

Paul's Exhortation pt 1 Romans 12:9-13 (ESV) bible-sermons.org February 16, 2014

Occasionally Apostle Paul includes a list of exhortations in his letters. Though there are similarities, each list is unique. I assume from these differences that he is encouraging each particular church in areas where they need to grow in the Lord. Of course each instruction can all apply to every believer, but depending on our weaknesses some are more needed than others. As we go through the list this week and next, let us each consider which phrases particularly apply to us. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to point out which we need to take special notice of and learn from Him how we can grow in those areas.

Paul would be the first to remind us that this is not a list of ways that we can be righteous before God (Galatians 2:16). Paul is not giving us a new set of laws to replace the laws of Moses. It was Paul who wrote that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life (2Corinthians 3:6). Rather, he is describing what the Spirit led life looks like so that we will notice where we need to yield to the transforming power of God's word.

Paul started this exhortation portion of the letter by pleading with us to come before God and submit our bodies as instruments for God's use, a living sacrifice. He told us that we do this by allowing the word of God to transform us so that we can test and approve what is God's will (Romans 12:1-2). Then he encouraged us to take an honest evaluation of the gifts that God has given us to serve one another and use those gifts to build up the local church.

Now Paul continues with a staccato list of what godliness looks like. It is difficult to divide them up as the original writing had no punctuations. He begins the list with one that he often has emphasized. ^{9a} *Let love be genuine.* While Paul had been as eager to keep every detail of the Law as anyone could be (Philippian 3:6), his conversion to Christ Jesus as the Messiah had brought to light the reality of one phrase in the Law. ¹⁴ *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* Galatians 5:14 Realizing how much he was loved by God, brought out the redeemed souls' obligation to love others with the same genuineness. Just as we are expected to forgive others because of the forgiveness we have received (Matthew 6:14), we are also to love as we are loved. It is agape love, the love that expects nothing in return. It sees beyond the surface to the intrinsic value in the one that is loved. Agape love sees the potential to restore the image of God that sin has marred. It sees how much God loves that individual in giving Jesus for their sin. Agape love values what God values.

Three times in the Gospel of John, Jesus commands us to love one another (John 13:34; 15:12, 17). Of course you can't work up this kind of love. It must be genuine. It has to come from God. We know we are supposed to love people. When an individual uses you time and time again it is challenging to have genuine love. This is when we see whether we are just

Commented [notes1]: Galatians 2:16 (ESV)
¹⁶yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Commented [notes2]: 2 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)
⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Commented [notes3]: Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)
¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Commented [notes4]: Philippians 3:6 (ESV)
⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Commented [notes5]: Matthew 6:14 (ESV)
¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

Commented [notes6]: John 13:34 (ESV)
³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

Commented [notes7]: John 15:12 (ESV)
¹²This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Commented [notes8]: John 15:17 (ESV)
¹⁷These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

doing what we are supposed to do, or if the love of God lives in us. When we find we are falling short, we ask God to fill us with His love for that person.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians with a similar expression. He told the Corinthians they were to commend themselves ⁶ *by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love*; 2 Corinthians 6:6 Paul explained to Timothy that correcting those that were leading others astray was done with the goal of love (1 Timothy 1:5). Peter also expressed this need to genuinely love others. ²² *Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart*, 1 Peter 1:22 Love is the hallmark of a genuine believer (John 13:35), love for God and for one another. Brother Carl from Solid Rock shared with the Pastors that during his trip to the Philippines little children and one shy baby clung to him. They could sense the love of God in Carl. How genuine is your love? Do others sense the love of God in you?

The word "let" speaks to us. It tells us that if we are believers, this love is already in us. We must allow it to be expressed. **The believers' problem isn't so much working up this kind of love, rather it is refusing to allow our old nature to stifle the love of Christ in us.** The word for "genuine" is literally "un-hypocritical". In other words, allow the love of Christ that is in your redeemed soul to be genuinely expressed.

Paul continues, ^{9b} *Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good*. This is sorely lacking in our culture. The American version of tolerance is to not make judgments about right or wrong. However, some things are evil. Some things are good. Don't allow yourself to get use to evil in your life or in the culture. Have you noticed the moral slide of our culture is increasing at an exponential rate? There are two words in Greek for evil. The evil we are to actively express our disdain for is the evil (*poneros*) that is in opposition to the good. This is not hatred of a person but of the subversion of what is good. Those ideas and expressions that attempt to distort what is good are what we are to abhor (Psalm 97:10).

