

Brick by Brick, Part 2

Scripture: Romans 12:10–12

Code: 45-94

INTRODUCTION

A. The Practice of Christian Living

1. Exemplified

Every once in a while I like to read biographies of Christians. I enjoy reaching back into the past to see what I can learn from others. I read about how they walked with the Lord and what they learned in doing so. One biography I read was about a precious saint of God named Robert C. Chapman, who lived in nineteenth-century England. He was a friend of John N. Darby, an early leader of the Plymouth Brethren, who greatly influenced Bible teacher C. I. Scofield, the Central American Mission, and Dallas Theological Seminary. On one occasion, Chapman expressed his life's goal in these words: "Seeing that so many preach Christ and so few live Christ, I will aim to live Him. " Appropriately, Darby said of him, "He lives what I teach. " What a commendation!

Another saint of God that I love to read about is William Arnot, who wrote a notable work on the parables of Christ. It was said that his preaching was good; his writing, better; and his living, best of all. It should be that way with all of us. We should live what we learn because Christianity is a way of life. Our relationship to God is not right if we don't have a Christian life-style.

2. Exhorted

Romans 12:9-21 is a very practical section about living the Christian life. If you have experienced justification (a divine declaration of righteousness), there will be an outflowing of sanctification (a living pattern of righteousness). Although sin will still be present, holiness is the deepest desire of your heart. We are the recipients of God's grace, and are to live obedient, godly lives that we might point others to Him. First Peter 2:9 says that God chose us so "that [we] should show forth the praises of Him who hath called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light. " We once served the devil, but have been redeemed to serve God (Ac. 26:18). When you live a godly life, you bring honor to the One who transformed you by attracting others to Him. Therefore, the Lord receives the glory. You are blessed for your obedience, and when you praise God for that blessing, God is further glorified.

B. The Passage on Christian Living

Philippians 2:12 is a verse that has confused many people. It says, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. " Some have said that means we are partly responsible for saving ourselves. The phrase "work out your own salvation" seems inconsistent with Ephesians 2:9, which says that salvation is "not of works " Is that a contradiction? Is Paul saying in one place

that salvation is not a result of your own effort but in another that we must work it out ourselves? To answer that, let's look at previous verses in Philippians to set the context for verse 12:

1. The Exhortation

Philippians 1:27 says, "Only let your conduct be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs [life-style], that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. " In other words, "If you're truly saved, let your conduct show it, whether I'm there or not. Let it be so genuine that it doesn't need to be monitored by my presence. "

2. The Example

In Philippians 2:5, Paul says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. " He goes on to describe in verses 6- 11 how Christ demonstrated the attitude of humility: "[Christ], being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal [necessary to retain equality] with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father. " So, Paul says, "Have the same attitude of submission that Christ had.

3. The Explanation

Now in that context, I think it's clear that "work out your own salvation" means that since you belong to Christ, having observed His example of humble obedience to God (2:6-8), and having noted the reward of that obedience (vv. 9-11), you should keep on obeying Him (v. 12).

Although the Philippians had demonstrated obedience, it heavily depended on Paul's presence. When he was present, he taught, exhorted, helped, confronted, answered their questions, and unscrambled their dilemmas. But now that he was gone, he wrote them, saying, "Now that I'm not there, don't be less obedient. You've always obeyed in my presence; now keep on obeying in my absence. Let your desire to obey come from within. " The "fear and trembling" that Paul referred to means that it is a serious thing to obey. One should reverently fear God and humbly obey Him.

4. The Expression

When you "work out your own salvation," you are living out what has already been worked with in you. Your desire to be pleasing to God, your submission to the Spirit of God, and your obedience to the Word of God, produces an outward manifestation of an internal salvation. This is the Christian life: living on the outside what is already true on the inside. And it is a word of great encouragement when Paul says in verse 13, "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and do of His good pleasure. " We should reflect on the outside what God is doing on the inside.

You say, "I am willing to live the way I ought to. I want to display the salvation that's on the inside. What do I need to do?" The answer to that takes us to Romans 12, where we find the practical duties that make up Christian living. Paul had given his readers a doctrinal base in the first 11 chapters,

called them to a total commitment in verses 12:1-2, and encouraged them to use their spiritual gifts in verses 3-8. He describes the practical Christian life that follows those prerequisites from 12:9 to 15:3. In the last chapter we began with . . .

