

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 12:9-16 – What’s Your Evidence?

Sermon Notes



Introduction

Paul started out this chapter telling us that we need to completely surrender ourselves to God as living sacrifices to be used in His service as He chooses. And he told us that we should have a humble opinion of ourselves. We are all members of the body of Christ (the church) and we each have gifts given to us, which we are to be using as members of the body. Now, having talked about some of the gifts, Paul goes on to tell us what a living sacrifice looks like.

He does so by showing us where our focus and life goals should be. Our primary life goal is to be committed to God for His use and to satisfy His objectives. He describes this as being a sacrifice to God. This is referred to in the Old Testament as a “devoted” offering. This means that it is 100% released from our control and 100% devoted to God for His use, like the animal sacrifice that was killed and completely burned up, or the drink offering that was poured out, no longer to be of any use to the one offering it.

Let’s see how God feels about this devoted offering. In the book of Joshua, when the Israelites defeated the city of Jerico, after encircling the city 7 times on the 7th day, the priests blew the trumpets, the people shouted a great shout, and the walls came a tumbling down. But, just before that, Yahweh had Joshua deliver this message:

Now it happened that on the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, and Joshua said to the people, “Shout! For Yahweh has given you the city. “And the city shall be devoted to destruction, it and all that is in it belongs to Yahweh; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live because she hid the messengers whom we sent. “But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest *as* you are devoting *them* to destruction, you also take some of the things devoted to destruction and make the camp of Israel devoted to destruction and bring trouble on it. “But all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron are holy to Yahweh; they shall go into the treasury of Yahweh.” (Joshua 6:16-19)

But, we are also told that not all of the Israelites obeyed God's order. In the following chapter we are told:

But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things devoted to destruction. Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; therefore the anger of Yahweh burned against the sons of Israel. (Joshua 7:1)

And because of this, the Israelites were not able to defeat the people of Ai, which was the next city they were to destroy. From this we can understand how serious Yahweh is about a devoted offering.

But what does that look like for us? No – we are not supposed to kill ourselves. We are told to be a “living” sacrifice. This means that instead of living for ourselves, our lives are to be devoted to God. But, what does that look like? Paul will focus the remainder of this chapter on describing this “living sacrifice.” He tells us the characteristics of this spirit filled life (the living sacrifice) in four categories: Personal Duties, Family Duties, Duties to Others, and Duties to those who consider us enemies. We'll look at the first two of these categories today and the final two next week.

Romans 12:9-14

Let love be without hypocrisy—by abhorring what is evil, clinging to what is good, being devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, being fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, persevering in affliction, being devoted to prayer,

Personal Duties

Paul utilizes a series of descriptive word groupings (mostly in pairs) to describe our personal duties, how we should act as living sacrifices. Let's see how well we fit into his descriptions. As we go through these lists, do some personal investigation to determine whether or not you display these descriptive characteristics. The first descriptor is, “*Let love be without hypocrisy.*” The Greek word translated hypocrisy is the word for an actor in a play who is pretending to be someone he is not. So, our love should be sincere and not done as an act to try to convince people that we are something that we really aren't.

Next, Paul gives us one of his descriptive word pairs. It includes, “*abhor what is evil*” and “*cling to that which is good.*” Christians today tend to be “middle-of-the-roaders.” We don't want to go to extremes, so we interpret this as “dislike bad stuff and like good stuff.” However, the word translated “abhor” means “to hate intensely.” And the word translated “cling to” means “to be securely glued to.” These are not middle-of-the-road descriptors, they represent the extremes. Today, it seems Christians have become soft, and we tend to tolerate evil without saying much about it. When we see someone do something evil, we should not turn around and forget about it, we should be filled with indignation and absolutely hate the evil act. And - Paul says that we should be “glued to that which is good.” When two things are glued together, they are inseparable. That's how we should be - inseparable from things which are good.

Family Duties

Paul now focuses on how Christians should treat each other. These are the family duties mentioned earlier. The first family duty is described as a special kind of love, the kind that

exists in close families, like a mother has for her newborn baby. I think if I were to paraphrase the first part of this verse it would say, “Your love for your Christian brothers should be like that which binds a mother and her child.”

