book. I am continually discovering them. That is the way to maintain **fervency in spirit**.

The third expression in 12:11 looks to what we should be optimally devoted to with a vibrant attitude. Paul says in **serving the Lord**. The participle **serving** is a present tense as are all of the participles in this section. Paul is

not interested in one act but a continuing lifestyle. Here a continual lifestyle of **servicing the Lord**. It is fueled by “fervency in spirit.” The Greek word **servicing** is *δουλεω* and means “to act in total service to another, perform the duties of a slave, give undivided allegiance, render service willingly.” We are to consider ourselves as slaves of the Lord. He is our legal master. He purchased us with a price. We do not belong to ourselves. We belong to Him. Therefore we ought to serve Him. How should we serve Him? We should do this willingly, enthusiastically. He is all there is. What else is there? Everything else is a vanity. That is the book of Ecclesiastes in a nutshell. Nothing else will satisfy. Truth, knowing Him, seeing His plan, that will satisfy...

In 12:12 Paul adds, **rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer**. These three all go together. First, **rejoicing in hope**. **Hope** refers to something certain but in the future. We are to rejoice in what is stored up for us in the future. The word **rejoice** is from the word *καιρω*. Just down the road to Comfort, TX you see the turn off for the Kairos Celebration barn. That word Kairos probably comes from this word *καιρω*, not from Greek but from a Latin equivalent. It means “to celebrate” and that is the purpose of the celebration barn. That is where they have marriages and family reunions and all other kinds of celebrations. What are we to celebrate? We are to celebrate what is stored up for us in the future. That is our hope. There are many things stored up for us in the future; the blessed hope of the rapture, the resurrection in glory, the judgment seat for rewards, the entrance into Christ’s kingdom where we will rule and reign, the transition from the kingdom into the eternal state with the new Jerusalem. These are all things stored up for us in the future and we are to always be celebrating in this future hope. That is what helps us with the second thing Paul lists in 12:12 - **persevering in tribulation**. Tribulation refers to times of distress or affliction. All believers will face times of affliction. Jesus said, “In this world you will have affliction but take courage, I have overcome the world.” The fact is you are going to have difficulties so the only question is how to cope with them. Paul says **persevere**. The Greek word is *υπομενω* and it means “to maintain a belief or course of action in the face of opposition, *stand one’s ground, hold out, endure*.” Now you can only do this if you have a future hope. That is why this expression follows the statement rejoicing in hope. With no future hope you have no basis for persevering in hard times. But since you do have future hope you know that the difficulties of the present are only temporary. One day they will give way to the future hope and eternal bliss. Since that is the truth when you have difficulties the proper response is to stand your ground, maintain your belief, don’t give up, don’t give in, don’t give over, stand firm because this is not going to go on forever. Your present tribulations are only temporary but the coming future hope is eternal. We know this lesson from Job. James says we count Job blessed because he endured. He endured ten children killed on one day, sickness and many other difficulties and we see the end of Job, we see that God was merciful and full of compassion toward Him. Do we remember that? Do we not think God will be the same toward us? I hope you know that. We are going through our trials for a purpose, it is testing our faith and this makes us stronger believers, it leads to us becoming completely sanctified in God’s sight, lacking in nothing. I think it is easier to persevere in sufferings if we remember what Paul said earlier in Rom 8, that if God is for us, who can be against

us? I have God on my side. There is no one greater than God. So persevere through tribulations. And what are we going to have to do to keep persevering? The next phrase in 12:12 tells us.

We are going to have to be **devoted to prayer**. The word **devoted** means “busy oneself with, be busily engaged in.” We ought to be busy in **prayer**. Surely we need to be busy with prayer when we are facing tribulations and need the strength to persevere! There are six words for **prayer** in the NT. They all have one thing in common, requesting something from God, that is the one essential component of prayer. You can add other things like praise, thanksgiving and confession, but the one essential component of prayer is requesting. That is exactly what this word for **prayer** means, petitioning God. When we are petitioning God we are saying we are depending upon Him. That is the correct attitude when you are facing tribulation. You are saying God, I cannot supply the continuing strength to endure, but you can. So we ought to be busily engaged in making requests to God. We read in the early church that they devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). They needed help. So do we. We also read that the apostles rejected certain responsibilities so they could devote more time to prayer (Acts 6:2). That shows that prayer should have a very high place on our list. Oh that we would attend to this ministry that is so rarely attended to. Paul said to the Colossians, “devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it...” I wonder how often we fall asleep in it? What a striking mark against our ability when we fall asleep in prayer. What, if we were attend to this ministry of prayer busily, might happen in our lives, our churches, our communities, our nations? Who knows?

In 12:13, the last two things are stated, **contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality**. The word **contributing** means to take an interest in and in short it means to take an interest in the needs of the saints so that you can meet those needs if capable. Saints is a word that is used of all believers. It is a word that means “set apart ones.” When you first believe God sets you apart as His possession. That is what you are whether you feel like a saint or not. God has said you are a saint; that is the end of it. We are to contribute to the needs of the saints, that is, to have an interest in them as fellow parts of the body of Christ so that we can meet their needs. The early church shared with other local churches as they had needs. There was a famine in Judea and the churches of the Mediterranean regions supplied their needs through Paul who delivered the gift with other reliable men. It is important to understand that the body of saints who have need extend beyond these walls. If we evaluate their needs responsibly it is valid to contribute to their needs wholeheartedly.

And finally, in 12:13, **practicing hospitality**. The Greek word translated **practicing** means “pursuing it” not just doing it. It is to be looking for opportunities to do it. It means “to follow in haste in order to find something, *run after, pursue*.” The word **hospitable** literally means friendliness to strangers. This kind of hospitality was more common in the ancient world where there were not many hotels and the like. You would invite them into your home. This was considered a very sacred act and still is in much of the Middle East. Still we as Christians often do invite other believers to stay in our homes and we serve them. This is being hospitable and there are many other

ways to do this, we cannot all do it to the same degree, but it is something that is characteristic of the Christian life.

In summary, in 12:9, Paul says love without hypocrisy, don't put on an act, be sincere in your love for one another. Also, abhor what is evil, have an extreme hatred for it and cling to what is good, be closely attached to it, involved in it, continually. In 12:10, be devoted to one another in brotherly love, both words of familial love for one another, understand that we are a family and believers outside of this place are also in our family. Also, give preference to one another in honor means go first and lead the way in commending others for a fine performance, don't wait on them to commend you. In 12:11 not lagging behind in diligence uses two speed words to describe us not slowing down in our optimum devotion to the Lord but instead maintaining a fervent spirit, a vibrant enthusiasm for the Lord in our serving of Him. In 12:12 rejoicing in hope is maintaining a joyful attitude relative to what is stored up for us in the future, the rapture, the judgment for rewards, the kingdom, reigning with Him and the eternal state in the New Jerusalem. Keeping this hope helps us persevere in our tribulations, our afflictions, with which we are all afflicted, but we should not give up, not give in. And through these afflictions we should be devoted to prayer, requesting of God that He give us the wisdom and patience to see our way through the difficulties. All the while in 12:13, contributing to the needs of the saints as we find needs to be met among our fellow believers. And finally, practicing hospitality, pursuing opportunities to show kindness to others.

Are these things *what* your life looks like? This is what the Christian life looks like when it is lived by the Spirit. It is a life marked by sincere, genuine love for one another. It is the love with which God first loved us and we are to therefore love one another. In reality all we are doing is passing along the love that God has shown us. That is what the Christian life looks like when we are living by the Spirit.

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Epistles (Romans 9-16)*, electronic ed., vol. 43 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 73.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 12:9.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 12:11.