

Romans 12 (Lullingstone) 24-9-17

This is the last week where we are looking at Paul and His Epistles. We have looked at his journeys, his concern with the building of the church, how we should select and treat our leaders, and his teaching. This final week we are looking at how the Gospel is for everyone and everyone's work.

Jesus has always demanded one's all in following him. He never made an exception. If he ever did, it would have been the time a rich young man came to follow Jesus. Outwardly the man had all the trappings that would make for a great follower. Inwardly, however, he was holding back. Jesus recognized that. He will not accept a partial commitment. He didn't then; he doesn't now. The apostle Paul provides a framework for what it means to follow Christ totally and the consequential changes it makes in a person's life. Every decision we make in life has a consequence, if our decision is to follow Jesus and his teachings, then the consequential change is for good, for it says in Jeremiah 29 v 11 it says "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Do we give our whole selves to God, or are we like the rich young man, outwardly appearing to be a great follower, but inwardly holding something back.

This reading in Romans reminds us that God expects unconditional surrender. But once made, a transformation takes place that changes a person into the person God wants us to be, and to be able to live the real life they seek.

God has good, pleasing and perfect plans for us, his children. He wants us to be changed people with renewed minds, living to honour and obey him. Because he only wants what is best for us, and because he gave his Son to make our new life possible, we should joyfully give ourselves as living sacrifices for his service.

In the song, dance the Hokey Kokey it tells us to put our left arm or right leg or some other body part of our body into the circle, shake it, and then "turn yourself about." It's an active and sometimes tiring little exercise that ends with the command, "Put your whole self in ..."

When I think of that song and dance, I'm reminded of another instruction. This one is from the apostle Paul, he writes: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1). "To present your bodies" is Paul's way of saying, "Put your whole self in." The song and dance routine we call worship involves offering our whole person to God. That's more difficult than the dance routine.

God wants us to follow him fully and be totally committed to giving our lives to Him. It doesn't matter what position we hold in church, whether we are part of the leadership team, or a member of the congregation. Proclaiming the Gospel is everyone's work, whether it's by what we say or how we live our lives, and what we give of ourselves.

Most of us understand the idea of giving as an offering of money when we're here at church. There are plates or bags, and we put our money or envelope and drop in. It represents an acknowledgement of God's blessings in our lives; it represents our commitment to the ministry of the congregation; it is a part of our worship; it's a way in which we open up the windows of heaven so God can bless us even further; it represents for many an antidote to materialism. While a few folk could use some encouragement, most of us understand what it means to make an offering to the church.

But real commitment is not merely the offering of money or elaborate prayers to God. Neither is it inspiring liturgy or splendid ritual. Nor is it making large donations. Nor is it singing majestic songs of praise, or listening to a sermon, as important and as fruitful that may be. Real worship happens when we confess sin, turn from that sin, and then offer ourselves completely and wholeheartedly to God.

Like the Hokey Kokey, like marriage, God wants us with a 100% commitment. He wants us to put him first before anything. He wants our relationship with Him to be over and above everything else in our lives, When we give our lives to Him, He will repay us tenfold. When we go to the Supermarket, we wouldn't consider buying a bottle of mineral water with a label that reads "98% Pure Mineral Water, 2% Sewage Water" When we make our marriage vows, when asked "will you love, comfort, honour etc... We don't answer well probably most of the time. At least I hope you don't. But all of us, as Christians , including leaders, sin and have allowed spiritual sewage water to seep into our lives.

[Rom 12:9-21](#) is a practical "how-to" guide on God-like love. In this passage Paul demonstrates that love is an action not just an emotion. This means, you can love those who are unlovely and unlovable. You can even love your enemy or persecutor. Paul's theory is simple: Love without action is not love. This text calls for two radical, yet biblical displays of love. "Let love be without dissimulation", and "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.. "

How do you want to be remembered? Reflect on that question for just a moment. Imagine that you have passed away and are able to be a heavenly spectator at your own funeral. What would the rector be able to say about

your life? More importantly, what would people from church, work, and your neighbourhood say about you? What would your family and friends say? What would you want them to say? When your life is all said and done, I believe that you will want to be remembered as a loving person. You won't wish that you had spent more time at work. You won't wish you would have made more money. You won't wish that you would have had a nicer home. You won't wish you could have played more golf or purchased nicer clothes. You will wish that you had loved people with God's love.

Romans 12:9-16 seems at first glance to be an unconnected series of staccato commands, a "rag bag" of miscellaneous exhortations, but a closer examination reveals that these verses flesh out what love looks like in the Christian life. The theme of the passage is not hard to find: *Love must govern all our relationships*. John Stott a Theologian and Christian leader, calls this Paul's "recipe for love" and notes that it seems to have many "ingredients."

Let me illustrate. I have 1 brother and 1 sister—Rodger and Susan. I am actually the fourth of four Sansom children, my eldest brother Colin drowned 35 years ago. We're all very different. Rodger lives in Co. Durham and Susan lives near Heathrow. We have different personalities, different habits and hobbies, different likes and dislikes. Yet one thing binds us together. We come from the same womb. That fact means that there is a special place in my heart for my them so that even if I haven't seen them for a long time, it's as if I last saw them yesterday. There is a bond between us that time and distance cannot break.

The same truth applies in the spiritual realm. *Everyone who belongs to Jesus belongs to me*. And I owe all of them, and you, tender affection and brotherly love. Let us be clear what Paul says. We are to love all true believers everywhere all the time. That can be hard sometimes because most of us have some inner qualifications. We don't like this group or that denomination. Maybe some folk are not comfortable with people who speak in tongues or sing modern worship songs, use contemporary prayer, or cannot understand The Book of Common Prayer. We may even distrust people who have a different worship style that we do. God's kingdom is not limited members of one denomination or to people who look, think and act just like us. God's kingdom embraces all true believers no matter who they are or what church they happen to attend

So how we are to love is clearly mentioned in 1 Corinthians ch 13 v 4-8 "⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not

rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things".

The church is to be a community of love. We owe it to the Lord, to each other, and to the watching world.

Let brotherly love abound more and more.

Let Christian sympathy go out to those in need.

Let us take the banner of God's concern around the world.

Let us pray for one another and especially for those with whom we disagree.

Let our hearts overflow with brotherly love for all of God's children everywhere.

Dear Lord Jesus, teach us to love each other as you loved us, Amen.