I. DUTIES TOWARD OURSELVES (v. 9)

The first circle of responsibility involves three personal attitudes of loving without hypocrisy, hating what is evil, and clinging to what is good. As we come to verse 10, the circle widens a bit to encompass another dimension:

II. DUTIES TOWARD OTHER CHRISTIANS (vv. 10-13)

This second section is directed to the family of God, although some of it backs up to include the individual. As the circle widens, it doesn't exclude prior issues; it merely embraces some that are broader in responsibility.

A. Loving the Brothers (v. 10)

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another. "

1. The Command (v. 10a)

The phrase "be kindly affectioned" is one word in the Greek text: *philostorgos* (*philos* = "a friendly, affectionate love"; *storg^e* = "a natural, familial love"). A form of *storg^e* is used in 2 Timothy 3:3, where Paul says to Timothy that people will be "without natural affection" in the last days. There will be a breakdown in normal love relationships within families. *Storg^e* refers to a natural love, rather than a love induced by desire, beauty, or an attractive personality. Paul says that the Christian family ought to have an affectionate kind of love. Christians ought to be marked by a natural love that is shared with all believers.

The Love That Knows No Limits

I think you've experienced that kind of love when you've met other Christians. I can go where I don't know anyone, but if they love the Lord Jesus Christ, it doesn't take very long for us to experience a bond of love that is unique to Christians. There is a common bond that stretches beyond culture, time, place, and circumstances. Even though we may have nothing else in common, there is an immediate sense of affection with one who belongs to the family of God. That kind of love is given to anyone who belongs to the same Lord and Father. That's why our Lord says in Matthew 18:10 that you are you never to despise (Gk. *kataphrone^o* = "look down upon") anyone who's in the family of God. On the contrary, we should have a natural attraction for fellow Christians. It's marvelous how

we protect and care for each other. That's how it ought to be in God's family. Jesus said that "whosoever shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me" (Mt. 18:5). That's the kind of love our Lord calls for.

2. The Conditions (vv. 10b-c)

a. Brotherly Love (v. 10b)

". . . with brotherly love . . . "

That phrase is from the familiar Greek word philadelphia. When combined with the previous phrase, the exhortation can be translated, "be lovingly loving with one another with loving love. " The repetition of the same idea makes for a very strong statement: "Love fellow believers as if they were intimately associated with you as kindred. " Christian love is not impersonal love; it is a tender caring affection of those who belong to Jesus Christ.

1) 1 John 5:1--"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and everyone that loveth Him that begot, loveth him also that is begotten of Him. " If you love God, you love those who belong to Him.

2) Ephesians 4:32--Paul said, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. " We are to be identified as those who love because we have been greatly loved by God.

3) 2 Corinthians 12:15--The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that he would love them more, even if they loved him less. That kind of love ought to characterize all of us.

4) 1 Corinthians 4:14-21--Paul told the Corinthians, "I love you as my beloved children, and want to take care of you. If you keep disobeying me, I'm going to have to discipline you. But if you behave, I'll come in gentleness--you make the choice. However, my love will reach out to you, either in the warmth of affection and gratitude for your obedience, or in discipline. I want you to be all that God wants you to be. " Not only is brotherly love confrontive, but it is also caring and compassionate.

5) Romans 5:5--We have love to give to others because "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts "

6) 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10--"But, as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. . . . But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more" (cf. Phil. 1:9).

So, we are to love with a tender, gracious affection that belongs uniquely to those in the family of God.

b. Humility (v. 10c)

". . . in honor preferring one another"

Love is specifically expressed by preferring others over ourselves. The attitude of humility is an essential ingredient in the life of the church is humility. Since we are to express the "comfort of love . . . fellowship of the Spirit . . . tender mercies and compassions . . . in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:1-4).

The idea of "preferring one another" carries the sense of leading the way: We're not to wait until someone else honors or meets our needs. We are to lead the way in honoring others, esteeming them more highly than ourselves. We are to be quick to give honor, respect, and help in meeting a need. That is the truest test of humility that I know about. Some people, however, get very angry and and envious when someone else is honored. But just the opposite should mark a believer. We prefer others and take the initiative in bringing honor to others and meeting their needs.

Within the second circle of responsibility toward the family of God, there are still personal responsibilities as well. Paul now backs away from more general exhortation and presents three essential matters that relate to an individual's manner of . . .