In the second part of this descriptive pair, Paul tells us that we should gladly look for ways for others to receive honor before ourselves. In the body of Christ, we should all consider the good of others more important than our own good, and we should be giving honor to others, not seeking it for ourselves.

Paul continues his description of this Christian family life. Here, there are three descriptors. Literally he says, “**in diligence not slow, in the spirit being fervent, in the Lord being a slave.**” In the first of these, Paul is telling us that whatever we choose to do, it should be done earnestly, not lazily. In other words, whatever you apply yourself to, you should do it the best you can. It should be done diligently and faithfully, as if Christ were there observing you. The second descriptive here is that we should be fervent in spirit. Whereas the first descriptive grouping dealt with the physical part of our family life, this refers to the spiritual part. Paul is telling us that our spiritual life and effort should be fervent. That is, we should be “on fire” for the Lord.

In his evaluation of the church of Laodicea, in the 3rd chapter of the book of the Revelation, our Lord criticized them for being lukewarm. Clearly, He was not pleased with the church that was merely lukewarm, and I believe that is a warning to all Christians today. Then, in the third part of this descriptive grouping Paul ties the first two descriptors to our service for our Lord. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ and are no longer free. We are the purchased slaves of God. Therefore, we should be serving Him, not ourselves. And we should do so fervently.

Having told us how to behave within the context of the church (our family life), Paul now tells us how to behave in the world. This triple descriptive starts off with “**rejoicing in hope.**” We have a hope of eternal glory that the unsaved don’t have. We know that we have a future in which we will live with our Savior, where there will be no tears, no pain (either physical or emotional), and no suffering. It is this future hope of glory that Paul reminds us of, telling us to rejoice in this hope.

The next part of this descriptive is to be “**persevering in affliction.**” When we are under pressure or affliction, we want to take matters into our own hands, causing us to respond inappropriately. Instead, we need to “remain under control” or “remain under the authority and Lordship of our God.” We need to remain submitted to Him and committed to doing His will, not our own.

I am often reminded of our Lord’s prayer in the garden just before He was taken captive. He knew what was coming for Him and He didn’t want to do it. Really - He did not want to go to the cross! And yet – he prayed to the Father, “**Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.**” (See **Matthew 26:36-46**) This should be our attitude whenever we are suffering.

Finally, Paul tells us we constantly need to be, “**devoted to prayer.**” No matter what happens, whether in good times or bad, whether in sickness or health, whether in joy or in sorrow, we need to consistently be in the attitude and practice of prayer with our Heavenly Father.

God does not intend for each of us to be on a journey by ourself, calling upon our Father whenever we have troubles. Instead, He wants us to be on a journey *with Him as our*

constant companion and guide, talking (praying) about everything with Him as we experience it; asking questions as we go, sharing our joys with Him, and seeking comfort from Him in our sorrows. This is the kind of personal relationship God wants with each one of us.

Romans 12:15-16

contributing to the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep, by being of the same mind toward one another, not being haughty in mind, but associating with the humble. Do not be wise in your own mind.

Duties to Others

Now, continuing on with Paul's description of how a Christian is to be a living sacrifice, he turns his focus to how we should treat others. He says that we should be, "**contributing to the needs of the saints.**" Even those of us who think we don't have very much, can share some of what we do have with other Christians who have even less.

Paul also tells us that we should be pursuing hospitality, not just being willing, but actively pursuing such opportunities. This was a necessary virtue in the first century, when houses of public accommodation were scarce. It is not so much a necessity today in our society, which may be one reason why we have become more isolated from each other rather than more closely engaged with one another. Keep in mind that we never know who a stranger really is, for in the book of Hebrews we are told,

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

If we are truly in God's family, then we should show all kindness and eagerness in sharing God's blessings to us with others.

Most Christians have experienced the pain of having someone make life difficult for them. It may have been because of something we have done to them, or it may have been completely unjustified. In either case, our natural reaction is to speak evil of them and maybe even pray that God would punish them for what they are doing. However, Paul tells us that instead of seeking revenge through imprecatory prayers, we should speak well of the one or ones persecuting us.

