

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

How to demonstrate in our lives a full allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, some very, very practical truths and we would all do well to heed. So follow along as I read beginning in verse nine, Romans 12 verse nine.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.¹

I would like to begin this morning by asking you to ask yourselves a question. Are you maturing in Christ? Ask yourself that. Am I maturing in Christ? Can those who know me best affirm change in patterns in my life, patterns of obedience and discipline and spiritual productivity? Can others honestly see measurable spiritual growth in my life? That would be translated into things like having an increased appetite for the Word of God and an increased knowledge for it or of it, an increased habit of private study, meditation in the Word, an increased habit of private prayer, a passion to know and experience God. Do people see those things increasing in your life? Do you see that increasing in your life?

Do you have an increased hatred for personal sin and a decreased frequency of it? Do you see yourself more and more concerned about putting off those things that would bring dishonor to Christ and forfeit blessing in your life and putting on those things that would honor him and bring blessing to you? Do you have an increased burden for the lost? Is there an increased abundance of the spiritual fruit on your vine? Do you have an increased longing for Christ's return?

Beloved, the litmus test of spiritual maturation, in other words, the way we can really see if, indeed, we are growing in Christ is simply this. We will have a desire to serve Christ by serving others in his body, by serving one another.

You have to ask yourself. Do I really have a desire to be in relationship with my church family, with other brothers and sisters in Christ? Or do I live kind of out here in isolation? Do I spend most of my time not even thinking about my brothers and sisters in Christ? Do I really have little time for my church? Ask yourself. Do I really look for opportunities to serve others in the body? Do I have a longing to be taught? Do I have a desire to be shepherded? Do I have a desire to be held accountable in my life? These are the things that will demonstrate whether or not you are really growing in Christ or not.

¹ Romans 12:9-13.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Are you using your spiritual gifts? That is what Paul has been talking about here. Are you willing to even faithfully serve the Lord in obscurity when nobody else sees it? Do you have an increased commitment to the one another commands of Scripture? And, finally, do you have an increased desire to obey the very things that we have just read from this text?

I hope you do, because, dear Christian, if these things are not increasing in your life, if there is really therefore no measurable spiritual growth, your spiritual life is not only going to be unproductive and, frankly, boring, but also it is going to be dishonoring to Christ. And you will forfeit blessing in your life and you will even live under a cloud of divine chastening.

Now some inevitably will say, “My, pastor, is describes me. I struggle with this. I have asked for forgiveness 1000 times. I find myself wanting some of these things, yet not really being committed to these things. So I try to silence my conscience any way I can. I come up with all of these excuses, but I know that my excuses are lame.

So what do I do? Well, the answer in a nutshell, to begin with, is you have got to understand what it means to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

1 Timothy four verse seven. I love that word discipline. The Greek word is γυμναζω (goom-nad'-zo). We get our word gymnasium from that. And it means to exercise. It has to do with rigorous training and spiritual self discipline. These are the types of things that we know little of in our spiritual, evangelical culture. And the result of that will be godliness which is nothing more than a proper attitude and response toward God and others.

We live in a very undisciplined culture. Most people do only what they have to do to survive. Most people spend the rest of their time on a couch in front of a television or a computer. The average American spends an average of two hours per week on Facebook, 30 hours per week watching television, 18 hours per week on the internet. That is 50 hours per week. One of the Barna studies says among Bible readers—which is less than half of all confessing Christians—among those the average amount of time spent reading the Bible is less than seven minutes per day. That is less than one hour per week. You wonder why the church seems so ineffective.

The Francis Schaeffer Institute has some interesting statistics and this actually came out of a study of the United States Census Bureau records, startling statistics which, by the way, is backed up by other denominational reports. They said that every year more than 4000 churches close their doors compared to just 1000 new church starts. And they said that every year 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity. They go on to say this translates into the realization that people are leaving the church from our research we have found they are leaving as hurting and wounding victims of some kind of abuse,

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

disillusionment or just plain neglect. Now why is that? There is no discipline. There is no real discipleship. There is no one anothering. There is no using of spiritual gifts. This is what happens when the local body is weakened by members who refuse to serve, by member who really do not take serious the command to present their bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice as acceptable to God. This is what happens when, as Paul says, you think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. This is what happens when there is no discipline.

