

## *Supernatural Living*

Romans 12:9-21

August 28, 2011

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" says the Lord. On the contrary:*

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Romans 12:9-21 (NIV)

Last Sunday we began to look at Romans 12. I said that Romans, chapter 12, comes at a significant point in Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Almost all of Paul's letters are written to the Christians in each of the areas he was writing. Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Galatia, Corinth, and Rome. Of all of them, Rome might have been the one which comes as close to who America is today. Rome was an empire which seemed to have it all. It had the military might and power, control and influence over almost all the other countries in the area. Seemed to be the ideal and center of civilization at the time. The Roman Empire (44 B.C. - 1453 A.D.) was thought to be the empire which would never fall. But as history would demonstrate, the Roman Empire, once thought to be indestructible, would fall just like many of the powerful empires before it, and many since. A reminder to all of us not to put our hopes and dreams in the kingdoms of this world. Paul begins his letter to the early Christians in Rome with a salutation, and in the salutation he writes: "*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints*" (Romans 1:7a).

In Romans 12 Paul begins to tell us what the life of a "saint" or disciple of Jesus Christ should look like. In verse 2, that which we looked at last week, he tells us to "no longer be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." To "offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God."

He tells us to be humble and contrite, to think of ourselves with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given each of us. We are all sinners who fall short of the

glory of God and we are saved only by His grace and what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. But because of what He has done for us, we are called to give our lives back to Him, using the gifts He has given us, to serve Him as members of the body of Christ:

*Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Romans 4:6 (NIV)*

This morning we commission those who will be starting or renewing positions for the new church year beginning Sept. 1. Hymnal #795 & #304

In verses 9-21, our verses for today, Paul goes into more detail in what the life of a true disciple is supposed to look like. Actually Paul gives us a comprehensive list of some 25 basic characteristics of what a disciple of Jesus is supposed to possess. The list is not meant to be exclusive but these are some central characteristics or marks of a true disciple. I decided to trim it down to ten. I wasn't sure if you would be up for a twenty-five point sermon this morning. And there seems to be a progression, perhaps grouped into categories. The first several involving our personal duties, then moving on to our responsibilities in relation to other Christians, the family of God, then our duty to all people, and finally our responsibility towards our enemies. Though none of them are easy, the list also seems to be progressive in nature as it appears to move from easier ones to the most difficult.

Like David Letterman's Top Ten List, this is Paul's Top Ten List of the Marks of a Disciple of Jesus Christ:

### **1. Love -**

First and foremost, it is about love. As I mentioned last week, the Christian life is not just about a list of things to do or not to do, the Christian life is relational. "Love must be sincere." The King James Version reads, "Let love be without hypocrisy." Sincere means there is nothing false about it. We live out what we say. The word used here for love is agape. Much more than just a feeling or an emotion. It is the same love that Jesus demonstrated for us when he died for us on the cross. The greatest virtue of the Christian life is love. Love is more important than any spiritual gift one may have. Which is why it is the first one in the list of spiritual gifts in Galatians 5:22. All the other spiritual gifts mean nothing if there is not love. In Paul's great chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13:13 he says, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." Some of Jesus' last words on his last night with his disciples:

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*  
John 13:34-35 (NIV)

## **2. Devotion to our brothers and sisters in Christ -**

A true disciple is devoted, committed, to one another, in the family of God, to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We show our love for God and Jesus through our love for one another. This love of our brothers and sisters is not optional, it is required. How important is it? Well the disciple John tells us in his great epistle on love, his first letter, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers [and sisters in Christ]. Anyone who does not love remains in death” (1 John 3:14 NIV). Think about the implications of that statement.

## **3. Zeal in Serving the Lord -**

A third characteristic of discipleship is zeal. “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.” This might just be one of the most difficult marks to keep. The word zeal means “great energy or enthusiasm for a cause or objective.” Paul says we should never be lacking great energy and enthusiasm for serving the Lord. He tells us in his letter to the Christians in Galatia, “Let us not become weary in doing good, but at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Paul knew the Christian life was tough.

**4. Joyful in Hope** - Living the supernatural life will inevitably bring opposition from the world. If there isn't opposition from the world around us something is wrong. Sometimes the supernatural life will even bring opposition from fellow Christians. Often we will not see the fruit of our labors. Without hope we could never survive.

