

Chapter 58

Clinging to What Is Good

(Romans 12:9–16)

Paul now slightly changes direction in his exhortations. He began with a general appeal that they should give themselves to God in body and in mind (12:1–2). Then he asks them to live for God in using their spiritual gifts in their fellowship with other Christians (12:3–8). Now he turns to the various circumstances that they might face amidst the complexities of life.

1. He begins with **three general exhortations**. First on his agenda is the call to Christian love.⁹ *Let love be genuine*. It is easy to be phoney and deceitful in this matter. Paul's next two commands really follow up what is involved in genuine love. *Hate what is evil*. If we are not careful we shall find that we get so accustomed to wicked ways that we begin to feel somewhat tolerant towards them. *Cling to what is good*. When we find what is God's will, we fuse our entire life together with it. Paul is setting before us a life-long agenda: to develop Christian love towards everyone everywhere. His idea of love is not easy-going tolerance of anything and everything. There are things to be hated. Love is thoughtful, zealous, warm-hearted enthusiasm for God's world to be the way God wants it.

2. Next Paul proceeds to **our attitude towards fellow Christians**. The two exhortations of Romans 12:10 deal with commands about 'one another'. *Show family affection to one another with brotherly love*. Actually there is parallelism in the two commands.

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With brotherly love	– show family affection to	– one another.
With honour	– go ahead of	– one another.

We have the same heavenly Father. We relate to that other Christian person as a brother or sister in the Lord Jesus Christ. Humanly speaking he or she may not be the kind of person that I would like. But because she is one of God's people, because he is a brother in Jesus Christ, I want him or her specially to know the love of Jesus coming through me. Then Paul says: *In honour, outdo one another*. It is an unexpected kind of rivalry where we try – more than others – to appreciate others.

3. Next Paul goes on to deal with **our attitude towards God's work**. ¹¹*In diligence, do not be lazy. Be set on fire by the Spirit. Be serving the Lord*. Let us consider his commands one at a time. He asks us to rouse ourselves to energetic service for God. It is the Holy Spirit who will give us the strength. We clear away the ashes. We cannot give the fire but we can put away the things that put the fire out! And we maintain our zeal by remembering that it is the Lord Jesus Christ whom we serve.

4. A fourth collection of exhortations deals with **our attitude towards difficult circumstances in life** (12:12–13). Paul says: ¹²*Rejoice in hope. Persevere amidst tribulation. Persist in prayer*. There is a logical progress of thought here. It is rejoicing in the glory that is coming to us that leads to our persevering. What makes us willing to persevere in faith amidst troubles and persecutions is the knowledge of what Jesus is doing and what he will yet do. Reference to trouble leads Paul to mention prayer. One advantage in tribulation is that tribulation makes it easier to pray! One can also see the connection between verse 12 and verse 13. ¹³*Share in the needs of the saints. Pursue hospitality*. Times of tribulation require prayer. They also demand a spirit of generosity when others are in need. And troublesome times might specially require hospitality.

5. Next comes **our attitude to other people** (12:14–16). He begins with our experience of opposition. He says: ¹⁴*Bless those who are persecutors; bless them and do not curse them.* The Christian will inevitably find that there are people who oppose him. Paul calls for positive good will towards the persecutor. But not only must we be free from vindictiveness (12:14). He asks also for freedom from jealousy: ¹⁵*Rejoice with those who are rejoicing.* And then he moves to sympathy: *Weep with those who are weeping.* The two parts of the verse form a contrast. Jealousy is the opposite of sympathy. And we must refuse to be snobbish – to maintain a spirit of superiority. ¹⁶*Have the same mind towards each other. Do not be snobbish in mentality, but be carried along by the lowly things and lowly people. Do not become wise in yourselves.* Christians are to have a common mind, a similar mentality. They may not have the same opinion about every minor detail of life, but their grasp of the gospel is identical. One thing that hinders the expression of the oneness that is present among all Christians is pride. When Christians fall into pride of intellect, pride concerning their gifts, pride in their nationality or tribe or social status – then division and unfriendliness come in among Christians. Paul says: ‘Don’t let it happen. Be carried along by people who are poor or needy or are socially rejected.’ Get so involved with them that you are ‘carried away’ by how intensely you care for humble people. God has chosen the poor (see James 2:1–5). Don’t lord it over anyone (see 1 Peter 5:3).

Another way of expressing the same point follows: ‘Do not become wise in yourselves.’ Snobbishness comes into our lives when at one point or another we – quite sincerely! – think we are superior to others in some way. In fact all Christians have something to share with other Christians; and all Christians have things to learn from other Christians. Often the socially ‘lower’ Christian has much more to give than the rich Christian. Paul says: you may have what others lack; but they have what you lack. We need each other.