Now we all struggle with discipline. Think of just the physical example of discipline. If you are like me, you struggle with your weight. You have to always be careful what you eat and make sure you don't take in more calories than you burn up. We live very sedentary lifestyles. We are very undisciplined physically. In fact, a number of research points out that we are the most physically unfit culture in the history of the world here in the United States.

You know, no one drifts towards good health. It requires daily discipline, right? Well, there are amazing parallels between our physical and spiritual lives. In fact, some of the things that I read recently, I learned that most folks are in denial about their physical condition and the health risks associated with obesity. One study surveyed 1043 families with children ages 11 and younger representing a cross section of the state of Georgia. They found 42 percent have overweight or obese kids. Of those families, catch this, 76 percent of the parents misclassified their children as either underweight or normal weight. Isn't that how we always look at things?

The same is true when it comes to honestly assessing our spiritual condition. Oh, I am in great shape physically. God is pleased with me. My kids are doing great, et cetera.

But, you know, folks, in reality most Christians are spiritually undisciplined. Even as we don't drift towards good health, we don't drift towards godliness. It requires commitment, discipline. We trend in the opposite direction unless we discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. And what I want you to hear as we begin to look at what God has for us here in this text, is simply this. God simply cannot use nor will he bless an undisciplined Christian or a disobedient church. And I am concerned for this church, because I see a lot of disobedience. And somehow we can rationalize it.

Serving Christ by serving his people, our church family is simply not a priority for most Christians, even many in our church. As Paul warned, the world is squeezing us into its mold. For everything else is a priority. We will give allegiance to everything else, but no, I just don't want to be involved with my church family, because, after all, that can be a little uncomfortable at times. So we become passive and lazy. We have become ruled by our lusts, by our emotions. We allow ourselves to once again become slaves to sin rather than slaves of righteousness as Paul warned in Romans six verses 17, 18.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Then we come along and we pray, “Oh, God, help me to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ.” And then we do nothing.

Imagine spending the next three months praying to lose weight and get in shape, but you don't do anything. What do you think is going to happen?

Dear Christian, this morning I am going to call you to a whole new level of spiritual discipline. Welcome to boot camp. I want to do it in a very loving way, but I am very concerned for our church. I love you. We all love Christ. But sometimes we have to ... we just have to sit down and take a hard look at ourselves, right? That is what we need to do this morning. It is going to be tough at first. It is like getting back in shape. I know usually over the winter I don't run as much. I don't do as much. I kind of get a little bit lazy, because, after all, it is too cold to go outside. And then the spring comes. You know, I start hitting the road and, oh, I am gasping and groaning and moaning. And I can come up with a thousand reasons why I need to just kind of stay in the house. We tend to do the very same thing in our spiritual life.

The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 1:27 that we are called to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. I know that you all want that. I do. And what that means is to live consistently with what we believe, what we teach, what we preach, to have a gospel centered life, a Christ centered life where he is the center of gravity around which everything else orbits which translates into your church is to be the center of your life, not something out here as an option.

What we know in Scripture that if we do our part, God is going to do his. Paul exhorts us in Philippians two verse 12 to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. That is our part. We need to work out, ok? We are going to start exercising here. And yet ultimately the change in some mysterious way is accomplished by God, not us. Paul goes on to say in verse 13 of Philippians two:

“... it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”²

But, friends, unless we get serious about obedience, I mean, with fear and trembling, ok, we will never experience all that God longs for us to experience. God will not use us. He will not bless us. We will be a dishonor to him. Let me say it differently. Unless you are willing even today to decisively commit yourself to subordinating all of your personal desires and ambitions to those things that are consistent with the mind of Christ, your life will amount to nothing. Is that what you want? Unless we are determined and disciplined to deny ourself and follow Christ, what a novel thought. As Christ has commanded us to do, unless we are determined and disciplined to do that come what may, we will continue

² Philippians 2:13.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

to forfeit blessing in our life and our lives will be a hindrance rather than a help to the cause of Christ.

Paul understood this in 1 Corinthians nine beginning with verse 25. He says:

And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.³

Well, ok, pastor, specifically: What types of things do I need to do here? Back to the physical analogy. What is the diet I need to go on? What is the exercise regimen that I need to go on?

Well, folks, it is much more than a program here. It is a lifestyle. It begins with a heart change, a change in priorities. Imagine today—to use the physical analogy—you have come to the doctor and the doctor says, “Unless you lose weight and quit smoking, you will die within the next year.”

