

February 3, 2014

Demonstrating the Love of Christ

Romans 12:11-13 (NASB), ***“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.”***

In many people’s minds today the word Christian does not carry warm and fuzzy feelings. Sadly in our culture today the word Christian is often linked to some distinctly un-Christian concepts and actions. Every now and then I will be watching a news opinion program and they will have a Christian on with a non-Christian debating some topic of the day; recently it has usually been the issue of gay marriage. Far too often these debates end up in a shouting match which I believe does harm to the cause of the gospel and does not reveal what it really means to be a Christ follower. While it is vital as Christ followers for us to hold firmly to the sufficiency and inerrancy of Scripture I also believe that we are to first and foremost to be marked by love. Does this mean we ignore the truth? Absolutely not but we must share the truth of God’s love *in love* with those that are lost.

In Romans 12 we have been learning what it really means to live out the love of Christ in our lives. In verse 1 Paul writes that we are to ***“present”*** our ***“bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.”*** In our last devotional as we looked at verse 10 we learned that this means we are to ***“be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”*** Paul then began explaining what exactly that looks like and the first thing was that we are to give ***“preference to one another in honor.”***

In verses 11-13 Paul unpacks what this means even more. In verse 11a he writes that we are not to be ***“lagging behind in diligence...”*** John MacArthur writes in his commentary on Romans that ***“Whatever is worth doing in the Christian life is valuable enough to be done with enthusiasm and care.”*** We are not to lag behind in ***“diligence.”*** The word ***“lagging”*** is translated to mean “lazy or idle.” We are not to be lazy or idle in doing good. Sloth and indifference not only prevent good, but they allow evil to prosper. Proverbs 18:9 says, ***“He who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys.”***

Paul continues in verse 11b with our need to be ***“fervent in spirit...”*** The word ***“fervent”*** is translated to mean “to be hot.” We are to be on fire in a sense for the Lord Jesus Christ and this fire that we have is to be played out each day in how we live our lives, not just in the stance that we take on social issues. 1 Corinthians 9:26 says, ***“Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air.”*** Galatians 6:9 says, ***“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”***

Part of being ***“fervent in spirit”*** is ***“serving the Lord”*** as it says in verse 11. Far too many “Christians” make a profession of belief in Jesus Christ but they serve only themselves. As Christ followers we are saved to serve the Lord in whatever way He has gifted us and called us to service. All service to the Lord is with one goal in mind and that is to glorify and honor Him.

A Christ-follower is to be a joyful person. Paul writes in verse 12 that the Christian rejoices ***“in hope.”*** The word ***“rejoicing”*** which is used here is translated to mean “be glad.” We are to be a glad people! Why? Because we have the hope of Jesus Christ which is the hope in the world.

Romans 5:1-2 says, ***“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”***

The Christ follower will face persecution, suffering, and trials. In fact in many parts of the world today those who faithfully live lives that are surrendered to Christ and faithfully proclaim His name are under severe persecution. But the Christ follower does not shrink from suffering. It says here in verse 12 that the Christ follower perseveres ***“in tribulation.”*** The word ***“tribulation”*** means “oppression and affliction.” This oppression and affliction is the *result* of the faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Hebrews 10:32 says, ***“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings.”*** Then in verse 36 of that same chapter it says, ***“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”***

Along with tribulation comes the need for prayer. Verse 12 concludes with the call for the Christ follower to be ***“devoted to prayer”***; 1 Thessalonians 5:17 calls on us to ***“pray without ceasing.”*** How many of us really devote much time to praying for the salvation of others and for the endurance of fellow believers? 1 Timothy 2:8 says, ***“Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.”***

Paul ends this explanation of what the Christ follower’s life looks like with verse 13 which says, ***“Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”*** As Christ followers we are always to be eager to share in the ***“needs of the saints.”*** In other words as Christians we are to take care of those among us who are in need. This means the needs of missionaries, pastors, evangelists and also saints who find themselves in times of need. This isn’t just about the physical and financial needs that others have, it is also the spiritual needs they have as well. Hebrews 6:10 says, ***“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.”***

Finally the Christ follower is to practice ***“hospitality.”*** The word ***“practice”*** is translated here to mean “pursue.” We as Christians are to *pursue* hospitality towards not just fellow believers but more importantly those who are outside of the body of Christ. By practicing hospitality we demonstrate the love of Christ and honor Christ and bring others into His kingdom. Matthew 25:35 says, ***“I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited Me in.”***

As Christians we are to stand out from the world. What this means is that we are to be marked by first of all a love for one another and a love and concern for the lost. My prayer is that we will be convicted of the need to love others in our midst in merciful and compassionate ways demonstrating the love of Christ.

Recently I read of a Christian brother who was in the supermarket line and a young mother was in front of him going through the checkout. It quickly became apparent that she did not have the money to buy all of the groceries she needed. He stepped up and told the cashier “I will pay for the rest.” As he was leaving the store the young woman asked him “Why did you do that?” His reply was simply, “Because Jesus loves you.”