Is this easy? Absolutely not! Our fallen nature wants us to get revenge on those who continually try to do evil to us, but the Holy Spirit wants us to be Christ-like. Consider this, as Jesus was lying on top of the cross having nails driven through His hands and feet so that He could be tortured in the most painful manner known to man, He said,

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

If ever there was a person who would have been justified in asking God to take vengeance on those who are mistreating Him, it was Jesus. Instead of that, however, He prayed that they would be forgiven.

Paul's next descriptive pair involves weeping and rejoicing, but let's look at the second half of this descriptive pairing first. We are to weep with those who are weeping. Paul is not telling us to cry whenever someone else cries, for there are many reasons for us to cry. But,

when that crying is from grief, we are to share in the grief of the suffering one by taking on some of that grief as our own. We are told by psychologists today that one of the ways a person can get over grief is to have others share in the expression of that grief with them.

In the first half of this descriptive pairing, Paul tells us that we are to rejoice with those who rejoice. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, this is actually the more difficult thing for Christians to do. The problem is that what we say and what we do are often two different things. It is easier to mourn with those who are mourning than to be happy with those who are happy. Instead, we often feel jealousy or envy toward those who have something to rejoice about. But this, my friend, is the sin of selfishness at work.

Now, the message of the next descriptive pair centers on the Greek word *phroneo*. A literal translation of this might be, “*minding the same thing toward one another, not minding high things, but joining together with the lowly ones. Do not become conceited about yourselves.*” As you can see, Paul is talking about how we think about ourselves and others, particularly within the body of Christ.

The crux of this descriptive is in the middle, “**not being haughty in mind, but associating with the humble.**” It is fascinating to observe people in the presence of a celebrity. Everyone wants to be near the celebrity and to be his or her friend. But nobody wants to be the friend of the poor homeless person. This is not how it should be within the church, according to Paul. We should have the same regard for everyone independent of their social or economic status. I think if we get to the nut of this one, we will see that these improper attitudes are based on selfishness (how others can make us feel or what can be done for us) instead of self-less-ness (what we can do for others).

Keep in mind that Paul is talking especially about relationships within the body of Christ. That’s why he says “one another.” His basis for these things goes back to verse 3 of this chapter:

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think right-mindedly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Now, Paul summarizes this section with, “Don’t get hung-up on yourselves.” Becoming self-righteous is the result of comparing ourselves to others (usually with an inflated view of ourselves) instead, we should be comparing ourselves with Christ. If becoming like Him is our objective, then none of us will get puffed-up because the One we are comparing ourselves to is so much greater than we are.

So What?

How is your journey in life going? Perhaps your path is rocky and difficult right now. Are you patiently enduring it? Are you going it alone, or do you have your guide walking with you and leading the way? And, are you carrying on a constant conversation with your guide? Let’s look at a few of the things that Paul has just taught us.

Let me ask you a real soul-searching question. Who are you really living your life for? Are you your own master, or are you completely submitted to the one who bought you with the precious blood of Christ? Do you want to please God? If so, then you need to let His Spirit,

not your own flesh, control your thoughts and actions. Your choice is to please yourself or to please God. Which will it be? It can't be both. It must be one or the other

“Ouch! That makes my own toes hurt!

There are three key characteristics of Christians who are committed to God, who have placed themselves on the altar as living sacrifices. Their love is genuine, they absolutely hate that which is evil, and they are good through and through. Is that how others see you? If not, why not?

I have known some Christians who are constantly looking for opportunities to share what they have to meet the needs of others. These people are usually smiling. I have also seen Christians who hoard what they possess and seldom give to those in need. These people don't seem to smile very often.

Do you smile a lot?

When we grieve with those who grieve we take to ourselves some of their grief. However, when we rejoice with those who rejoice, we are actually giving them some of our joy. And then, we give all the glory to God, for He deserves it! Let's put these things into practice this week!

If we are submitted to our Lord and committed to becoming like Him, then we will naturally treat others with the proper attitude knowing that we, like them, are merely sinners saved by grace.

And we get none of the glory because He gets it all!

Let's pray