Hopefully that would motivate you to do that. Well, likewise, we need to be motivated to get serious about our discipline in how we serve Christ by serving others.

Now in Romans 12:9-21 Paul gives 25 distinct, but closely related exhortations, a very concise ethical injunctions that define a well disciplined Spirit led believer, a believer that really characterizes Christ’s likeness and Christ’s love. And we are going to look at them in two categories: first disciplines of personal character and then disciplines of duty towards fellow believers.

So let’s look first at the disciplines of personal character. This is where we need to begin here in our spiritual boot camp to get serious about our character. Number one in verse nine he says you need to love or let love be without hypocrisy. In other words, your love for others needs to be genuine.

Now it is interesting that the apostle would see that we need this admonition and the reason why we need it is because we tend to lay claim to virtues that we do not have. And so he is reminding us here. Hey, let love be without hypocrisy. Love here is the ἀγάπη (ag-ah’-pay) love, that self sacrificial, unselfish love, that Christ like love, a love that is fully devoted to the welfare of others, willing to pay any price and demand nothing in return. This is a love, dear friends, that is a choice, not an emotion. Do you choose to love others in your church body, in your church family?

³ 1 Corinthians 9:25-27.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Few of us can lay claim to such a virtue. Even when we look at our own families, do we really love this way? Much less fellow believers in our church. Yet this is the kind of love, dear friends, that validates genuine saving faith. John tells us in 1 John 3:14:

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”⁴

By the way, love is action. It is not abstraction. It has legs to it. you can see how it is manifested. When Christ said that he loves us he didn't just stay in heaven. Look what he did. He came to serve us, to save us.

1 John 4:16 John says:

“God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.”⁵

I was thinking about something that one of the old Church fathers said about John. His name was Jerome. He said this. “When the venerable John could no longer walk to the meetings of the church, but was borne thither by his disciples, he always uttered the same address to the church. He reminded them of that one commandment which had received from Christ himself as comprising all the rest and forming the distinction of the new covenant. Here it is: My little children, love one another. When the brethren present wearied of hearing the same thing so often, asked why he always repeated the same thing he replied, quote, ‘Because it is the commandment of the Lord. And if this one thing be attained, it is enough,’” end quote.

Beloved, I fear that loving one another has been replaced by a love for self. And for this reason we could come up with a thousand lame excuses that justify our lack of love within the body of Christ manifested in our refusal to get involved with the body and serve, use our gifts, present our bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice, live out the one anotherings.

In Roman 8:35 Paul tells us nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Beloved, likewise, nothing should separate us from the love of one another, the love for sinners. Beloved, love is the highest value. It is the supreme discipline. Again, it is a choice. It is not always an emotion.

⁴ 1 John 3:14.

⁵ 1 John 4:16-17.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

1 Corinthians it is more value than spiritual gifts which, as you will recall, were being used carnally. And in Romans it is more valued than retaliating against those who persecute against you, which gives insight into the condition of the church in Rome, the condition between the Jews and the Gentiles. They were fighting we know. Like cats and dogs in the church, not just in Rome, but in all of the new churches. There were animosities that existed in this clash of culture. So these things were very, very important in the early Church as they are today.

No doubt this is what was fueling Paul's concern about this most important spiritual discipline, the commitment to love. He also said, "Let love be without hypocrisy." Hypocrisy comes from a Greek term that was used to describe an actor, a person that wears a mask. In other words, don't let your love be pretentious here. Don't let it be something that you are pretending to do. No phony relationships. Don't be like Judas who followed Christ and betrayed him with a kiss, who followed Christ not out of a sincere love for him and love for his people, but out of self centered manipulation to achieve his own ends. Don't love that way.

And I would challenge you this morning to examine your heart. Repent of this lack of love for others, lack of love for Christ, this love of self and maybe at times this love with hypocrisy. You may fool others, but you won't fool God.

So Paul begins with the absolute primacy of genuine love, but, secondly, he says, "I want you to abhor what is evil."

Now, friends, even as hypocrisy is the antithesis of love, evil is the antithesis of holiness and godliness. Evil, as we see in Scripture is lawlessness. It is the opposite of righteousness. I think you will agree with me that as Christians we have been absolutely immersed in the cesspool of evil in our culture. It is everywhere you turn. And unfortunately, because of the way our flesh works, it is easy for us to become desensitized to evil. As Paul warned, be careful, the world will squeeze you into its mold. Don't let that happen. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Hear the truth of the Word so that that won't happen.