B. Serving the Lord (vv. 11-13)

1. The Modifiers (v. 11a-b)

a. Zealous in Service (v. 11a)

"Not slothful in business . . . "

That's not a very good translation by modern standards. It may have worked well when King James authorized the translation of the Bible in Old England, but it doesn't get the idea across in modern times. It sounds like it has something to do with businessmen, and it has been erroneously used in that way. A better translation from the Greek text would be: "Not lazy in zeal. " The Greek term is *spoud^e*, which means "haste" or "zeal. " Paul is saying, "Don't grow lazy in the work of the Lord. In regard to spiritual zeal, don't reduce your commitment to pursuing God's will. "

1) Galatians 6:9--Paul says that we should "not be weary in well doing . . . " (cf. 2 Thess. 3:13).

There has to be a sense of urgency and intensity in the Christian life. There's no room for laziness.

2) Ecclesiastes 9:10--Solomon gave some very wise advice: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work . . . in the grave "

3) Isaiah 56:10--Isaiah indicted the leaders of Israel with these words: "[Israel's] watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. " The people who were supposed to be on spiritual watch in Israel went to sleep like watchdogs who failed to bark when they should have.

Paul is saying in Romans 12:11 that ministers of Christ are to be diligently accomplishing the Lord's work while it still can be done.

4) Proverbs 18:9--The book of Proverbs reveals how appalling laziness is to God. Solomon wrote, "He . . . who is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster. " The greatest waster I know is one who wastes not money, but time.

5) Ephesians 5:16--Paul said we should live wisely, "redeeming the time "

6) Hebrews 6:11-12--"And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful "

Are you working hard--or hardly working?

I'm afraid that many Christians rust out when they should rather wear out. I haven't met very many who have done the latter. Avoiding hard work is the trend of our day. A survey was taken that revealed that relatively few businessmen actually work hard. It picked out the middle and upper management of the business world (who control their time more than blue-collar workers) to determine how many hours that they worked were actually productive. The survey revealed that the national average of productive time spent in an eight-hour day was two hours! We live in a leisure-oriented society. You say, "Yeah, but for those two hours I really produce!" Maybe you do and that's enough to keep the rest of your people working eight.

Unfortunately, our attitude toward leisure gets transmitted to Christianity. I've noticed that many young men in seminary drag out the educational process. There may be some valid reasons for doing that, such as marriage or a part-time job, so I don't want to fault everyone who takes a long

time to graduate. But there was a time when you went in the door of a seminary and graduated three or four years later. One benefit of that was training in diligence and discipline. I graduated from high school at seventeen, from college at twenty-one, and from seminary at twenty-four. I believe that the consistent pace I kept was one of the best teachers of self-discipline that I ever had. Very often, young men work a little bit, go to school a little bit, date their fiancée a little bit, play racquetball a little bit, and have a lot of free time. But when they get out of seminary and start working at a church, they have to do one thing all the time. That's a shock to their leisure mentality. So it's not unusual to see them cancel the Sunday night service, for example, because they can't discipline themselves in the preparation process. One of the keys to the ministry is sitting in your chair until your work is done. That may not sound very glamorous, but it is necessary.

There is a need for zeal in the work of the Lord. There was a lady in our church who taught Sunday school for eighteen years. That's a marvelous example of not becoming weary in doing good. I have been asked, "How do you force yourself to study week after week?" I don't force myself to study; the people who show up on Sunday do that! I have a responsibility to teach them the Word of God. Accountability in the ministry is very helpful. When you tie yourself into a ministry where there's a certain demand on your time, you are forced to be zealous and diligent in preparing for it.

b. Fervent in Spirit (v. 11b)

". . . fervent in spirit . . . "

1) Explained

Even though you may not be lazy, you can still have a bad attitude as you serve the Lord. You can say, "I'm going to do such-and-such because it has to be done. I'd like to get out of the whole thing. " The word "fervent" means "to boil with heat. " We are to be at boiling point--never lukewarm or cold (Rev. 3:15-16). The Christian life ought to be filled with enthusiasm, zeal, excitement, joy, and dedication.

I once read a magazine article called "Get Enthusiastic!" It began: "I've just been talking with Lorraine, and she left me feeling like last year's bird nest, all hollow and ravelled. You've met people like that, haven't you? Sure you have. Millions of them. They're so common, in fact, that they threaten to become a national epidemic. What's the matter with them? Are they in great trouble? Not any more than the average citizen. Sick? Nope. Crushed by grief, remorse, or sorrow? Hardly ever. Then what in the world ails them? The oldest blight on earth-- they lack enthusiasm. "

We can become weary in doing good. We can lose our zeal and excitement. That's too bad because the Christian life needs to be filled with dynamic energy. We should not only be committed to do the task and not grow lazy, but also be boiling in the spirit to get it done.

