

**THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part forty-six**  
**Sunday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 - 5:30 p.m. - Teaching #2173**  
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**BE FERVENT IN SPIRIT**

**Romans 12:10-11 - “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. [11] Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”**

There is a sense in which the whole of chapter twelve is aimed at importing a fresh interpretation of spirituality - the *nature* of the life imparted by the Holy Spirit to those who are genuinely transformed, or “*renewed*” in their minds - “....**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind....**”(12:2a). *If* the Holy Spirit is at work in my mind, the *shape* of my ambitions will be totally **at odds - polar** - to the natural direction of the human condition.

And nowhere is this more obvious than in the way the Holy Spirit sets my heart in *relationship* with everyone else in whom the Holy Spirit works. Paul says the Holy Spirit actually causes a linkage with other Christians - even those who, like me, are sometimes worldly and mean and self-centered - even with *those* Christians - the Holy Spirit creates a linkage that is very close to **genetic**.

In fact, in **verses 4 and 5** Paul uses an analogy that implies a relationship that, in human bodies, can only take place with cells in the **same womb**, sharing the **same birth**, body parts that are members in the same **physical body - Romans 12:4-5** - “**For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**”

These words carry powerful implications. I would no more aim my ambitions at hurting or avenging a fellow Christian than my liver would mount an attack on my kidneys.

And of course, Paul’s whole point is that without *this* kind of unity my spirituality is suspect. This is because the **same** Holy Spirit who is at work in *my* life is also the Holy Spirit at work in my spiritual *brother’s* life. And that’s the point at which we pick up the theme of today’s text:

- 1) **WE ARE TO MINISTER TO ONE ANOTHER AS PARTS OF THE SAME BODY. WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS PARTS OF THE SAME FAMILY**

**Romans 12:10a - “Love one another with brotherly affection....”**

The word translated into the two English words “*brotherly affection*” is “*philostorgos*” (“*fil-os’-tor-gos*”). And you can see one of the English words we get from it - “*storge*.” It has to do with *family affection* (“*philos*”) that is literally **stored up** in the heart. In other words, Paul says, let there be a *tenderness* and an *affection* that isn’t brought about by something pleasant in the *circumstances* or some particular merit in the *person himself*.

There is a *kind* of love that is **stored up** in the heart and **brought into** any situation **before** any other circumstances manifest themselves. You don’t love your family - sons or daughters or parents - because they’re bright or good looking or always pleasing in everything they do. You love them because they’re *family*. They share your **genes**. They’re of common **blood**.

This is the logic behind Paul’s exhortation in **verses 14, 17, and 19** - “**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them....12:17....Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all....12:19....Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”**

We’re going to study those words in detail next week. But never miss Paul’s point in them. If my love for you is effectually erased and turned into bitterness or anger or even revenge when you mistreat me, then I have done more than merely settle scores with you. I have **revealed the nature of the love I had for you in the first place**.

That’s because if my tenderheartedness is turned into rage, or a quiet smoldering ill-will, or even a behind-the-scenes revenge, then all I have revealed is that my **love** for you, all along, was only a selfish love that flourished because I loved that you were **nice** to me.

Whatever **destroys** love reveals the *nature* of that love. A love that can turn to revenge because it was spurned isn’t God’s love. And the whole point of today’s text is it is **God’s Spirit** who transforms and renews us. He creates a

**family** love where there once was none. So this love for each other in Christ that Paul describes isn't just a love for someone because they go to the same church or like the same books or choruses. It is a love **created - stored up** - in our hearts because we are indwelt by the same **Spirit of adoption**.

This means this relationship is deeper than mere **friendship**. There is quite **literally** a shared **divine seed** that mustn't be violated - even by behavior that could well destroy an ordinary friendship. This is a theme Paul will come back to in **verses 14-21**.

Notice also that this love is **commanded** - "**Love one another with brotherly affection....**"(12:10a). How can this be? If this love is so important, how can it be **commanded**? How can the heart be reached with such an order? And the answer to that question is found back in the first two verses of this great chapter:

**Romans 12:1-2** - "**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind....**"

"**By the mercies of God**" is the important phrase. You can never make a **direct** appeal to your emotions. They don't lie under our power if approached that way. And Paul doesn't start out that way. His appeal is based on the "**mercies of God**" (12:1). This is the basis of the entire renewal of the mind and inward transformation. Feelings and emotions are always reached by something **else**. The mercies of God must be an object of contemplation and much prayerful thought. **Understand** the mercies of God as they have been poured out so lavishly and undeservedly on your life.

What did those mercies do? Well, they reached my sin darkened heart. They warmed a life spiritually dead and undeserving. They imparted forgiveness and hope and joy when I merited none and could summon none. The mercies of God caused me to be born into this new life. Yes they did. This is a **marriage-saving** truth. It means I will never be asked to forgive anything in my spouse as great as what I have already been forgiven in Christ.

That's how powerful this truth is. This isn't just an **allegorical** truth. It is an **actual** one. In other words, the depth of the **family relationship** in the body of Christ must be just as spiritually impacting in my heart as is my own **personal salvation** experience. I can't just take one while ignoring the implications of the other.

Look at the way Jesus described the creation of the divine family of God: **Mark 10:29-30** - "**Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, [30] who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.'**"

What powerful words! Jesus admits that because of the seriousness with which we follow Him we may actually have to choose between following Him and preserving relationships with members of our own family who hate and reject Him. It's a great tragedy when that happens. I've only witnessed it a few times.