Hold fast to what is good. Stay in the Word. Keep up your time of prayer. Don't forsake assembling with believers (Hebrews 10:25). Another translation says to "cling" to what is good. It takes an effort on our part not to be swept along with the tide of culture. The flesh would readily rise from its grave and enslave you once again. That is why we must make the effort to tightly hold on to what is good. Keep practicing godly habits. Sometimes you will experience dry spells. Don't give up or back off. That is when you really need to hang on. The author of Hebrews warns us that if we don't tie our boat securely to the dock of what we have been taught, our boat will drift (Hebrews 2:1).

^{10a} *Love one another with brotherly affection*. This is different from the love of the previous verse. Verse nine was agape love. This verse is *philedelphia* love, which is fraternal love. We are to be like a family. I've tried to stress this over my years here at Wayside. Ida was so

Commented [notes9]: 1 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

⁵The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Commented [notes10]: John 13:35 (ESV)

³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Commented [notes11]: Psalm 97:10 (ESV)

¹⁰O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Commented [notes12]: Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Commented [notes13]: Hebrews 2:1 (ESV)

¹Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

good at expressing this love. That is why we are encouraging you to participate in Ida's dinner six. You can't love one another as a family if you don't get to know one another. Take each other out to lunch. Participate in a Bible study group. We must find time to spend with one another to get to know one another and express brotherly love and concern (Hebrews 13:1).

^{10b}*Outdo one another in showing honor.* It could be literally translated, "Value one another preferentially." Every brother and sister in Christ is a highly favored son or daughter of God. Each of you is precious in the eyes of God (Isaiah 43:4). What a wonderful fellowship any church would have if they really practiced this instruction! Can you imagine, outdoing one another in showing honor every time we get together? That is an expression of the brotherly affection we are to have. Some of you are really practicing this. You see the gift in each person and tell them how blessed you are to see them expressing it. It is to listen wholeheartedly, to care sincerely, and to acknowledge the expression of Jesus in that person's life. It is to consider them more significant than yourself (Philippians 2:3).

¹¹*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.* I love this expression! First it says to not let our eagerness become laziness. Don't slack off or slow down. We should be aware of the danger of taking a break from the intensity of our faith. Nothing attracts others to good or evil like passion (Galatians 4:18). Someone was asked how they were so effective in ministry. They responded that they just get on fire for Jesus and others come to watch them burn. They lived this verse.

There is a definite article before "spirit" so I would translate this second half of the verse as "... get on fire in the Holy Spirit as you serve the Lord." The word "fervent" (*zeo*) is used in Greek to describe a boiling liquid or a red hot metal. We have the highest calling in all creation and all time. We have the Lord of all creation living in us. That is something to be passionate about. In fact, I would say it is sinful to not be passionate about the Holy Spirit at work in your life. We are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). Do you realize what that means? You are seated in the place of power and authority. Just because some people misuse this truth certainly doesn't mean we should ignore it. You are chosen by God and your destiny is more glorious than you can imagine. You have the privilege of working with God in the earth to bring Him glory. You might even be the instrument which God uses to bring others sons and daughters to glory.

A short while ago a man came into the office. He said, "You don't remember me, but back in 1997 you had me over for Christmas with your family and you prayed for me. I was a rock and roller living in sin, but after that prayer God got ahold of my life. I've been evangelizing in the worst of the prison wards in Detroit. Now I've been sent out doing street evangelism wherever God leads me. I just wanted to let you know and encourage you." Well, what could I say? Glory to God! All I did was pray over him. I don't even remember it. At least I was

Commented [notes14]: Hebrews 13:1 (ESV)
¹ Let brotherly love continue.

Commented [notes15]: Isaiah 43:4 (ESV)
⁴ Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.

Commented [notes16]: Philippians 2:3 (ESV)
³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Commented [notes17]: Galatians 4:18 (NIV)
¹⁸ It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.

Commented [notes18]: Ephesians 2:6 (NIV)
⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

willing by the grace of God to pray for him as the Spirit led. God really did it all. I just got to be an instrument in His hands. Should we get excited and be zealously fervent about those opportunities to transform a life from darkness to light (1Peter 2:9)? You better believe it!

Now, I have to admit that like most of you I have those times when I'm not so passionate. In fact, as I was working on this message I was in a spiritual battle. I couldn't understand why God was allowing certain things to take place. I abhor the evil that I was witnessing. I'm not alone. The prince of preachers, C. H. Spurgeon battled with depression. But as I made it to this verse and allowed the Holy Spirit to speak to my heart, the darkness began to lift and the fire began to be stoked again. We all have times of difficulty (1Peter 4:12). Just don't stay there. Work through it. Don't become apathetic, which is the opposite of what this verse is instructing us to do. Let the Word of God speak to your heart and renew your mind (Colossians 3:16).

