

## Introduction

- Because we have been saved by the unending mercies of God in Jesus Christ, Paul has called us to offer all that we are to God as worship (12:1). This begins with our minds (12:2), where we are tempted to think of ourselves rather than each other (12:3), even though God has saved us into one body of Christ (12:4-6a). In putting us together, God by His grace gifts us to serve one another (12:6b-8). The apostle now commands how we are to live together in the body of Christ.
- While we have broken this list up, Paul himself gives it as a single picture of our lives together.
- After a discussion of how we are given grace to serve one another in the body of Christ, Paul describes true love in the congregation.<sup>1</sup>

## Living Together in Genuine Love (12:9-13)

12:9a **Let love be without hypocrisy.**

- I've made this command larger and bold to draw our attention to it especially; **everything Paul says after this in 12:9b-16 elaborates on how to love each other genuinely.**
- The people of this world, this age, define love as a feeling or affirmation of everything a person feels about themselves. Christians, on the other hand, seek to obey Paul's command near the beginning of this chapter: “...do not be conformed to this world [or age, αἰών], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (12:2).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is similar to what he does in 1 Corinthians: chapters 12 and 14 describe the Spirit's gifts and how they are to be used in the congregation; chapter 13, purposefully placed in the center of this discussion, describes selfless Christian love.

<sup>2</sup> The last imperative, or command verb, in chapter 12 was in 12:2, where Paul commands, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Everything after this,

How does God define love in the Book He has given us? The Bible's definition of love is the only true definition of love, since it is revealed from the God Who is eternally and in Himself love (1 John 4:8).<sup>3</sup>

- God defines love in the Bible as that eternal reality between Father and Son as the one true God (John 17:24), displayed toward us in the Father's giving of the Son to save us from our sins on the cross (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 1:3-6; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 4:9,10), and including us by the pouring forth of Himself into Christians in the Person of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). God did not create humanity because He was lonely; He is in Himself eternally love, since in the one true God the Father has always loved the Son, the Son has always loved the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the Personal love-bond between them.<sup>4</sup> Salvation and

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while translated as command in English, is actually just elaborating on those two commands (up to 12:14, where we are commanded to “bless” and not “curse” – it's so hard that I suppose he felt he had to reiterate the command tense of the verbs!).

<sup>3</sup> “The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation” (*Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, I).

<sup>4</sup> This is why only the Christian God, described in the Bible and confessed by the Church for two millennia, can be love. He did not learn to love when we were created; He has always, unchangeably in Himself, been love – the one God can only be love in Himself if He is also three Persons (Trinity). On my first trip to the Philippines, five years ago, I read *On the Trinity* by Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173)

true love is that we, despite being sinners alienated from God our Maker, are brought into the eternal and infinite love of God by the purpose of the Father, the saving work of the Son on the cross, and the application of that saving work to us by the Holy Spirit. All human love is a reflection of that one true love, though rebellious humanity suppresses that “*truth in unrighteousness*” (Romans 1:18) or twists it.

- **We, brought into the eternal love of the Triune God, are now commanded by the apostle to live that out together in faith-community with each other.**<sup>5</sup> He

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during the 13-hour flight over the Pacific. Richard says, “if there was only one and single person in the divinity...he would never enjoy the delights and sweetness that he could have gained by being the object of a profound love...he would have no absolutely no one to whom he could communicate the delights of charity-love” (3.14). Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) further says that the Son is the Father’s Personal reflection of Himself, and the Spirit is the Personal love between Father and Son: “The Father is the Deity subsisting in the prime, un-originated and most absolute manner, or the Deity in its direct existence. The Son is the Deity generated by God’s understanding, or having an idea of Himself and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the Deity subsisting in act, or the Divine essence flowing out and breathed forth in God’s Infinite love to and delight in Himself. And I believe the whole Divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the Divine idea [the Son] and Divine love [the Holy Spirit], and that each of them are properly distinct Persons” (*An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity*). I give you these two examples to show Christian reflection on the biblical reality that **the one God Who is eternally three Persons is love in Himself without us – by His grace we are brought into that eternal, infinite love-bond, and we live that reality out in faith-community with each other.** No other God but the Trinity can possibly be love!

<sup>5</sup> Remember that the story of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-37) comes out of the “*lawyer*” trying to redefine “*neighbor*” so that he

doesn’t leave it up to our ideas of how to do this – he gets specific.

- 1 John 3:16,17 tells us that love involves the sharing of “*the world’s goods*” when there is need; in other words, **genuine love is visible.**
- Everything after this elaborates on love.

### **Active Ethics (12:9b)**

12:9b *Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*

- The first step in loving as God loves (which is the only true love), is seeing reality as it is – as God describes it. What He says is good is good, and what He says is evil is evil – we cannot rightly love if we do not have that base.<sup>6</sup>
- “*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil*” (Proverbs 8:13a).
- “*...of the Son [God the Father] says [in Psalm 45:6,7], ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His Kingdom. **You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness**’*” (Hebrews 1:8,9).
- How do you discern right and wrong? By voices in the culture, or by the Bible alone?

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could obey Leviticus 19:18 according to his own narrow standards (Luke 10:25-29)! We are all tempted to do the exact same thing, which is why Paul starts giving us details.

