

Love in the Family of God
Romans 12:9-13

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A small boy sat with his mother in church listening to a sermon titled, "*What Is a Christian?*" The preacher punctuated his message at several key points by asking, "*What is a Christian?*"

Each time, he pounded his fist on the pulpit for emphasis. After one of these outbursts, the boy whispered to his mother, "*Momma do you know what a Christian is?*" "Yes dear," the mother replied, "*now try to sit still and listen.*"

As the preacher was wrapping up his sermon, once again, pounding especially hard this time, he thundered "*What is a Christian?*" At that point the boy jumped up and yelled, "*Tell him Momma, tell him!*"

Well, we know what a Christian is but what should our attitude be toward our fellow Christians? This is the question I hope to answer in this new series, *Christian Relating*.

Now, the family of God is special in that it's not to conform to this world. The family of God is to live supernaturally which is produced, directed, and empowered by God's own Spirit.

So, how do we live supernaturally? By transforming our outer life, through the conforming of our inner life, to Christ-likeness. But how is this accomplished? This is accomplished through *agape* love.

An analogy of love is to look at it as the circulatory system of the spiritual body. It enables all members, who are truly connected to Christ, to function in a healthy harmoniously way.

If a believer is walking in the Spirit and experiencing the love of God, he or she will see specific commands come about in his or her life in greater and greater ways.

So today, we're going to look at our personal responsibilities and then our duties as Christians within the family of God.

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In Romans 12:9, Paul lists three personal duties of supernatural living, *"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."*

The greatest virtue of the Christian life is love; that's why Paul lists it first. It's not just a bullet point on a presentation, but a command, *"Love must be sincere."*

Love represents unselfish, self-giving, willful devotion. This is *agape* love. An honest love that's not hypocritical or false.

Agape love centers on the needs and welfare of the one being loved. A genuine, sincere love that's without hypocrisy or pretense; untainted by self-centeredness.

In fact, our word "hypocrisy" is taken from a Greek word which describes play-acting. The church must not be turned into a stage. We're not to be hypocrites. Love mustn't be an act but must be real.

Yet there is such a thing as pretense-love. This veneer of love has been with Christians from the time it was displayed in Judas' betrayal of Jesus with a kiss.

Love must not be faked, nor should it consist of empty words or actions. Sincere love helps others become better Christians.

The next Christian duty Paul mentions is to *“Hate what is evil.”* It may seem strange that the command to love is followed by the exhortation to hate.

But we need to understand that *agape* love is not a blind sentiment. It’s so passionately devoted to God that it hates its opposite which is evil.

Psalm 97:10, *“Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.”*

Evil is the enemy of God and the enemy of love. Hatred of evil engenders an avoidance of it. We’re to love what God loves and hate what God hates.

Then the third personal duty of supernatural living is to *“cling to what is good.”* This verb *“cling”* comes from the word for glue and was used to describe any bond - physical, emotional, or spiritual.

So, we are to cling to what is good. But what is good? The Bible defines good is defined as *“whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, and whatever is of good repute.”*

As servants of Christ, we’re to bind ourselves to what’s good; that which is inherently right and worthy. But you can’t hold a grip on what’s good until you hate what’s evil.

Therefore, as we separate ourselves from the way of the world and fill ourselves with the Word of God, the things that are good will replace the things that are evil.

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Next, in Romans 12:10-13, Paul describes additional duties believers are to follow when interacting with fellow members of the family of God. The first being Christian fellowship.

Paul saw all believers as having one Father, thus constituting one family. Paul understood that the bonds which unite God's family are more secure and longer lasting than those that bind earthly families.

Romans 12:10, *"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."*

The phrase *"Be devoted"* comes from a Greek word which describes a natural affection for relatives, typically that of the love of a parent for a child.

In fact, the phrase *"one another in love"* is the Greek word where we get the word Philadelphia, which means "city of brotherly love."

Therefore, we're to have brotherly or a family type affection for one another in the family of God.

These phrases were originally applied to blood relationships but today they're applied to the tender, warm affection which should unite the members of the family of God.

Then we're to *"Honor one another."* If we're devoted to one another in brotherly love, it's natural that we'll give preference to each other in honor.

Love in the Christian family is to express itself in mutual honor as well as mutual affection. To honor is to give genuine appreciation and admiration for one another.