We see it all the time. We see it even in the Church. Women dress immodestly even in the church and the husbands and the fathers say nothing. Many Christians go to great lengths to identify with and look like the most evil people within our culture.

Someone said recently—and I had to laugh—quote, "Call me a kill joy, but I miss the good old days when the youth pastor got tattoos before he got saved."

Many actually enjoy entertainment that exalts evil and mocks righteousness, horror movies that exalt wickedness and Satan, immoral music videos. Several of our listeners have written to me even of late. They are leaving their churches because their churches

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

are ordaining homosexual men and women as pastors. They are being mocked, because they are, quote, “unloving.”

Beloved, self sacrificing love is the virtue of holiness. It is not some schmaltzy sentimental thing that winks at sin. You see, true biblical love involves a holy hatred for evil because evil is the enemy of God who is love. Think of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Speaking of Christ the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews one verse nine:

"THOU HAST LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, THY GOD, HATH ANOINTED THEE WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE THY COMPANIONS."⁶

No, no, wait a minute. Wait a minute, pastor, some will argue. God hates the sin, but he loves the sinner. Well, that is a popular cliché, but it is one that can be very misleading. Yes, God loves sinners in that has made available to them salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but that love will never be experienced unless they do that.

The psalmist David said in Psalm five verse five:

“Thou dost hate all who do iniquity.”⁷

Psalm seven verse 11:

“God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day.”⁸

D. A. Carson makes this helpful observation. Quote, “Fourteen times in the first 50 psalms alone we are told that God hates the sinner. His wrath is on the liar and so forth. In the Bible the wrath of God rests both on the sin, Romans 1:18 ff, and on the sinner, John 3:36.” He goes on to say that God’s wrath is an entirely reasonable and willed response to offenses against his holiness.

In Proverbs six beginning at verse 16 we read:

“There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him.”⁹

Now as I read these I want you to ask. Do you hate these things? you should.

⁶ Hebrews 1:9.

⁷ Psalm 5:5.

⁸ Psalm 7:11.

⁹ Proverbs 6:16.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.¹⁰

Beloved, our love for God is demonstrated as much by what we hate as what we love. What you love really determines what you hate. We should all be diametrically opposed to any and all forms of wickedness, those things that God abhors.

{?} says, quote, “Those who love God also develop a fierce hatred of what is wrong. You who love the Lord hate evil, Psalm 97:10.” He goes on to add, “There is no room for half measures in loving God, because God is totally opposed to everything evil. The man who loves him must, likewise, be implacably opposed to evil.” Love for God cannot coexist with a love for evil. The very fact of the believer’s love for God means that he is dedicated to stamping out evil,” end quote.

The psalmist said in Psalm 119:113:

“I hate those who are double-minded, But I love Thy law.”¹¹

Verse 163.

“I hate and despise falsehood, But I love Thy law.”¹²

Psalm 97:10.

“Hate evil, you who love the LORD, Who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked.”¹³

Psalm 119:104.

“From Thy precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.”¹⁴

This is what Paul is saying when he commands us to abhor evil. Proverbs 8:13:

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Proverbs 6:17-19.

¹¹ Psalm 119:113.

¹² Psalm 119:163.

¹³ Psalm 97:10.

¹⁴ Psalm 119:104.

¹⁵ Proverbs 8:13.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Beloved, hatred of sin means that we flee from things like sexual immorality. We flee, we run from idolatry, things that would pull us away from an allegiance to Christ.

In 2 Timothy 2 verse 22 Paul tells him:

“Flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”¹⁶

Beloved, we need to discipline ourselves from these things. Unless we choose to discipline ourselves in these regards, it is not going to happen, because our flesh is drawn to evil like a moth to a flame. That is why Paul says in 1 Thessalonians five verse 21:

“But examine everything carefully.”¹⁷

Let's stop for a second. What would that include? What you watch on your television, what you watch on the internet, what you listen to in your music, who your friends are, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.¹⁸

Beloved, I would encourage you all to pray for discernment in this regard. Take inventory of those things in your heart, in your life that you treasure more than Christ. And, by the way, you want to know a real easy way to make up that list? Write out all of the things that keep you away from church on Wednesday nights, keep you away from small groups, that keep you away from adult Bible fellowships, that keep you away from student ministries, that keep you away from all of those things that God has said within this local body are opportunities for you to serve him by serving others. That is where you want to look for the list.