2) Exemplified

a) Apollos

Apollos was described as being fervent in spirit. Acts 18:24-25 says, "And a certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and, being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord " He had a never-slow-down, aggressive, and enthusiastic spirit.

b) Henry Martyn

This great missionary to India once said, "Now let me burn out for God!"

c) Paul the Apostle

Paul said, "I, therefore, so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection . . . " (1 Cor. 9:26-27). In Colossians 1:28, he said,

"[We are busy] warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. " He was an indefatigable and zealous worker. Not only was he externally motivated by his accountability to Christ, but he also possessed a fervent spirit. I love to see enthusiastic Christians like that!

2. The Ministry (v. 11c)

". . . serving the Lord"

a. Explained

Zealousness and fervency of spirit should characterize our lives as we serve the Lord. The two phrases at the beginning of verse 11 modify the last one, "serving the Lord. " We are not to be lazy, but fervent in spirit as we serve the Lord. People can get excited about many things: houses, cars, and wardrobes; football, baseball, and basketball games. Sometimes they act like idiots in their enthusiasm! When some people fall in love, the bells really ring--every waking moment of their life is controlled by their abandonment to their relationship. They go to sleep and dream about the one they love. Almost everyone who has fallen in love has experienced that. My love for my wife is not as superficially exciting as it once was; rather it has settled into a deep and wonderful love. But initially, a new relationship causes so much enthusiasm that everything else in the world fades into oblivion. I wonder, though, if we've ever experienced that same intensity in serving the Lord Jesus Christ. What an exciting thing such service should be: We ought to be boiling over!

When Paul began the Epistle to the Romans, he said, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son . . . " (1:8-9). Paul loved the thought of serving the Lord. I do, too. In fact, I can't believe that God has given me the privilege of serving Him in the way he has. The sense of satisfaction in serving Christ outweighs any other satisfaction the world has to offer. We are called to serve the Lord with a fervent, enthusiastic spirit. If you can't serve Him that way, then the problem is not where you're serving, but what you have in your heart. Serving the Lord should be an exciting and joyful experience.

b. Examined

Romans 12 uses three distinct words in Romans 12 for the idea of "service" or "serving. " The first one is in verse 1. Its verb form is *latreu^o*. As a noun, it refers to "reverential service of worship"--our serving God by offering ourselves to Him. Verse 7 talks about practical service of caring for others' needs, using the word *diakone^o*. We serve the Lord not only as priests who bring an offering in reverential service, but also as servants who do menial tasks and whatever else needs to be done. However, in verse 11, the word *douleu^o* is used, which refers to the intense service of slavery. The emphasis here is that we see ourselves as slaves of Christ, giving total service to Him alone, with eagerness and zeal.

Paul knows that level of commitment will not be easy because we will face the opposition of an ungodly system. Therefore, he adds three more exhortations in verse 12:

3. The Motivators (v. 12)

a. Rejoicing in Hope (v. 12a)

"Rejoicing in hope . . . "

Anyone who fully serves the Lord with his whole heart is constantly aware of the Christian's hope for the future. When you serve the Lord, you automatically have a heavenly focus. It's that hope for the future that keeps us going. In spite of the opposition and indifference we run in to and the failures we experience, our service to the Lord results in our hope for the day when we will rest from our labors and be rewarded. The hope of better things brings joy to the obedient Christian. I serve because someday I want to go to the Lord and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. " The day will

come when "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-52). We will be able to say with Paul, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55). Because of the victory of future resurrection, Paul exhorts us to "therefore . . . be . . . steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). We serve the Lord with a whole heart because we know there will be an eternal reward. We expectantly wait for "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23) and "the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19).