12a Rejoice in hope, Paul has described our hope earlier in this letter. Our hope is the finished work of Christ in us. When our transformation is complete, we will be in the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29). We will forever be in His presence. That promise is the source of abiding joy that can see us through the worst of times. It is what kept the martyrs strong in their final hours. We know where we are headed and the glorious future that is ours. We know it because we have tasted and tested it in the Holy Spirit.

12b be patient in tribulation, This is what I mentioned earlier that I was failing to do. I was being impatient with the tribulation I was dealing with. **It helps to realize that all tribulation the Lord allows in our life is for our good** (James 2:3-4). During Simply the Story training, I was struck by one passage from Exodus. The Israelites were going out defiantly until they saw the Egyptian army bearing down on them. Then they blamed Moses for leading them out of Egypt in answer to their prayers. God spoke through Moses and told them they didn't need to fight, God was going to fight for them, just be silent! That is often the best course to take in tribulation. Be silent! (Exodus 14:8-14) **Otherwise you may express your doubts and fears and even murmur against the God who is answering your prayers.**

12c be constant in prayer. We are more familiar with Paul's other expression of this in 1Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." We are to be always praying. It is our spiritual breath. It is our communion with God. Not only do we present our needs and those of others to the only One that can really meet them, but we also seek direction and guidance as we serve the Lord in whatever calling He has placed us. It is an attitude of the heart. "Constant" means to be continually attentive to something or to wait continually upon someone. Our heart should always be attentive to the Lord for His direction (1Chronicles 16:11).

13 Contribute to the needs of the saints The brotherly love we have as a family in the Lord is not just in word only. We should do what we can to assist those that have needs within the

Commented [notes19]: 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Commented [notes20]: 1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Commented [notes21]: Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Commented [notes22]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Commented [notes23]: James 1:2-4 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Commented [notes24]: Exodus 14:8-14 (ESV)

⁸ And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. ⁹ The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians -For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' ¹³ And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

Commented [notes25]: 1 Chronicles 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!

body. We do have a benevolent fund, but that mostly goes to those outside the congregation as a witness that this church cares, thereby showing that God cares. But when one of us has a financial need through no fault of our own, we should respond. We don't want to encourage dependency or enable bad habits, but we do want to assist in a time of need.

When we give to missions we often are contributing to the needs of the saints. When I go to India we contribute to the physical and spiritual needs of those saints. A Spirit filled believer is generous when he or she sees the need of a brother or sister (Hebrews 13:16). As John the Beloved wrote, ¹⁷ *But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?* 1 John 3:17

^{13b} *and seek to show hospitality.* The inns of the first century were not much to speak of and were often dangerous. Jewish hospitality, however, was famous, especially during the feasts. Rabbis taught that it was one of the greatest things one could do to earn favor with God. Of course we don't see it as means of earning favor, but rather as a response to God's love for us. The Crawfords were wonderful at hosting missionaries that came through town. They would insist on having them there and treating them to home cooking. Open your home to guests and you will be blessed (Hebrews 13:2)! We value our privacy too excessively. Hospitality is a demonstration of the genuine love that began this list and of the brotherly love we are commanded to express. When we host those who are not in the faith, it gives them a chance to witness a Christ honoring home. It may even give us an opportunity to pray for them, and you just heard what God can do with that!

Paul is exhorting us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2Corinthians 13:5). Is one of these areas lacking in your walk with the Lord? He's not telling us to measure up so we can please God, but rather encouraging us to find the joy of letting the Spirit of God reign in us (Romans 14:17). Which of these instructions is the Spirit of God telling you to surrender to Him? I encourage you to write it on the bottom of your bulletin and take it home and pray about yielding that area of your life more fully to the life of Christ in you (Galatians 4:19). Put it on a note where you will see it regularly and memorize. Let it renew your mind and transform your actions. It's not by accident that the Apostle followed the instruction to renew our minds with this exhortation. Grab hold of these truths and don't let them go!

Questions

- 1 Why does Paul give us these lists?
- 2 What is genuine love?
- 3 Review the other verses about love.
- 4 Why must we abhor evil?
- 5 Why must we cling to what is good?
- 6 Do you think of the church as family?
- 7 How do we live out verse 10b?

Commented [notes26]: Hebrews 13:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Commented [notes27]: Hebrews 13:2 (ESV)

² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Commented [notes28]: 2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Commented [notes29]: Romans 14:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Commented [notes30]: Galatians 4:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

- 8 How do we practice verse 11?
- 9 Review the three parts of verse 12?
- 10 Do you see a need in a brother or sisters life?
- 11 Why is hospitality a blessing to the giver?