And then you need to do whatever is necessary to get rid of those things and flee from them.

Thirdly in verse nine he says, “I want you to cling to what is good.” The word cling is powerful in the original language. It means to glue or join together. It means to be bonded to something. Cling, he says, to what is good. Good expresses here the moral excellence of a thing or a person. For example in Romans seven verse 15, the law of God is, quote, good.

¹⁶ 2 Timothy 2:22.

¹⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:18-19.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

So this is a call, my friends, for discernment. It is a call to be discriminating. Paul has already acknowledged that he struggled in this area. I do, too. We all do. Let's admit it. But let's get serious about it. Remember what he said in Romans seven verse 15?

For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.¹⁹

You see, folks, our natural inclination is to cling to what is evil. Let me ask you. Which do you remember more easily, the clean jokes or the dirty ones? The filthy words, pornographic images? That is the type of thing that our flesh is drawn to. We are like a dog that will go back and eat his vomit or his feces. That is what our flesh does unless we discipline ourselves for godliness and commit ourselves to doing things that the Holy Spirit of God is commanding us to do through his apostle and through his servant your pastor.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 again.

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.²⁰

Folks, this is the opposite of allowing the world to squeeze you into its mold. Instead, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind that we may prove what the will of God is, Romans 12:2, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. We must not hold on tightly or be bound to those things that are dishonoring to God. We have got to release them. You have got to run from them.

Think of the things that you tend to be glued to. How often do we hear the phrase, "He is glued to his television?" I am not saying don't watch television. But you have to be careful what you watch. We are glued to ungodly friends. We are glued to immoral movies. We are glued to music that is dishonoring to the Lord in our collection. Some are glued to pornography. Some of you are glued to seductive fashions, designed to

¹⁹ Romans 7:15-21.

²⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

somehow have men notice your body. Some of you are glued to false teachers. Some of you are glued to an unsaved boyfriend or girlfriend.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul says:

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."²¹

So, again, we are to cling to what is good. Philippians 4:8 gives us a sample of this. Cling to whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

Beloved, examine the preoccupations of your heart. Examine those things that occupy your mind and feed your flesh. Rid yourself of those things, because if you don't a little leaven does what? It leavens the whole lump. You leave it in your life, it will grow, it will metastasize and it will destroy. If you go to the doctor and you find out that you have got just a little bit cancer, what do you say? Well, good. I am glad it is a little bit. I am not going to deal with that. I don't have to worry about that.

No. You want it out. Why? Because if you don't, the consequences could be dire. Beloved, this is exactly what happens in our spiritual life. Discipline yourself to put these things off and put on Christ and all that is good. Now Paul moves from disciplines of character to 10 disciplines of duty toward fellow believers. We will go through this here fairly quickly. These are wonderful truths and, again, we have to say: Am I willing to really be disciplined in this area?

First of all he says in verse 10:

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”²²

Now the language here denotes the kind of affection and the natural love that we would have for a family member. So we are to be devoted. It means to be tenderly loving, to show respect for, to honor.

²¹ 2 Corinthians 6:14-16.

²² Romans 12:10.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Philippians two verse three. He says:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.²³

So ask yourself. Does this describe the attitude of my heart towards my church family? If I can say with all tenderness and love, if you are just a Sunday morning Christian, the answer is no, it does not. You are not devoted to one another in brotherly love. You are ultimately devoted to yourself. You have no desire. The key word is desire here. I know some of you have health problems. Some of you work. I know that there are some legitimate excuses. But if you have no desire to be a part of a small fellowship group, if you have no desire to come here on Wednesday nights and be fed the Word and pray with the rest of the body and use your gifts in that context, if you have no desire to be a part of adult Bible fellowship or the other things that goes in the church, then rest assured, you are not being devoted to one another in brotherly love. Don't kid yourself.

As believers united to Christ we are one family. We have one Father. There is this amazing bond that is more secure and lasting than even the one that binds us together with our physical families.

