

Romans 12:11-14
July 26, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Last week I suggested that Paul has put together a checklist of how our lives should be lived as children of God. There are multiple areas that he covers. I compared it to a performance review at the office. When your boss evaluates your work, you are being evaluated in different areas, e.g. skill level, people skills, the ability to problem-solve, identify strengths or weaknesses, etc.

Transition: As we go through Paul's checklist, I want to again give you a word of encouragement: We could easily read this chapter and see only our shortfalls, but let's remember that there are things we are doing right. Let's read this text and determine what our "next step" would be to help us become well-rounded as Christians. **All of us CAN strengthen our spiritual walk with the Lord BY honestly evaluating ourselves in each of the AREAS of our walk Paul identifies for us.** We will go through the text slowly and take each verse and process the meaning. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Rom 12:11-14]

V.11:

- Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

V.12:

- Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

V.13:

- Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

V.14:

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

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.11: What does a healthy "zeal" and "spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" look like in the church? [In verse 11 the key thought is the last clause—**servicing** (*diakoneo*; *diakonian* in v. 7 is trans. "serving") **the Lord**—and the first two clauses explain how a believer is to serve as the Lord's "slave" (*doulos*; cf. 1:1): **never ... lacking** ("not shrinking, not hesitating, not being lazy") **in zeal** (*en spoudē*, "diligence," rendered "diligently" in 12:8), and being fervent in spirit. **Keep your spiritual fervor** is literally, "being fervent, or boiling (*zeontes*, used only here and in Acts 18:25 of Apollos) in the spirit" (either the Holy Spirit or one's inner life). These two commands also balance each other as negative and positive commands (cf. Rom. 12:9). As believers serve God as His slaves they should be enthusiastic and diligent.]

Q: On a scale of 1-10 (1 = no zeal and 10 = spiritual fervor on steroids), where would you rank yourself and why?

Q: If you don't have spiritual fervor, how do you get it? What do you think needs to happen to increase your spiritual fervor? [Subjective; let people wrestle with this.]

Q v.12: Paul highlights three character traits that we should have as we serve the Lord with spiritual fervor. What are they? [allow an inner joy to be fueled by hope; let the peace of Christ allow you to stay patient in affliction; be faithful to pray continually.]

Q v.13: Paul returns to our Christian responsibilities to other believers. What are two practices that are expected of us? [Share with God's people who are in need AND practice hospitality.]

Q: The first responsibility is self-explanatory, but what does "practicing hospitality" mean? [(lit., "pursuing friendliness to strangers"). Both ministries, meeting needs of our fellow believers and being hospitable to strangers, involve helping others.]

Q v.14: We are to "bless those who persecute you." What does that look like? [Perhaps Paul thought of Stephen (X-Ref Acts 7:59-60) and of Jesus Christ (X-Ref Luke 23:34). They both modeled these words and responded to persecution even to death by praying for God's forgiveness of their persecutors.]

Process "Bless": In v.14 the Greek word is "Eulogeo (yoo-log-eh'-o)," where we get the word eulogy, which means "to speak well of someone." In this verse, we are still to speak well of those persecute us.

Observation: After reading the Acts passage re: Stephen and the Luke passage with Jesus, notice that they modeled "blessing those who persecuted them." They both blessed their enemies by going straight to God the Father and asking Him to show FAVOR to their enemies. What we see is that the Lord has given us the power to invoke blessings on others, but it is God who actually gives the blessing or favor to others.

LOOK:

We need to hear this because it's time to do an assessment on how we are living out our calling as God's children. Paul provided multiple scales to be measured by, but the goal is to do an act on the information you learn from it. Since our spiritual growth is a process, we need to think in terms of baby steps in areas we need to improve. If you haven't been faithful in prayer, then figure out a small baby step that works for you to sharpen your prayer life. If it's practicing hospitality, then figure out a baby step that works for you to sharpen your hospitality efforts. Let the Holy Spirit use this chapter to illumine the baby step(s) HE wants you to take and be open to it. You can't lose!

See if someone wants to share:

Q: What is the one small baby step you can take this week that helps you strengthen your walk with the Lord?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 555–573). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Loving participation (vv. 9–16). Here the emphasis is on the attitudes of those who exercise the spiritual gifts. It is possible to use a spiritual gift in an unspiritual way. Paul makes this same point in 1 Corinthians 13, the great “love chapter” of the New Testament. Love is the circulatory system of the spiritual body, which enables all the members to function in a healthy, harmonious way. This must be an honest love, not a hypocritical love (Rom. 12:9); and it must be humble, not proud (Rom. 12:10). “Preferring one another” means treating others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:1–4).

Serving Christ usually means satanic opposition and days of discouragement. Paul admonished his readers to maintain their spiritual zeal because they were serving the Lord and not men. When life becomes difficult, the Christian cannot permit his zeal to grow cold. “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Rom. 12:12, NIV).

Finally, Paul reminded them that they must enter into the feelings of others. Christian fellowship is much more than a pat on the back and a handshake. It means sharing the burdens and the blessings of others so that we all grow together and glorify the Lord. If Christians cannot get along with one another, how can they ever face their enemies? A humble attitude and a willingness to share are the marks of a Christian who truly ministers to the body. Our Lord ministered to the common people, and they heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). When a local church decides it wants only a certain “high class” of people, it departs from the Christian ideal for ministry.

RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS MEAN RIGHT LIVING

Romans 12–13

In all of his letters, Paul concluded with a list of practical duties that were based on the doctrines he had discussed. In the Christian life, doctrine and duty always go together. What we believe helps to determine how we behave. It is not enough for us to understand Paul’s doctrinal explanations. We must translate our *learning* into *living* and show by our daily lives that we trust God’s Word.

The key idea in this section is *relationships*. The term “relational theology” is a relatively new one, but the idea is not new. If we have a right relationship to God, we will have a right relationship to the people who are a part of our lives. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20).

Our Relationship to Our Enemies (Rom. 12:17–21)

The believer who seeks to obey God is going to have his enemies. When our Lord was ministering on earth, He had enemies. No matter where Paul and the other apostles traveled, there were enemies who opposed their work. Jesus warned His disciples that their worst enemies might be those of their own household (Matt. 10:36). Unfortunately, some believers have enemies because they lack love and patience, and not because they are faithful in their witness.

There is a difference between sharing in “the offense of the cross” (Gal. 5:11; 6:12–15) and being an offensive Christian!

The Christian must not play God and try to avenge himself. Returning evil for evil, or good for good, is the way most people live. But the Christian must live on a higher level and return good for evil. Of course, this requires *love*, because our first inclination is to fight back. It also requires *faith*, believing that God can work and accomplish His will in our lives and in the lives of those who hurt us. We must give place to “the wrath”—the wrath of God (Deut. 32:35).

A friend of mine once heard a preacher criticize him over the radio and tell things that were not only unkind, but also untrue. My friend became very angry and was planning to fight back, when a godly preacher said, “Don’t do it. If you defend yourself, then the Lord can’t defend you. Leave it in His hands.” My friend followed that wise counsel, and the Lord vindicated him.

The admonition in Romans 12:20 reminds us of Christ’s words in Matthew 5:44–48. These words are easy to read but difficult to practice. Surely we need to pray and ask God for love as we try to show kindness to our enemies. Will they take advantage of us? Will they hate us more? Only the Lord knows. Our task is not to protect ourselves but to obey the Lord and leave the results with Him. Paul referred to Proverbs 25:21–22 as he urged us to return good for evil in the name of the Lord. The “coals of fire” refer perhaps to the feeling of shame our enemies will experience when we return good for evil.

As children of God, we must live on the highest level—returning good for evil. Anyone can return good for good and evil for evil. The only way to overcome evil is with good. If we return evil for evil, we only add fuel to the fire. And even if our enemy is not converted, we have still experienced the love of God in our own hearts and have grown in grace.

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 489). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

12:11–12. Paul then provided a series of exhortations concerning a believer’s personal attitudes, attitudes that will make him more attractive to others. In verse 11 the key thought is the last clause—**servicing** (*douleuontes*; *diakonian* in v. 7 is trans. “servicing”) **the Lord**—and the first two clauses explain how a believer is to serve as the Lord’s “slave” (*doulos*; cf. 1:1): **never ... lacking** (“not shrinking, not hesitating, not being lazy”) **in zeal** (*en spoudē*, “diligence,” rendered “diligently” in 12:8), and being fervent in spirit. **Keep your spiritual fervor** is literally, “being fervent, or boiling (*zeontes*, used only here and in Acts 18:25 of Apollos) in the spirit” (either the Holy Spirit or one’s inner life). These two commands also balance each other as negative and positive commands (cf. Rom. 12:9). As believers serve God as His slaves they should be enthusiastic and diligent.

The three exhortations in verse 12 can be understood either as independent items or as additional descriptions of how believers should serve the Lord. They are to **be joyful in hope**, because their hope in Christ is the basis of their rejoicing (5:2–5; 1 Peter 1:6–9). **In affliction** (*thlipsei*, “distress, trouble, pressure”; cf. Rom. 8:35) believers are to be **patient** (*hypome nontes*, “being steadfast, having endurance”; cf. 5:3). Also Christians should continue **in prayer** to God for wisdom, guidance, and strength (cf. 1 Thes. 5:17). Being **faithful**, NIV’s translation of *proskarterountes*, should be rendered “persisting in” or “devoted to” (cf. Acts 1:14; 2:42; Col. 4:2).

12:13. Returning to Christians' responsibilities to other believers, Paul exhorted them, **Share with God's people who are in need** (lit., "sharing [*koinōnountes*, 'having in common'] the needs of the saints"). This characterized the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32, 34–37). This concern also motivated the church in Antioch (Acts 11:27–30) and the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9; Rom. 15:25–27) to give to the church in Jerusalem. In the same vein the apostle commanded, **Practice hospitality** (lit., "pursuing friendliness to strangers"). Both ministries, meeting needs and being hospitable, involve helping others.

12:14. Paul's exhortations in this section relate to a believer's reactions to the actions and emotions of others, whether Christians or not. The hatred displayed in persecution usually evokes response in kind, but Paul commanded, **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse** (cf. Matt. 5:44). Perhaps Paul thought of Stephen (Acts 7:59–60) and of Jesus Christ (Luke 23:34). They both modeled these words and responded to persecution even to death by praying for God's forgiveness of their persecutors.