

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #44

Romans 12:9-16

Somehow we have been conned into believing that numbers in church equal success, but Biblically speaking, it just is not true. When a church is focused on God's Word, is becoming a place of prayer, and the people of God are fellowshiping one with another, that is a successful church regardless of numbers.

BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH ARE TO MAINTAIN GODLY ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS CONCERNING RIGHTEOUSNESS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND REACTIONS.

Here are the keys to success from God's perspective. Forget the numbers and focus on developing self and minister to others.

In this section there are four key elements to a successful church in the mind of God.

SUCCESSFUL ELEMENT #1 – A successful church has unhypocritical love. **12:9-10**

Unfortunately most people's perspective of love and God's perspective are two different things. In these verses, God describes love that is not hypocritical. The word "without hypocrisy" (*αυτοκριτος*) comes from a word that means God does not want us having a pretend love or a play-acting love in the church (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 461). He wants our love real. There are three qualifying descriptions that Paul gives of this kind of love.

Description #1 - Unhypocritical love continually hates evil. **12:9a**

We may see whether or not we are a hypocrite by an honest evaluation of our attitude toward evil. **Unhypocritical love hates what God classifies as evil.** The more we are developing a hatred and abhorrence for evil, the more we are non-hypocritical from God's perspective.

If we love Biblically, we will hate Biblically. Hating evil is part of a love that does not pretend or play act.

Here is a good question for each of us to ask: "Am I continually being drawn to love evil things or to hate evil things?"

Description #2 - Unhypocritical love continually clings to good. **12:9b**

The word "cling" is one that literally means to be glued or cemented to good. The tense of the word indicates a continual action (*Ibid.*, p. 252).

Unhypocritical love cannot be separated from good; it is glued to it.

Description #3 - Unhypocritical love is continually devoted to one another. **12:10**

I like the imagery used here, “brotherly love.” Family members do not typically abandon other family members. They stay in the family and work through situations. In dealing with one another in the church, we must view it that we are a family. We need to honor one another. We need to respect one another. We need to give preference to one another. When evil must be addressed, we need to do it truthfully and lovingly.

SUCCESSFUL ELEMENT #2 – A successful church has wholehearted service. **12:11**

There are three descriptions given of wholehearted service:

Description #1 - Wholehearted service is not lagging. **12:11a**

The idea of lagging behind is the idea of shrinking or hesitating or being too timid to do something (*Ibid.*, p. 314). The idea of the word “diligence” is the idea of having a diligent zeal or earnestness (*Ibid.*, p. 415). **Paul’s point is, a successful church cannot be timid or cannot shy away from the work of God. They must be diligent in their focus. A successful church will keep moving forward and keep active; it will not be slothful.**

God is not and will not be impressed with excuses or laziness. God saved us and He expects that we become a vital part of His work.

Description #2 - Wholehearted service is fervent. **12:11b**

The word “fervent” is a Greek word that means boiling. The idea here is that, from God’s perspective, those who are successful are those who are always at a boiling level in their service for Him. Notice carefully that this fervency is internal, “fervent in spirit.” People right with God have an internal passion and drive to know God’s Word.

Description #3 - Wholehearted service is serving the Lord. **12:11c**

The present tense participle, “serving,” speaks of a continual service. What Paul means here is that spiritual and successful Christians are those who continually serve the Lord.

They may have setbacks, but they do not quit.

They may get knocked down, but they get back up.

They keep serving the Lord. They keep at it, working in God’s church for God’s glory.

SUCCESSFUL ELEMENT #3 – A successful church has godly endurance. **12:12**

Any church doing a real work for God will have its share of setbacks. One reason is because the church is attempting to do the will of God and there is a satanic force at work trying to do what he can to prevent it.

There are three descriptions of godly endurance:

Description #1 - A godly endurance rejoices in hope. **12:12a**

A godly endurance does not rejoice in trials, but it does rejoice in a hope that someday God will deliver from the trials. There is a joy in seeing things through and sticking it out. When one sees God perform the impossible and people have faithfully endured, there is great joy.

Description #2 - A godly endurance perseveres in trials. **12:12b**

That word “persevering” is just the opposite of running away. It means to remain behind. A successful believer is one who does not run away but hangs in there. It is not that people do not feel like running, it is that they don’t run. They stay in the work of God and they stay active in serving Him in the church.

Description #3 - A godly endurance is devoted to prayer. **12:12c**

Successful people are praying people. When difficulties come, spiritual people don’t run, they pray! No church will ever be successful in the mind of God until it becomes a place of prayer. One of the great ways of coping with trials is to pray.

SUCCESSFUL ELEMENT #4 – A successful church has Christ-like reactions. **12:13-16**

Reaction #1 - The reaction to those who have needs. **12:13a**

A Christ-like mindset continually tries to meet the needs of other believers. When a person who is in tune with God sees another believer with a real need, he does what he can to help. So does a church.

Reaction #2 - The reaction to those who need a place to stay. **12:13b**

A Christ-like mindset is hospitable. The church that is successful opens its hearts and homes to people. Real spirituality is hospitable.

Reaction #3 - The reaction to those who are your enemies. **12:14**

A Christ-like mindset continually prays. The idea here is not only to treat those who persecute us in a friendly way, but also to pray for them.

The idea of blessing and not cursing is one of praying for someone and leaving them to God. Donald Grey Barnhouse hit the essence of this prayer when he said this injunction does not mean we are to ask God to prosper one’s evil ways. Barnhouse says we are to pray that God will bring the person to repentance so He can bless him (Vol. 4, p. 84).

As I view it, “Bless those who persecute you,” can mean two things:

- 1) Pray God will bring them to repentance so He can bless them.
- 2) Tell them what they must do to be blessed by God.

Reaction #4 - The reaction to those who are experiencing something emotional. **12:15**

A Christ-like mindset continually empathizes. **Here is one of the most outstanding verses of counseling in all of the Bible; when others are rejoicing, rejoice with them, and when they are weeping, weep with them.**

Reaction #5 - The reaction to those who differ with us in thought or status. **12:16**

A Christ-like mindset is continually striving for harmony.

A Christ-like mindset strives for an other-oriented harmony. It is not proud or arrogant; it associates with all people regardless of social status or class and is not wise in one’s own estimation.

This is what makes a church successful in God’s estimation.