In Luke 14:26 Jesus says how we are to love Christ more than our family. So, of course, we should be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Folks, this is what honors Christ. And this is what brings blessing to us. Paul says in Galatians 6:10.

“Let us do good to everybody, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”²⁴

You see, our devotion to one another is to be a testimony to the world of our devotion to Christ and being united to Christ in faith.

John 13:35.

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."²⁵

Well, yes, but, pastor, so and so is an absolute jerk. He or she said something that just really ticked me off. Well, ok, thank you for that. Then you are exempt from this. You know, if somebody did that to you, my goodness. You don't have to be devoted to somebody like that. You don't have to love that kind of a person. Really.

²³ Philippians 2:3-4.

²⁴ Galatians 6:10.

²⁵ John 13:35.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Dear Christian, I want to say this so kindly, but grow up. Of course people are going to say things that hurt your feelings. Of course there are going to be people within your church family that many times you don't like, but that doesn't give you a free pass. Paul doesn't say, for example, be devoted to one another in brotherly love unless... fill in the blank. We don't see that. What if Christ treated you that way?

Somebody offends you, what are we to do? Well, you go to them. Oh, I am not going to do that. I am going to tell the pastor and have him go to them.

No, you are the one to be devoted to them. Really? Yes. What you should do is pray for them. Spirit of God, help me to have an opportunity to go to this dear person that I am having problems with. I know you have commanded me to love them. Love is a choice. It is not an emotion. And I am going to pray that you will give me an opportunity to speak into their life where I can in a very loving way confront them, where we can be reconciled.

Galatians six verse one tells us:

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.²⁶

Well, what is the law of Christ? It is the law of love. It is the law of loving your neighbor as much as you love yourself. What does it mean to bear the burdens? Oh, well, that means we just pray for them at a distance. We don't ever get involved in their life. No it doesn't. What it means literally is to help get underneath their burden of sin, come alongside them and help them come to a place of real, genuine repentance and reconciliation. That is what it means to be devoted to one another in brotherly love. But it is like we have lost all of this, as if it is ok to just kind of come to church on Sunday morning, maybe show up for a few other things every now and then, write our check and I am good.

Beloved, you simply cannot do this if you are not part of the church, if you have no desire to be in relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ. This is contrary to presenting your bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice. This is contrary to what Paul has been saying, to use your spiritual gifts to put the Spirit of God on display and see other people come into conformity with Christ.

²⁶ Galatians 6:1-2.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

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Practically speaking we expect you, as leaders of this church, to desire to be a part of the body, to be a part of the adult Bible fellowships, the small groups, the what we do on Wednesday nights, other things. I know you can't make all of those things. But most of the time our excuses are pathetically lame.

This is how we grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ.

If I can put it to you a little bit differently, none of these admonitions could be lived out with you sitting at home watching television or making some other lame excuse about, well, you know, my babies, they have to be in bed at a certain time and we have got to get up at a certain time and all of this type of thing. Well, ok. So maybe what you need to do is catch this word. Sacrifice. Children, we are going to serve the Lord tonight by being a part of whatever the activity is. It is going to require that we get to bed maybe an hour later. It is going to be a little bit tough in the morning, but do you know what? We are going to do this for the glory of God. We are going to learn what it means to be a living and a holy sacrifice, to be devoted to one another in brotherly love. We are going to model that. So I don't want to hear any whining in the morning.

Frankly, some of you have child centered homes. Your whole life revolves around your children and that dishonors Christ.

I want you to ask yourself. How much time am I willing to give to serving Christ and his body? How much am I willing not to concede to the world? How much are you going to let the world take? I mean is... are you comfortable with an hour a week, a couple of hours a week? Are you comfortable with letting everybody else function within the body while you enjoy whatever it is that is a greater priority? Do you really think that that is honoring to the Lord?

How much time does God expect you to give? How much time does God expect us to give in ministering to our fellow believers in our local church? And why is it that we get so defensive when we are asked these questions? Because we love self more than we love Christ and his people. Because we resent being disciplined. How much time should we give? I don't know. You have to ask yourself that before the Lord. And Jesus said, "If any man is going to come after me, he needs to deny himself, take up his cross and be willing to follow me, come what may." We have been told to present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice. I don't know. How much does that mean for you?