<sup>6</sup> In Isaiah 1 we see the covenant people of God not knowing how to love each other rightly (1:17,23); as a result God does not accept their worship (1:11-15) and commands them to “*cease to do evil, learn to do good*” (1:16,17) – later He will pronounce “*woe to those who call evil good, and good evil*” (5:20). Unless we have God’s categories for good and evil, we will not love each other rightly. When everyone does what is “*right in his own eyes*” (Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:5), there is no universal morality, and, therefore, no way for us to genuinely love each other.

### Devotion to Each Other (12:10)

12:10 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor...*

- This is one of the hardest things to do, which is why Paul says it in several other letters to different churches:
  - “Let no one seek after his own good, but that of his neighbor” (1 Corinthians 10:24).
  - “...love...does not seek its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5).
  - “...be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).
  - “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3,4).
- Do you do this in your dealing with other believers in the congregation? How about with your spouse?

### Passionately Faithful (12:11)

12:11 *...not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord...*

- We are active and passionate in our service to the Lord – notice we are not primarily serving ourselves or even each other, but “the Lord.” This frees us from both selfishness and making our service to each other contingent on how likable or worthy they are of our service! Compare with Ephesians 6:5-8// Colossians 3:22-25, with can be applied both to vocation but also our service to each other.

### Heaven-Leaning (12:12)

12:12 *...rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer...*

- We’ve already seen that the Roman congregation was undergoing difficulties (8:31-39).<sup>7</sup>
- How do they persevere?
  - They find their joy “in hope.” Happiness is rooted in our circumstances; Christian hope is built upon that which is eternally promised in Christ, and cannot be changed or affected by earthly, temporary circumstances. READ 4:18-22; 5:1-5; 8:18-25; 15:4-6. Are you living primarily for this world and its brief circumstances, or for that which is eternally promised to us in Christ? Joy is seen in those who keep their eyes on Christ.
  - They persevere.<sup>8</sup> Perseverance is spoken of most often in the Revelation, a book written to comfort believers in worldly tribulations (READ 1:9; 2:2,3,19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). In fact, all the blessings promised in the Revelation are given to those who “overcome,” that is, those who are faithful to Christ no matter what happens to them in this life (READ 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:7).
  - They pray. The command to rely constantly on God in our daily lives is repeated several times in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:18-20; Philippians 4:6,7; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Peter 4:7).
- Relying primarily (or exclusively) on worldly solutions and helps will not result in a powerful life able to love others out of its heaven-sourced joy in all

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<sup>7</sup> I am always humbled by Hebrews 10:31-39. Read it. If these things happen to you, will it be said that you endured with joy?

<sup>8</sup> “All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end” (*Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, V).

circumstances. When we seek happiness by good worldly circumstances, we tend to selfishness.

### Active Service (12:13)

12:13...*contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*

- “Contributing” is the verb form of the word usually translated “fellowship.”<sup>9</sup> True Christian fellowship is a giving of ourselves and our resources to help other believers.

### Our Attitude Toward Enemies (12:14)

12:14*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

- This is not natural, and is therefore a sign of God’s gracious work in a believer’s life! Jesus taught the same thing (Matthew 5:44); Paul lived this principle out (1 Corinthians 4:12) and taught it elsewhere (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Peter taught it (1 Peter 3:9), and told us we are to live it because of the example of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21-23).

### Emotional Togetherness (12:15)

12:15*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*

- Paul teaches the same thing to the congregation in Corinth as he is teaching them how to exercise their Spirit-given gifts in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:26).

### Humble in Our Thinking (12:16)

12:16*Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind,*

<sup>9</sup> Maybe you’ve heard of the word “koinonia” (κοινωνία), or “fellowship.” “Contributing” is the verb κοινωνέω. See the similarity?

*but associate with the lowly.*

*Do not be wise in your own estimation.*

- The divisions of humanity recognized and emphasized by the world have no place in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. This includes divisions along gender (biblically-defined, Genesis 1:27), race/ethnicity, nationality, social standing, economics, etc. (READ Galatians 2:11-14; 3:28,29; Colossians 3:10,11; James 2:1-9).
- I really love John Murray’s words on this passage: “‘Be not wise in your own conceits.’ Literally rendered it is: ‘be not wise in your own eyes’ (cf. 11:25; Prov. 3:7). Apparently the conceit in view is that self-sufficiency by which our own judgment is so highly esteemed that we will not have regard to wisdom that comes from any other source. It strikes at the opinionated person who has no regard for any one else’s judgment. ‘The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated’ (James 3:17). The opinionated person is intractable and impervious to any advice but his own. Just as there is to be no social aristocracy in the church, so there is to be no intellectual autocrat.”<sup>10</sup>
- When I disagree with someone on how to do something, I must ask myself, “am I disagreeing because I want to be right or in control or to put this person in their place?” I see a lot of people who act contrarian, and I strongly suspect the motivation for their disagreeing is automatic and connected to a desire for control. This is not Christian love, and has no place in a congregation (or Christian marriage).

**Those who receive God’s boundless mercy in Christ should worship Him with all they are – which includes a whole-life love for each other in Christ that reflects that same boundless mercy!**

<sup>10</sup> John Murray (1898-1975), *The Epistle to the Romans*, volume 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 137.