

Romans 12:9-21 Putting Your Faith to Work

So far in chapter 12 we have been told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and to discover what is God's will for our lives. Within that process, we were reminded that as believers we are part of the body of Christ, and our actions will impact the rest of the body, either for good or for ill. As such, we were exhorted to use the gifts God has given us for His glory and the well-being of the whole body.

Now, in bullet-point fashion, Paul lays out over 20 basic commands which basically flesh out what he meant back in verse 1 of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices. True religion was never meant to be just about what you believe, nor is it just about performing religious ceremonies – it has always been about lives that are conformed to the will of God, beginning with the inner attitudes of the heart and extending out to the way we treat others. These commands are simple enough that we really don't need a lot of help understanding them, but they are also profound enough that we must make sure we are really listening so as to live them out.

Let love be genuine. Literally, let love be without hypocrisy. The love he speaks of here is *agape*, the self-sacrificing love that seeks the well-being of another. This is the foundation on which the Christian life should be based, acting out of love – whether we're talking about loving God or other people. Genuine love will back up its words with actions, and will remain steadfast from good times to bad times.

Abhor what is evil. If we are true believers, we should loathe anything that is evil or wicked. In the Lord's prayer we are instructed to pray "deliver us from evil." There should be a real break from what we used to be and what we used to do. Of course, this means we have to understand what God calls evil. In Mt 15:19, Jesus associates evil thoughts with murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander. In Mark 7, Jesus said evil things like coveting, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness come from within and defile a person. Hebrews 3:12 admonishes us to "take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." Just from these brief scriptures, it is clear that evil is anything which is contrary to God's declared standard of morality, and that we naturally have evil within us, thus we need God's redemption and renewal.

Hold fast to what is good. The word doesn't just mean to grip tightly; it means to glue together. In this case it is passive, so the idea is "be glued to what is good." How do we accomplish this? If we take it in connection with the command back in v. 2, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect," then we fill our minds with God's Word of Truth, memorizing it, meditating on it, studying it, so that it "sticks" to both our conscious and subconscious mind. Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, is all about the Word of God, and the value of memorizing and meditating on it. Just a few examples: v. 10-11 "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." V. 15-16 "I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word." V. 92-93 "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life." V. 104 "Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."

Love one another with brotherly affection. Philostorgos with Philadelphia. Tenderly love one another as brothers. This command narrows the scope down specifically to how we relate to fellow believers. If we are fellow members of the body of Christ, part of the family of God, we ought to have the sort of love

that shows it. This also comes under the main heading which started the section, "let love be genuine". Agape love is the foundation, and these others emanate from it. 1 Cor 13:4-7 describes this love as "...patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Eph 4:32 says "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." In other words, we put up with minor errors "because we're family."

In the same vein of family relations, we are told "outdo one another in showing honor." The KJV says "in honor preferring one another." The idea is that we should willingly give preference to others, and if someone else gets the credit for something we've been working on, be glad for them. This makes me think of the kind of person who loves to work in the background, keeping things going, but seldom being noticed.

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Don't let your zeal for God's work slacken, nor your earnestness diminish. Always be on fire for serving God. This might be hard, because we get tired, we get discouraged. This is one reason we need one another – to encourage and stir up.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. If you want happiness, base it on the hope you have in Christ, not the things in your hands. Remember that "in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33) In good times and bad, we ought to pray, seeking God's wisdom and help, as well as giving Him praise and committing our way to Him.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. This is still in reference to our relations within the body of Christ. We share because we're family, and we welcome one another in our homes.

Verse 14 and beyond look outward from the church to the world. Bless those who persecute you. This is not the normal human way, but it is God's way. Trust God to punish the wrongdoers in His way, His time. You be a blessing to them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. In other words, have compassion for your fellow man, and show them God's love. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Sometimes we struggle with thinking we're better than someone else, but if it were not for God's grace, we might be worse than them. Jesus was a friend of sinners. We ought to be willing to do the same.

"Repay no one evil...so far as depends on you, live peaceably with all. ...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." This reminds me of the way God has dealt with all of us, as described back in Romans 5:8 "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."