

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 149

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 18:15-20



LET LOVE BE GENUINE

Last week we discussed the saying, “*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*” (Matt 16:24). Today we will use part of last week’s epistle, Romans 12:9-21, and discuss *how to follow* Jesus – how to conduct ourselves in the family, in the church, and in the world. The lesson explains in practical terms what is involved in denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus. It contains at least twenty ways to imitate Christ, in each of which we see Jesus himself as the prime example. In fact, the passage simply reveals the nature of Jesus. Our very best in this life amounts to denying our own way of life in order to seek his – surrendering my own life to live his glorious life.

The verses in Romans 12 are meant to guide our lives today, tomorrow, and the next day, but their real purpose is beyond all days. They are preparing us for eternal life with Christ. They help us see ourselves in eternity. “*We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal*” (2 Cor 4:18).

As we discuss just verses 9-13 in Romans 12 today, it may seem that you are living far below the standards they set, and in fact most of us are. But we press on toward the upward call of God. And the effort is not ours alone. We have his promise, “*I will never fail you nor forsake you.*” (Heb 13:5).

In fact it is better to view these things not as a set of rules we must force ourselves to obey, but as a description of someone we intend to be – an image of what we hope to become, and will become with God’s help. Let us see now what life is like when God begins to conform us to the image of his Son.

Romans 12:9-13. *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.¹*

- *Let love be genuine* (v.9). *Genuine* love is unselfish. If I love someone, love in return is the natural, hoped-for result. But if I love someone and *expect* love (or anything else) in return, my love is not genuine.
- *Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good* (v.9). *Good* and *evil* are mutually exclusive. Good thoughts thrust out evil thoughts, and vice-versa. There is real danger in allowing evil thoughts to remain in your mind. Unless they are recognized and actively hated for what they are, in time they will become “acceptable.” William Barclay remarked, “Our security against sin lies in our being shocked by it.”² When you are “holding fast to what is good,” you are never comfortable with evil thoughts and images.
- *Love one another with brotherly affection* (v.10). A more complete description of unselfish love is in 1 Cor 13. Here the emphasis is on *brotherly love*. Brotherly love is caring love, as in the illustration of the boy carrying on his back a crippled boy nearly his own size. When asked if his load isn’t too heavy the boy replies, “He ain’t heavy – he’s my brother.” This illustrates what Paul meant. Brotherly affection means being so concerned for the one you are helping that you forget the inconvenience to yourself.
- *Outdo one another in showing honor* (v.10). This is difficult. Men and women both are ready to compete and *outdo one another*, but usually not in *showing honor*, giving more honor than we get. In the world, the

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

² William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, Daily Study Bible Series (Rev), 1975, Westminster Press, p.163.

goal is to outdo the competition – to get honor rather than give it. But the Bible says, *“The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life (Prov 22:4).* In other words, “outdoing one another in showing honor” has an eventual plus side: *honor and life* in the kingdom of Heaven.

- *Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit (v.11).* There are times when leaving everything in God’s hands is not helpful. Review James 1:22-27, which says, among other things, that “pure and undefiled religion” includes “keeping oneself unstained from the world.” Accomplishing this takes real effort in this life. Faith must be proactive. Apathy will not work. As one commentator put it, “We must keep our spirit at the boiling point.” The message in Rev. 3:15-16 from Christ to the church at Laodicea reads, *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.”* These words are not comforting for those of us who “flag in zeal” when it comes to following Christ.

- *Serve the Lord (v.11).* When you follow Christ, opportunities to serve come often. Sometimes you see them coming, and sometimes they come suddenly, as when Jesus was interrupted by the woman who touched his robe in Mark 5:25-34. The Bible says we are called to serve God on these occasions. In obeying, we are being conformed, step by step, into the image of Christ – prepared for life in the kingdom of God. *“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30).* Each opportunity to serve Christ may seem small, but, like the cup of cold water, it is never unimportant. It leads to glory.

- *Rejoice in your hope (v.12).* Discuss Nathanael in John 1:45-49 as an example. He was not “rejoicing in hope” as he sat under his fig tree: “Will I live to see Messiah? I don’t think so!” Philip found him and said, *“We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”* Nathanael was still not impressed. *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* But after Jesus spoke with him, Nathanael rejoiced. *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”* Finally, Nathanael was able to “rejoice in the hope” that had lain dormant in his heart – the hope of sharing the glory of God. Romans 5:2 concludes, *“... and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”*

- *Be patient in tribulation (v.12).* When king Nebuchadnezzar had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego thrown into the fiery furnace, “tribulation” was an understatement. But these three were men of faith, and suddenly, the Bible says, King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and “rose up in haste.” He said to his counselors, *“Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?”* They answered the king, *“True, O king.”* He answered, *“But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” (Dan 3:25).* The fires of suffering come to all people. The difference for Christians is the presence of Christ, taking the heat with us.

- *Be constant in prayer (v.12).* Make prayer a component of your daily life. The Bible says, *“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17).* A day without prayer is a day without regard for God, a day without fellowship with Christ, and consequently a day of lost opportunities. A church sign reads, “Seven days without prayer makes one weak.” Jesus set the example by praying often, especially before his suffering and death.

- *Contribute to the needs of the saints (v.13).* The way of the world is, “gain and keep all you can – die with the most toys.” The Christian way is to give freely – store up treasure in heaven rather than on earth. Recall last week’s lesson, Matt 16:24-27. What do you gain if you get rich and famous and lose your soul in the process? If you gain the whole world and lose the life you could have had with Jesus, what is the net profit?

We have discussed only a few of the items listed in in Romans 12. If you feel inadequate (as even Paul did) to obey all these precepts and live as Jesus lives, you are not the only one. But here comes the point: You are never alone in this quest. The Bible says faith is the gift *of* God, not *from* God. It is the Father’s gift of the life of the Christ – divine life and power working in you. So we press on, saying with Paul in Eph 3:20-21, *“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”*