Christians have been re-created in the image of God and each has a unique contribution to make in the kingdom of God.

We're to be quick to show respect, quick to acknowledge the accomplishments of others, quick to demonstrate genuine love by not being jealous or envious.

If you need to compete or win, then you should try to outdo others in showing honor. This is done by putting others first.

Romans 12:11, *"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."*

The phrase, *"Never be lacking in zeal,"* could be rendered *"Not lagging in enthusiasm and intensity."* Whatever is worth doing in the Lord's service is worth doing with diligence.

The Lord's service is to be done with conscientious, careful, persevering effort. There's no room for sloth and laziness in the Lord's work. Slothfulness in Christian living holds back the Lord's blessings.

The source of this enthusiasm or fervency is not of man. If a Christian is set on fire, it's the Holy Spirit Who must do it.

Not only should Christians take care not to quench the Spirit, resist the Spirit, or grieve the Spirit, they should earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to fill them with zeal.

They should pray for the enthusiasm needed for properly carrying out their Christian service or duties. Fervency requires energy. So many failures in life are causalities of indifference and lack of commitment.

Therefore, whatever we do for our brethren should be done because we're serving the Lord. Our supreme purpose is to serve Jesus, and our power to fulfill that service comes from Him.

That's why, while we're serving the Lord, we can't permit our zeal to grow cold.

Romans 12:12, "*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*"

Hope, or confident anticipation of future fulfillment of the Word, is intended to stimulate present joy and rejoicing.

This confident expectation of God fulfilling the promises in His Word to us, in us, through us, and for us, gives us hope and, as we let this hope begin to expand in our being, it brings rejoicing.

Fellowship with Jesus and anticipation of eternal fellowship with Him is the source of abiding joy. Rejoicing in hope enables God's children to persevere in tribulation whatever its form or severity.

But living the supernatural life inevitably brings opposition. Opposition from Satan, the world, and sometimes it even sparks resentment by fellow Christians.

Without rejoicing in hope, the Christian life is hard to endure. This enduring indicates strength to bear up under the load or stress, plus the persistent application of this strength.

Though hope opens the door to being able to rejoice in our tribulations, the ability to persevere in tribulation isn't a product of human will power or toughness, but a gift of God's grace.

One reason the Lord allows His children to go through tribulation is to drive them to Himself. Without constant communion with God, joy and endurance in such circumstances is impossible.

Therefore, Paul immediately adds "*faithful in prayer.*" Faithful here literally means "*to be strong toward*" and carries the idea of persevering, unwavering.

Faithful prayer should be a natural part of a Christian's spiritual life as breathing is a natural part of our physical life.

Then Paul concludes his list of duties with two forms of sharing. Romans 12:13, "*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*"

The word "*share*" comes from a Greek word which means to participate in or with. The noun form is often translated fellowship or communion.

In other words, people mutually sharing their needs and resources with each other.

The last responsibility to fellow believers is that of practicing hospitality. Now, don't get hospitality mixed up with entertainment. Entertainment focuses on the host instead of upon the guests.

Hospitality in the Greek is literally translated "*pursuing the love of strangers.*"

Hospitality was especially important in Biblical times because inns were few and far between and those that did exist were often unsafe or unsavory places.

Christians were to open their homes and tables not only to each other but also to strangers they encountered. These encounters became major avenues for sharing their faith in Jesus.

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Conclusion

The Christian's life cannot be lived without Christians loving each other and this love cannot be in pretense because that won't enable us to honor and care for each other as God commands.

Leonardo da Vinci characterized an arch as consisting of two weaknesses, which leaning against one another makes for strength. In some respects, this is a good definition of community.

God has designed the church so that its members, though weak individually, would collectively contribute to the strength of the whole. The body of Christ strengthens itself as each part does its work.

Become thankful for brothers and sisters in Christ who are different from you. Let your strengths balance their weaknesses and be grateful that their abilities were given to make up for your deficiencies.

God has brought us together for the purpose of glorifying Him and building His church. When we learn how to relate in Christ's love, the building up of His body will occur to a greater and greater degree.

As we go through this series on how God expects Christians to treat others, let God make your heart tender toward others and you'll be amazed at how it improves your relationship with God, with yourself, and with others.