No matter how dark the world is or how hard the task is, we eagerly anticipate future glory. We await the time when the King comes to take His own people to Himself and reward them as they rest from their labors. Our hope is that someday the work will be done. If we had no hope of that, it would be a bleak world: continually serving, but never able to do all that we should do because of our weaknesses and limitations. We need to be able to look ahead and say, "Someday things will be the way they're supposed to be; the light of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ will dawn and our labors will cease as we enjoy eternal rest in the presence of Christ. " Because we can see the reality of that, we rejoice in hope. That may be difficult to do sometimes because we're sometimes overwhelmed with defeat. For everything I see that's good, I can always see many things that aren't. But I rejoice in my hope of the future.

b. Persevering in Tribulation (v. 12b)

". . . patient in tribulation . . . "

The word "patient" means "to stay under. " We can stay under pressure because we know what's coming. We can endure the trouble or "tribulation" (Gk. thlipsis = "pressure"). We can serve the Lord, reaching out in hope because we see the reward that's coming in the future. We endure pain, rejection, animosity, the struggle with Satan and his demons, and everything else that defies what we are trying to accomplish for God's glory. But that's not the end. Someday there will be eternal victory. That gives us joy and allows us to endure the pressure.

c. Praying with Diligence (v. 12c)

". . . diligently in prayer"

I believe that one of the reasons the Lord keeps the pressure on is to keep us in communion with Him. If you don't spend time communing with the Lord, it may be because you're not under pressure because you're not serving Him with zeal and a fervent spirit. I'll promise you this: If you're in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ as His bond slave, and you're doing it with all your heart, you're going to be in the midst of pressure. However, you can stay in it and rejoice in hope because you know a glorious future is coming. Furthermore, as you spend time bringing obstacles you encounter to the Lord in prayer, He will sustain you.

The phrase "diligently in prayer" conveys the idea of continuing steadily in prayer. Life becomes an open communion with God. For example, when a situation is brought to my attention, I commonly offer an immediate prayer to God for it. Such total dependence on God is a way of living for me, as if praying could be likened to spiritual breathing.

A Christian who loves without hypocrisy, hates evil, and sticks to what is good will be tenderly affectionate to other believers and humbly seek to honor others rather than be honored himself. That Christian's service to Jesus Christ will be wholeheartedly zealous. As a result, trials and tribulations will appear, but they will be overcome by a strong hope of future glory and reward based on God's promises. That hope will allow the Christian to endure everything he encounters as he constantly commits himself and all he does to the care of the Lord. That's the way to live the Christian life. It's all summed up in Romans 12:9-12.

Focusing on the Facts

1. If we have experienced justification, what will be the result of it in our lives?
2. Having received God's grace, why should we live obedient, godly lives (1 Pet. 2:9)?
3. How did Paul want the Philippians to obey (Phil. 2:12)?
4. What does it mean to "work out your own salvation" (Phil. 2:12)?
5. What encouragement does Philippians 2:13 give for living the Christian life?
6. Describe the kind of love that should be shared among believers.
7. How should we honor other believers (Rom. 12:10)?
8. According to Galatians 6:9, what should we not become weary of doing?
9. What is a lazy person guilty of wasting (Prov. 18:9)?
10. How can accountability in a ministry be helpful?
11. Beyond doing a task merely to avoid being lazy, what should characterize our attitude as we labor?
12. How did Apollos express his spiritual fervency, according to Acts 18:24-25?
13. Is serving the Lord with an enthusiastic spirit dependent on where you are serving? Explain.
14. What hope motivates us to keep wholeheartedly serving the Lord?
15. What makes it possible to persevere in tribulation?
16. What does the Lord allow in our lives that helps to keep us in communion with Him?

Pondering the Principles

1. Are you loving other Christians as if you were intimately associated with them as kindred? You may be attending church, but are you actually interacting with other believers? What are some practical ways you could show love toward brothers and sisters in Christ who are within your sphere of influence? Can you assist in meeting a need that you are aware of? Meditate on 1 John 3:14-18. Make a commitment with God to demonstrate your love in "deed and in truth" (v. 18).

2. Has society's attitude toward leisure been transmitted into your Christian walk? Do you put off growing in Christ and ministering to others until a more convenient time? Have you recently experienced the joy that comes from accomplishing something that will pay eternal dividends? Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. List the things you are doing now that you think will endure the testing of the Lord and will therefore receive a reward and be glorifying to Him. Also, list those things that will be burned up, like "wood, hay, [and] straw" (v. 12; NASB) when Christ evaluates our works. As you evaluate your works, determine if they are acceptable to God, having been done in the power of the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:6; Eph. 6:17), with the motive of love (1 Cor. 13:1-3), an attitude of faithfulness (Mt. 25:21, 23; 1 Cor. 4:2), and for the purpose of glorifying God (1 Cor. 10:13).

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