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Romans

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.
Romans 12:9

Starting here in verse 9 and continuing through the chapter, there are approximately 20 commands given by Paul. A command in the epistles is a prescriptive statement given with the intent that it will be followed by the believer. It should be obvious from reading these commands that many are things we fail at, either openly or in our heart, on a regular basis.

Unlike the law, however, there is no statement which says, "If you do these things you will live by them." Life has been granted through Jesus' work. The commands then are intended to bring us into a harmonious way of life, both for ourselves and those we interact with. When we fail to meet up to these directives, we can lose our joy, our health, and our rewards. However, failing to meet these commands will not result in a loss of salvation.

For example, a similar sentiment to Paul's admonitions is found in 2 Peter 1:7. The surrounding verses there show how to remain fruitful and also how to increase in being fruitful. But should one fail to do so, there is no indication of a loss of salvation. Rather, there is the chastisement for having been "shortsighted, even to blindness." Understanding this, Paul begins with, "Let love be without hypocrisy..." It's a similar thought to what John states in his first epistle -

"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."
1 John 3:18

Our love is to be sincere; not merely paying lip-service to those around us. The use of the word "hypocrisy" means that we are not to be two-faced in this love. Such love then is a volitional act of the will. There are times that we have to put aside ourselves and our negative feelings and sincerely endeavor to love those around us. It's often not an easy task, but it is what we are called to do.

Next we are told to "abhor what is evil." That which is evil is opposed to that which is godly. We are told to hate such things. Hatred then is not necessarily evil. God is said to "hate" things in Scripture and yet God is all-good. Therefore, anything contrary to what is holy and godly can and must be hated. Perversion, untruth, immorality of any kind, etc., is not just to be avoided, but to be hated. The things our leaders do which are contrary to Scripture are included in this. Even though we are instructed to be obedient to the laws around us, unless they violate God's law for us, we are to hate them if they are evil. Abortion is a perfect example of this. We are not only to refrain from abortion, but we are to abhor it and work against it. This is a mandate, not a hope.

Finally, we are told to "cling to what is good." The word for "cling" is kollōmenoi. It carries the thought of gluing two things together. We are in essence to be "glued to goodness." The root of this Greek word was commonly used throughout ancient Greek medical writings when speaking of the repairing of wounds. This then is the reciprocal of abhorring evil which could be considered a wound in what is good. In order to accomplish the latter (cling to what is good), we need to perform the former (abhorring evil).

Life application: The Bible doesn't waffle on the issues of sin and evil. We are to hate them in all their forms. Clinging to the world and its fallen system is contrary to what God expects of us. Let us be determined to live holy, godly lives and to cling to that which is good.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; Romans 12:10

This verse includes continued instruction in our expected duties and relationships as members of the church. Two specific thoughts are included. The first is to "be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love." Two words based on the thought of personal affection are used. One which is translated "kindly affectionate" is the word *philostorgoi*. This is the only time it is used in the New Testament and it is implying the closeness of family; a mother for her children, or the proper love of siblings who don't quarrel or compete, but who truly care for each other. The idea is that we are to love one another within the body of believers as if they were members of our immediate and cherished family.

The second word is translated as "brotherly love." It is the word *philadelphia*. It's used six times in the New Testament and it shows that we are to treat each other as true brothers in the faith. The idea of brotherly love finds its most direct explanation in the words of Jesus -

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34, 35

Just as Jesus loves us, we are to love each other. His love was a sacrificial love, going so far as death for His brothers. He washed their feet, humbled himself, and cared for them with true kindness and affection. And this type of love translates into the second thought of verse 12:10, which is that we are to act toward others "in honor giving preference to one another."

Instead of being first, we are to stand back and open the door. Rather than looking for note among others, we should note others. In place of lording our position above others, we should exalt those around us. The honor is to be directed from each person outward toward all other people. By acting in this way, it then becomes a demonstration to all that honor is due to all.

Life application: Paul's list of expectations from each of us is easy to assimilate in instruction, but immensely hard to put into practice. It involves a constant mental effort of putting ourselves into a proper perspective which is in many ways contrary to our nature. In order to meet these admonitions, we need to keep looking back to the life and ministry of Jesus. When we see His treatment of those who were of the faith, we have a fixed point of reference to act in like manner.

....not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; Romans 12:11

The list of admonitions concerning our Christian service continues with "not lagging in diligence." This is stated in the negative, showing us what not to do. We are then to assume the opposite and to be diligent. His use of "lagging" indicates slothfulness or idleness. Instead of hoping for opportunity and then ignoring it when it does come about, we are to seek out opportunities. If we are so blessed as to have them show up at the door, we are to be diligent in accepting what has come our way.