Beloved, our sacrifice for Christ will always be indirect proportion with our understanding of his love for us and our love for him. Sacrifice, again, is a foreign term to many. He goes on. Secondly, he says, "You need to give preference to one another in honor."

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

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Oh, this is a tough one, isn't it? Give preference. It is phrase that expresses the idea of putting others first. It has the idea of showing genuine appreciation and respect for others in your church family. It means stop trying to promote yourself. Honor your brother and your sister, Philippians 2:3 says:

“...with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”²⁷

In other words, don't be pushing for first place. Strive for others to have that position. If I can put it real graphically, you are in the left lane on the interstate following somebody and there are some slow people over here on the right lane. Are you all with me? We have all been there, right? Here comes some car whizzing up around to your right and you know what they are going to do. What are we to do? Well, in a manner of speaking, in our church family, we are to let them in and slow down and let them have that place.

Boy, our flesh just hates that kind of thing, doesn't it? Boy, I am going to cut you off. I am going to ride my horn. I am going to flash my lights. I am going not follow you to your place of work and let out the air in your tires.

I don't know why anybody would ever thing of such a thing, but...

Practically speaking, folks, this is what it means to the body of Christ. Let him in.

The third discipline, duty toward fellow believers, verse 11. He says, “Not lagging behind in diligence.”

This is great. It could be translated, never be lacking in zeal and intensity. In other words, don't be lethargic and lazy. Be on fire with the Spirit of God, serving with all of your heart. Be ablaze with humility and love and just a passionate desire to serve Christ by serving his people.

By the way, this is the opposite of... oh, boy, you know, I have had a hard time at work today. Boy, it is getting late here. You know, I am just too tired to come to church tonight on Wednesday night. I just can't quite make that or the small group or whatever it is. Yeah, and, honey, boy, I agree with you. You know, the baby is a little fussy tonight, too. And so we probably need to say. You know, and there are some things that we need to do around the house. You know how it works. You keep stacking it all up and finally you justify it in your own heart and your mind and you take off your shoes and you relax on your couch and you turn on your television. And all of that stuff is nothing more than a way of justifying what your flesh demands. It is the opposite of discipline, folks.

²⁷ Philippians 2:3.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Put your heart and your soul into it is the idea here. Great text in Colossians three verse 23. Some of us were talking about it yesterday when we were coming back from our elders retreat.

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.²⁸

1 Corinthians 15:58:

“... be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”²⁹

So, folks, don't be a lazy whiner. Don't be lagging behind everyone else. Don't be a person with no diligence, with no zeal, no passion, no eagerness, no energy, no devotion, no sense of urgency. If I can put it to you as plainly as I know how, there is absolutely no place for a sluggard in the body of Christ. No room for that. We need to discipline ourselves in this regard.

Hebrews chapter six beginning in verse 10 we read:

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.³⁰

That is the idea.

A fourth duty. Be fervent in spirit. Here is the proper attitude. Keep your spiritual fervor. It can be literally being fervent or boiling in the Spirit, in other words in your inner life. To put it differently, you need to serve the Lord with enthusiasm. Don't you hate it when you tell your child to do something and they are about to step on their lower lip and their shoulders are hanging down and they are going to go do it, but they are not fervent in spirit, ok? Sometimes that is how we serve the Lord. Don't do that. Be determined. Be resolved. Be persistent. Be enthusiastic. Fervent, ζεω (dzeh'-o) in the original language. It was used only here as well in Acts 18:25 of Apollos. I am anxious to meet that man one day. And in that text we read:

²⁸ Colossians 3:23-24.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

³⁰ Hebrews 6:10-12.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

“...being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus.”³¹

Beloved, being devoted to one another in brotherly love is not easy. And, again, it is choice. It is not an emotion. Some people are easier to love than others. I understand that. But if we are not fervent in Spirit, we are going to give up. We are going to throw in the towel. We must be like the apostle Paul, Colossians one verse 28. You know this great text.

And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And of this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.³²

And he said in Galatians 6:9:

“And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.”³³

So we need to discipline ourselves in this regard.

Fifthly he says we are to serve the Lord. Serving translates the Greek term δουλεύω (dool-yoo'-o). We get the word slave from that. We are to be willing slaves of a good and faithful master. We need to do his bidding, not our own bidding. We have to discipline ourselves to be intentional in serving Christ.

Ephesians five verse 15.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.³⁴

And what is the will of the Lord? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and to love your neighbors as much as you love yourself, to make disciples of all men, to teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded.

