

Title: How Christians Should Behave

Series: Living Free (part 17)

Text: Romans 12:9-21

Introduction: A Christian song I sang a lot in college has a line, ‘*They will know we are Christians by our love*’ – which is the essence of Jesus words of John 17.

We Are One In The Spirit

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

Chorus: *And they'll know we are Christians by our love by our love,
they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

What does this *love* look like? (Forest Gump once said, “I know what love is” but I wonder if I really do?) How does this love react when wronged? How does it behave towards strangers? That is what Paul addresses in the second half of chapter 12 of Romans.

Text: Romans 12:9-21

In thirteen verses Paul gives an amazing **29 commands** regarding the ethics of Christian living in Romans 12:9-21. Paul gives a multitude of imperatives to Christians on how they *ought* to live in light of being saved. by faith.

I. Let Love...

9. *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*

- *Don't just pretend that you love others: really love them (TLB)*
- *Don't let love be a mere outward show. (JNT).*

Verse 9 serves as a heading of sorts to a series of these multiple commands that follow. ***Let Love...***

- After all that Paul has taught about the Law, he will say later in **Romans 13:10**, “*Love is the fulfillment of the Law*”

A. *Let love be sincere.* Love is not to be fakey or flakey, inconsistent, prejudicial, or self-serving.

- **Lit. *Without hypocrisy*** – is taken from the idea of a potter covering up mistakes in his pottery by applying wax. The wax made it look good but the pot would leak if it got too hot.

B. The nature of Agape

The early Christians took a little-used Greek word - *agape* - and reminted as the love that God has for humanity and the kind of love that separates His followers from others

The nature of *agape* is that it has power to transform every type of social relationship.

Agape is not sentimental nor is not naïve or gullible

- Christians love when there are no violins playing
- Christians love when there is no end in sight
- Christians love when no one sees it but God

We love because we are Christians. We love unlike the world does. We love when there is nothing in it for us because we love the One who first loved us.

C. Agape *Abhors evil...Clings to good.*

When Ruth Graham asked what one thing she would say to young Christians she replied “Abhor evil and cling to good”.

Abhor is an extreme feeling of bitter hatred regarding something and implies loathing and disgust. Believers are to express a strong hatred for evil by a withdrawal from it, separating from it, putting great distance between the evil and themselves.

- *Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Isaiah 5:20*

Cling. One of the most familiar uses of the word *cling* – Gk. *kollao* - is in the description of marriage, where the husband is charged to leave his parents and *cleave* to his wife. It is the idea of being glued together by intention.

D. How do we do this? As we read Paul’s imperatives we can loose heart since we know we can’t do it but let us draw on the Lord’s love today....

- *the love of God has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit Ro 5:5*

When God’s love is truly in us loving all others is now possible. Like Jacob working for Rachel – it seemed like a few days because he loved he so much.

II. A Special Love Fellow Christians [Romans 12:10-16]

A. Treat one another like family

10. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another

There is a unique love that a family has for its members. The parent/child connection is strong but so is the brother/brother relationship. Our families are now extended to fellow followers of Jesus – of all ethnicities, cultures and generations.

There is a strong emotional bond of family affection.

- Illustration. Does anyone have an uncle or aunt who is kind of odd but you love him or her anyway and wouldn't think otherwise?.

All of us are called by God to be brothers and sisters in Christ to one another.

B. Stoke your passion for God

11. Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

12. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer

This is zeal is *according to knowledge* -. Fervent is translated 'aglow with the Spirit'.

There is a pattern in verse 12 that gives us a simple pattern for living.

1. **Keep Hope Alive**. 'Rejoicing in hope' could be translated 'let hope keep you joyful'

We as true believers should be the most positive people in the world. We cannot drag our way through life, moaning and groaning. We cannot always be looking on the dark side of everything, as negative prophets of doom. No, "we exult in God." **Romans 5:1**

- First step: Keep your faith-vision alive
2. **Stay Steady in Tribulation**. – we all know that life has tribulation.
 - Spurgeon once said: *By perseverance the snail reached the ark.*
 - "Triumph is *umph* added to *try*."
 - Keep moving forward in God
 3. **Continue in prayer**. Vision, Stand, Pray
 - Wesley "work as if it all depended on you and pray as if it all depended on God"
 - It the middle of how to love your neighbor, Paul implores us to pray!