But there's more. Jesus promises that if that **does** happen, the disciple will find a new network of relationships in the body of Christ that give what was sacrificed back. New brothers. New sisters. New parents. And new children. And such is the depth of these relationships that, if needed, they actually **replace** those that have been lost. I don't know of any words in the New Testament that more graphically portray the nature of the bonding in the family of God in the mind of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

## 2) **YOU ALREADY TREASURE GOD'S WORK IN YOUR HEART. NOW TREASURE IT IN YOUR BROTHER'S HEART JUST AS MUCH**

**Romans 12:10b** - "**....Outdo one another in showing honor.**"

What describes the way I am to **show** love to my brother? **Honor**, says Paul. That word translated "**honor**" is "**time**" ("**tee-may**"). And it carries a picture that helps us grab on to Paul's thought. The word means **money paid** or **a value established**. It's all about knowing the worth of something and treating it with its proper dignity.

So someone - perhaps in your family - gives you a ring or a watch. And you sort of like it, but it isn't quite your taste. So in it goes with other odd bits into a box or container to collect dust. But then you take it in to some jeweler and he or she appraises it at \$25,000. Suddenly you have a new affection for it. You had it there with you all along, but didn't give it the dignity it deserved. You didn't appreciate its worth.

Paul says that's the way it is in the family of God. We all feel we know the value and the worth of **ourselves**. In fact, Paul says this is part of our whole problem. He says we're usually **self-absorbed** in this appraisal and that's one of the marks of the Fall that the Holy Spirit wants to transform in us - **Romans 12:3** - "**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**"

So when Paul tells us to "**show honor**" as we love one another he has in mind my need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the renewing of my fallen mind. Showing honor in my love for **others** is loving them in **proper proportion** to my unregulated fallen regard I normally have for **myself**. It's my love for myself **demoted** by the honor I show my brother. And only the Holy Spirit knows how desperately my "**me first**" heart needs this admonition.

### 3) **SERVING THE LORD IS THE ONLY WAY TO MAINTAIN SPIRITUAL FERVCENCY AND PASSION**

**Romans 12:11** - "**Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.**"

If someone came up to you and asked how to keep his first love, what would you say? If someone asked about how to keep the heart spiritually aflame - how to keep apathy and coolness and hypocrisy and emptiness at bay - what advice would you give? If someone said the last thing in the world he wanted was some kind of dead **churchiness** defining his relationship with Jesus - that he didn't want to lose his **edge** for Jesus - in which direction would you point him?

And the reason I've poured out this list of questions is I can't help but notice that what most people today see as the **cause** of these problems, Paul specifically sites as the **cure**. And that should strike us as powerfully and strangely fascinating.

First, the obvious point: "**don't be slothful in zeal.**" Don't get lazy. Don't allow indifference and apathy any ground in your soul. There are plenty of flaws in all of us and in every church. But whatever you've experienced and seen, don't become an armchair critic. Don't wallow.

Then comes the call to the opposite. We're to "**be fervent in spirit.**" Stay alive on the inside. Keep your joy and your good attitude. Remember, love others by showing **honor** to them over yourself. When you put yourself first you become a know-it-all. You'll get cranky. So "**be fervent in spirit.**" That's good advice, but how shall we **do** it?

And that leads to the third part, "**.....serve the Lord.**" Only you have to put those last words with what has gone before - "**.....be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord.**" In other words, you **keep** your spirit fervent **by** serving the Lord.

When you put them all together you realize Paul isn't giving a **human potential pep talk**. This isn't just an appeal to **keeping busy**. He's talking about keeping **spiritually earnest**. He's talking first about keeping a **flaming heart**. And he has the nerve to insist that you can't do it just by **going** to church, or singing certain songs. You have to be **inwardly dedicated to something big**. You have to "**serve the Lord.**"

Now I want to show you what, to my mind, is one of the greatest examples of keeping a fervent spirit by serving the Lord. Most people don't even know it's in their New Testament:

**Acts 8:1-4** - "**And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. [2] Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. [3] But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. [4] Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.**"

These were people who had good reason to complain about the way life had gone for them. They decided to follow Jesus. They were converted. They tried to remain faithful to the teaching of the Apostles. And life when from bad to worse. What is it like to **watch** someone enter your home and drag your wife or husband or child off to prison and a likely execution?

But that wasn't the end of it. Those who **weren't** dragged off to prison were kicked out of their homes. The text says they were "**scattered**" - thrown randomly like dice on the ground or chaff in the wind. Their future was quite literally "**up in the air.**"

So what do you talk about when you're kicked out of your home and town? What fills your heart when you've just

watched loved ones taken away and been driven away from the place you've lived all your life?

And this is where the text is really quite shocking: "**Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word**"(8:4). They weren't talking about what they had been through. They were talking to everyone about what Jesus had done for them! Talk about keeping spiritual fervor!

This is what turned the world upside down. People notice those who keep their fervor when they have lost everything else. And this text **proves** it is possible. So, in view of God's marvelous mercies, not just as some bare command, don't be **slothful in zeal**. But be "**fervent in spirit**". But this fervency is different in nature from human hype. You can't get it at a conference or by listening to a pep talk. Because spiritual fervency is **deeper** it is also **harder won**.

Spill your life in some specific service for the Lord. And stay with it over the long haul. Discover the joy that only comes as you "**serve the Lord**."