A great example of this is witnessing. How many times do we hear the comment that the chance to witness never comes about? Rather, we need to seek opportunities with diligence and then follow through with them. Likewise, there are many around us who subtly let us know they want to know why we believe the things that we do believe concerning Jesus. When will we actually respond to those hints?

This concept Paul is speaking of surely applies to all types of work, not just ministerial jobs. If we are slothful in our regular employ, who will want to know about our faith? This goes hand in hand with what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:10 -

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going."

One aspect of life will affect all other aspects of life. Being slothful in one area will inevitably lead to sloth in another. Next, in contrast to lagging in diligence, we are instructed to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The word here for "fervent" is used frequently when speaking of boiling something. Paul is telling us to be "boiling with spirit" in what we do. When water or some other liquid is heated, eventually it will start to bubble and then the bubbling will intensify until it boils. This concept is transferable to our work ethic and emotions. We should be so moved in our service to the Lord that we boil over in the exercise of our duties.

Life application: If we want to get ahead in our job, we work our hardest, put forth diligence in our duties, and look for and pursue opportunities which can further the cause of our employer. If we put this type of attention into our earthly employ, how much more should we do so for our heavenly Lord and the furtherance of His kingdom?

...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;
Romans 12:12

Continuing on with his list of admonitions for the believer, we are told to be "rejoicing in hope." Our hope is the "blessed hope" Paul speaks of in Titus 2:13 which says that we should be, "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." For the believer, this is the coming rapture of the church. The good thing about the rapture is that even if someone dismisses the concept, it is still coming. They will just be more surprised than those who are expectantly awaiting it. And because of this sure hope, which is so specifically laid out in Scripture, we can not only rejoice in that hope, but we can "rejoice always" as we are admonished in 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

However, even while we rejoice in hope, we are not immune from trials, tests, or tribulations. Paul reminds us of this by saying that we should be "patient in tribulation." One can't be patient in what one doesn't experience. Therefore, it would be incorrect to expect the Christian walk to be one which has paths lined with roses and tables that are filled with corn, wine, and oil. Rather, we can and should

expect times of difficulty, but we are asked to be patient in them as we are carried through them.

Finally in verse 12, we are asked to be "continuing steadfastly in prayer." The King James Version says "continuing in instant prayer." This terminology has since all-but completely lost its original meaning. The idea here is perseverance, not suddenness. Jesus uses the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 as an example of persistent and continuous prayer.

So, we could ask, what is continuous and steadfast prayer? It is a state of life which asks us to speak to our Heavenly Father rather than gabbing on the cell-phone. We should petition Him rather than the government for assistance. We should pray for the needs of ourselves and others, asking that they be met in accordance with His plans and purposes, not claiming stuff as if He were a cosmic ATM machine. Prayer is to be a continuous stream of communication to God, submitted in humility and yet with confidence that He is listening and handling the requests.

Life application: Living out the many admonitions given by Paul is far more difficult than simply reading them. But by thinking on them and asking for the Lord's help in conforming to these instructions, it is possible to be molded into such a life. Take time in your prayers today to ask the Lord to change you to be conformed to the person He would truly wish you to be.

...distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Romans 12:13

Continuing on with his stream of counsel, Paul now mentions "distributing to the needs of the saints." The word for "distributing" implies "sharing" or "contributing." The early church as recorded in Acts had all things in common (see Acts 4:32). In other words, it was what we could ostensibly term "communist." However, this isn't to be thought of in the sense used by communists today where people are forced into wealth distribution. Rather, it was voluntary. Nobody was compelled to resign their property or income. This is clearly noted in Acts 5:4.

As evidenced in Acts, this type of life didn't work out and a new structure developed in the church as gentiles moved in. However, the concept of giving has continued to be a mark of Christianity which goes beyond anything seen elsewhere. Societies which distribute under the guise of fairness are actually the most crooked of all. What is rightfully earned is stolen away to give to those who don't work. Christian giving is one of sacrificial love. It is giving not to encourage indolence, but to assist the truly needy. Further, this admonition of Paul speaks of taking care of the "needs of the saints." Yes, Christians give outside of the faith, but this verse is speaking of tending to the needs within the faith.

Paul then finishes his thought today with the idea that we are to be "given to hospitality." Hospitality here is different than the distribution just mentioned. It carries the concept of having an open door, a welcome mat in front of the door, and an offering in your hand for the one coming in the door. Hospitality is a personal sharing of one's life and possessions rather than just putting money into a box to later be distributed. Showing hospitality communicates true love and respect for others who are entering into one's presence. In his third epistle, John speaks of this -

"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth." 3 John - 5-8

Life application: Have you been abundantly blessed by the Lord? If so, when you're at church this weekend, note someone who has been less fortunate and invite them to your house as a gesture of hospitality. Such kindness will reap great rewards for all concerned.