C. Excel in hospitality

13. Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality

Hospitality = "Love of strangers". The word here describes the practice of entertaining strangers.

Hospitality is love with open arms, open homes and warm welcomes for those in need of friendship, food and lodging.

Many in the Bible illustrate this important Christian trait.

a. Mary and Martha. **Luke 10:38** " a certain woman named Martha received him into her house

b. Lydia. **Acts 16:14-15** ...*If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*"

We live in a cynical world where it is easy to close our hearts of compassion for the stranger. We do need discernment but keep in mind 'do unto others as you would want done to you'.

I Peter 4:7-11 *The end of all things is near... love each other deeply... offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

- Story: A Russian woman (Svetlana) in our church who was kicked out of her home and went to the only Christian family she knew of in her town and asked if she could stay there. They said 'yes' and in time she became a Christian

Hospitality is a requirement for leadership in **I Timothy 3:2**.

The exceptions are so-called believers who are rebels – Paul later says have nothing to do with them.

D. Deeply connect with others

15. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

- USA Today article that said it is easier to reach out to those who weep than those who get promoted – particularly if it is the job you wanted! Studies have shown you feel closer to the one who rejoices with you than the one who weeps with you!

E. Pursue a genuine humility

16. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

Find a humble way to serve others and it will help them and deal with your pride

Love dictates that all people regardless whether rich or poor are equally valuable to God.

- Proverbs says *Let another man's lips praise you and not your own*
- Also: *Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*

The person who is wise in his own eyes is rarely so in the eyes of other people

III. Love All People Romans 12:14,17-21

A, Respond in the opposite spirit

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

20. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

Scripture does not say that this is easy but that it is right. We are to turn the other cheek when reviled. It is going in an opposite spirit.

- When you are treated unfairly refuse to strike back – instead smile and bless.

It is one thing to *put up* with those who persecute us it is completely another thing to actually ‘*bless*’ them.

Coals of fire has been interpreted to mean many things but the most straightforward meaning is to have a strong sense of conviction.

- **Matthew 5:46-47** “*For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only what do you do more than others? Do not even the gentles do that?*”

B. Be a person of peace

18. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

If there is division let it not be because of lack of love.

As much as it depends on you... Peace does depend on two parties but what is the Lord saying to you right now about what you should do to break the impasse?

- Story: Paul Johansson shares in one of his books that while as a pastor in Kenya he was praying about who should succeed him as senior pastor. After one Sunday service he saw two men starting to grab and shove each other, then a third man walked up and intervened. In a few moments, everyone was embracing and laughing. When asked what he did, Samuel said one man had owed the other man some money so to avoid conflict he gave the man some of his own money to pay off the debt. Samuel later became the pastor of the church. He was a man of peace.

C. Leave judging to God

17. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

19. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

What happens if we suffer evil? We are not to repay the transgressor in kind. There is a low level to which human relationships sometimes descend: when we do no good to those who do no good to us.

To take matters into our own hands is to play God. **Vengeance** has to do with justice – **revenge** has to do with wanting to punish someone because they have hurt us first.

Chapter 13 of Romans re-enforces the need for civil government to reward good and punish evil. In personal relationships we are to be a judgmental person.

Leave room for the wrath of God. Wrath is God's cleansing retributive justice - now and at the last judgment - is pure, holy and perfect.

D. Overcome evil with good

21. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good

This goes back to **Romans 12:9** which says to cling to good and to abhor evil.

This verse gives me great hope that evil can be overcome. Evil does not need to triumph if it is consistently confronted with good – agape’.

- Edmund Burke's most famous quote is *“The only thing that is required for good to triumph is for good people to do nothing”*

This implies conflict and struggle. But the good news is that good can and will triumph.

IV. Closing

Charge: Where there is evil confront it with good. If evil is committed against you – return not evil but good.

What is the Holy Spirit highlighting to you today from our text? Do good. Do it.