**5. Patient in Affliction** - It is not our present circumstances that should guide our emotions. As difficult as our present circumstances might be, and as long as they might seem to last, our hope is always in the future. The kingdoms of this world will all fall. Our hope is not in the kingdoms of this world but in the everlasting kingdom to come. Paul wrote earlier in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

*We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

Romans 5:2-5 (NIV)

I don't know about any of you but I can accept being “Patient with Affliction” better than “rejoicing in my sufferings.”

**6. Faithful in Prayer** - The Greek word there for “faithful” means to be strong toward something, carrying with it the ideas of steadfastness and unwavering. Paul writes in his final instructions to believers in Thessalonica, “Be joyful always; pray continuously [without ceasing].” How often do we really pray like that? Or do we pray like many others who pray only at the times when they can fit it into their busy schedules or when things in their life are really down and they don't know what else to do? One of the daily devotions I receive by e-mail is called “Wisdom Hunters” and I really enjoy it because it seems to go deeper than many daily devotionals. A week or so ago the topic was on prayer:

“Prayer is not a passive undertaking - rather it is an energized exercise of faith. Status quo believers only tip God with prayer, but eager followers of Jesus are compelled by an intense commitment to pray.”  
Wisdom Hunters Devotional, Aug. 17 & 19, 2011

Paul wrote in his letter to the Christians in Colosse:

*“Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.”*  
Colossians 4:12-13 (NIV)

How was Epaphras working hard? He was working hard in prayer. There is nothing more important to a church than several, or even better yet, many good prayer warriors. Because it is in the answer to prayer in which God gets all the credit. As I mentioned before I don't think God will continue to grow the church until we get serious about prayer.

**7. Share with God's people who are in need** - I must say, that as a congregation, I think we do a great job at that. But sometimes sharing with those in need, especially when it comes to money, is the easier thing to do.

### **8. Empathy**

Paul tells us that one of the marks of true discipleship is empathy. Now that is more difficult:

*“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”* v. 15

*Weep with those who weep.*

**9. Humility** - *“Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”* v. 16

Pride is the number one sin which gets in the way of sincere love and leads to Christian hypocrisy. Why? Because sincere love and authentic relationships require confession and forgiveness. With pride there is an aversion to authenticity because it means the admission of mistakes, and failures, and sin in our lives.

### **10. Non-RetaliatioN/Non-Violence**

But then Paul tells us that we should even go beyond all that:

*“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”* v. 14

*“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.”* v. 17

But merely not returning evil for evil does not fulfill our responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ. And the positive command or imperative is even more difficult.

*“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”* V. 21

Tremendous similarities between Jesus' teaching found in his *Sermon on the Mount* and Paul's teaching found here in the second half of Romans 12.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'"*  
Matthew 5:38-39 (NIV)

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"*  
Matthew 5:43-44 (NIV)

When do we look the most like Jesus?

We look the most like Jesus when we are loving the unlovable. We look the most like Jesus when we love our enemies and pray for them. We look the most like Jesus when we turn the other cheek. We look the most like Jesus when we do not return evil for evil. We look the most like Jesus when we try and overcome evil with good. We look the most like Jesus when we practice non-resistance and non-violence.

Does it make sense to the rest of the world? No!

Is it easy to do? No! In fact, on our own, it is impossible to do.

Paul says "do not be conformed to the pattern of this world," but "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." As I mentioned last week, we can place ourselves in a position to be transformed, but real transformation is the work of God.

"Spiritual growth [transformation, supernatural living] is accomplished by the Spirit of God, through the Word of God, in the context of authentic community, for the purpose of glorifying God."  
Chip Ingram, Living on the Edge: Dare to Experience True Spirituality

Is it possible to live out our life with all the marks a disciple that Paul writes about. Yes! Because there have been people that have done it. A 19<sup>th</sup> century Englishman by the name of Robert Chapman wrote, "seeing that so many preach Christ and so few live Christ, I will aim to live Him." Apparently he did pretty good at it because someone who knew Mr. Chapman very well once said, "He lives what I teach."

May that be our prayer for all of us. May we just not read and study the Word of God, may we just not preach and teach, and serve Him, may we Live Him!