Folks, you have got to literally prioritize your life. You have to schedule your service, how, when, where, what, because nothing else in life really matters.

³¹ Acts 18:25.

³² Colossians 1:28-29.

³³ Galatians 6:9.

³⁴ Ephesians 6:15-17.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

I hope you will agree with me. It is the passion of my heart to absolutely fall across the finish line of my life, absolutely exhausted for Christ. Paul said to imitate him. That is what he said in 2 Timothy four verse seven. He says:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.³⁵

Folks, the King is coming. He could come at any time. I hope you are living a life of urgency and excitement, that you are devoted to serving him so that he will not find you living for yourself, but living for him. He also adds we need to be rejoicing in hope. You know, serving Christ is not easy. Many times it creates conflict. There is sorrow. There is suffering, 2 Timothy 3:12.

“...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”³⁶

So what is the motivation in service? Well, it is the hope that we have. We are to remain, according to 1 Corinthians 15, as I read earlier:

“...steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”³⁷

He sees it. he will reward. Matthew 25:21, don't you want to hear him say some day:

“Well done, good and faithful slave.”³⁸

You see, folks, it is our hope that animates our present joy.

...and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.³⁹

For this reason, seventh, he says we are to persevere in tribulation. That is by the power

³⁵ 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

³⁶ 2 Timothy 3:12.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

³⁸ Mathew 25:21.

³⁹ Romans 5:2-5.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

of the Spirit. We keep on. By the way, this is not a passive, just kind of putting up with things. But it is an active, steadfast, endurance when God allows us to be tested. And we are to tap into the power within us. That is why, number eight, he says in verse 12 to be devoted to prayer. Devoted literally means to be persistent in prayer, to continue to pray with intensity and effort.

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17:

“Pray without ceasing.”⁴⁰

Does this describe the attitude of your heart? You know, if you have a hard time with prayer the reason is you are not involved in the battle. Proverbs 18:1.

“He who separates himself seeks his own desire.”⁴¹

Believe me, folks, if you are part of the battle, if you are involved in the body of Christ it sometimes is a battle. Most of the time it is a wonderful blessing, but if that is going on in your life, you are not going to have any problem having a habit of prayer. You will be on your knees and God will bless. And then as he closes this, verse 13, number nine, we are to contribute to the needs of the saints. Contributing here comes from *κοινωνεω* (*koy-no-neh'-o*). It can be sometimes translated communion or fellowship, but it denotes a partnership, sharing of one's possessions.

Acts 2:44.

And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.⁴²

And then, finally, we are to practice hospitality. The verb practicing here denotes a vigorous effort, a phrase literally means pursuing the love of strangers. And in this context it would be the love of strangers if it advances the cause of Christ.

As we close, I want you to understand that this is more than just inviting friends over for dinner. This literally has the idea of actively pursuing strangers in need if it advances the cause of Christ. We should consider it a privilege, not some miserable obligation. We are to be, 1 Peter 4:9, hospital to one another without complaint.

Who knows? We may even be entertaining an angel, Hebrews 13:1-2.

⁴⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

⁴¹ Proverbs 18:1.

⁴² Acts 2:44-45.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 16, 2012

Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.⁴³

The angel there, the messenger, it may refer to an actual angelic being or just a messenger from God.

When John commended Gaius for his generosity in the realm of hospitality, 3 John five we read:

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth.⁴⁴

Dear church family, examine your life against these standards. Get serious about your attitude toward fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And especially for those of you who really have no desire to be a part of the Bible fellowship adult or the Wednesday night meetings that we have, especially the small fellowship groups, we really want to help. The elders, we really want to help you. And what I am going to ask you to do, and I know we... sometimes we have to be creative. But what I am going to ask you to do, if you have no desire in this area and you have got some excuses, maybe, that you think are legitimate, I want you to email me with your excuses. I want you to tell me what is going on, because we want to come alongside you and encourage you and love you and patiently, maybe come up with some creative ways to get you involved in doing the things that you know God would have you do.

I think it is very clear. So now it is up to you. I will look forward to hearing from you.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell's messages, please visit OliveTreeResources.org.

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⁴³ Hebrews 13:1-2.

⁴⁴ 3 John 5:8.

The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow Christians - Part 4

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:9-13

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