

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 12:9-16

Romans 12: Paul's description of a healthy, contributing local body of Christ.

A parallel passage: 1 Corinthians chapters 12–13: 1. The composition of the body of Christ. 2. The diversity of ministries in the body of Christ. 3. The absolute need for love as the overarching requirement for the body of Christ.

Up to this point, Paul has primarily focused on God's love for humans. As John Stott puts it, that love has been "... demonstrated on the cross (Romans 5:8), poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5) and doggedly refusing to let us go (Romans 8:35, 39).

Paul insists that love governs and shapes all our relationships. He uses phrases like, "one another", "brotherly love", and "God's people".

A Remarkable Roadmap: (John Stott's Outline)

Sincerity v. 9

"Love must be sincere". The Greek word for "sincere" is "anypokritos". It literally means, "without hypocrisy".

The church is not a theatre, where roles are played out by actors; the love of God is to be genuinely expressed.

Discernment v. 9

"Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." It's interesting that after talking about genuine love, the next phrase begins with "hate. God's love is anything but blind. God's love is discerning. If we love what is

good, we will have the opposite feelings for things that are evil. Both cannot exist in harmony.

Paul adds to this directive, “cling to what is good”. The verb for cling is related to the idea of gluing something together. If we “cling to what is good”, we are going to reject what is evil. God’s love will not allow for good and evil to exist in the same context.

Affection v. 10

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love”. It’s a revealing sentence. “Brotherly love” is, of course, the word “Philadelphia” – which speaks of the love that natural brothers and sisters have for one another.

Paul is using verbiage that originally applied to the human family and applies them to the local church. It’s a picture of the local church as it experiences an authentic, warm affection for one another. It is a unifying kind of love.

Honor v. 10

“Honor one another above yourselves”. We have a double picture in verse 10. One is a mutual affection. The other is a mutual honor.

Paul could have meant “Honor one another above yourselves”, in a couple of different ways: 1. Philippians 2:3: “Esteem each other more highly than yourselves”. 2: “Outdo each other” in this endeavor.

Zeal v. 11

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” Zeal is a word used often in Paul’s era. We could also use the word “enthusiasm”.

True zealousness is not anti-intellectual. It means to have a sense of emotion attached to what we love. Psalm 69:9: “... Zeal for your house

consumes me...”

Paul warns us against having a church that lacks spiritual fervor or zeal. Many believe he is pointing to the Holy Spirit here, as the source of our zeal or enthusiasm.

Patience v. 12

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer”.

A trio of characteristics: Joyful, patient, and faithful. Paul is pointing to the Lord’s return. This is what propels us to be patience. We know the “end game” is in sight. See also: Romans 5:2; 8:24.

James’ parallel advice: “As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” James 5:11

Generosity v.13

“Share with God’s people who are in need”. In the prior section of Romans 12 Paul talked about the “gift of generosity”. Now he generalizes this as he gives us the next word in our list of descriptions.

The Greek verb Paul uses for “share” is like the word *koinonia*. It can mean either to share in people’s needs and sufferings, or to share our resources with them.

Paul is encouraging all believers to be generous.

Hospitality v. 13

“Practice hospitality”. The Greek verb for “practice” is closer to the word “pursue”. Paul is saying, “Pursue hospitality”.

John Stott’s explanation: “Hospitality was especially important in those

days, since inns were few and far between, and those that existed were often unsafe or unsavory places. It was essential, therefore, for Christian people to open their homes to travelers, and, for local church leaders to do so.”

Just as the local church is to show generosity to the needy, it is to pursue hospitality. There is a balance here. Believers are instructed to show brotherly love to each other, but balance that with a love for strangers. That, my friends, is a healthy balance.

Good Will v. 14

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse”. Paul’s words are very similar to Jesus’ own teaching in Matthew 5:44: “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”

Blessing and cursing has the connotation of wishing people good or ill, health or harm. While Paul’s instructions transcend his own era, we should keep in mind how persecuted the first-century believers were.

As Paul is writing Romans, the persecution of believers is mounting. Nero and others will make such persecutions commonplace – especially as the blame for the empire’s problems are shifted to both the Jews and Christians.

Sympathy v. 15

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn”.

Practicing sympathy means we do not put people at arm’s length. We do not stand aloof as people experience the joys or bitter moments of life.

Harmony v. 16

“Live in harmony with one another”. The Greek sentence reads: “Think the same thing towards one another.” The offshoot of that statement

is that we should “be of the same mind” or “live in agreement with one another”.

Paul makes the same appeal to the Philippians when he tells them to be “like-minded and one in spirit and purpose” (Philippians 1:2).

This requires a transformation of our minds. Christians can only have a harmony of thinking – as well as acting – when we have a renewed mind. A “common mind” involves sharing the same basic convictions and concerns.

Where there is no harmony of thought and purpose, local believers cannot work together for the larger good of God’s kingdom.

Humility v. 16

“Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”

Two negative statements here: 1. Do not be proud. 2. Do not be conceited. It can be said that both characteristics identify someone who has self firmly in focus. They are similar deficiencies, but not identical.

John Stott: “Few kinds of pride are worse than snobbery. Snobs are obsessed with questions of status, with the stratification of society into ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ classes, or its division into distinctions of tribe and caste, and so with the company they keep.”

Pride and conceit are the byproducts of someone who has taken their eyes off Jesus – and have imagined that they are better than others.

Paul has given us a truly comprehensive picture of both healthy Christians and, subsequently, healthy churches. As we recognize the grace that has been shown by God to us, we are called to have our worldly thinking transformed.

Without that activity, we can never rise above our world's culture. It is focused on self; it is extremely selfish. The love God calls for must rise above all of that. Through a work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, the body of Christ can set a different pace. We can establish a different environment that both nurtures the believer and draws the unregenerate.

It is, of course, a work in progress. Individual believers will excel at different rates than others. But combined, we can emulate Christ.

We can portray Christ to the world around us as we live out a love that is sincere, discerning, affectionate, respectful, enthusiastic, patient, generous, hospitable, benevolent, and sympathetic. It is marked by harmony and humility.

If we succeed in these things, who wouldn't want to join our ranks?