

106. The Book of Romans 12:13-16

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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(10-22-25)

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In our study of the Book of Romans, we have come to the application portion of the book. Romans Chapter 12 is without a doubt one of the most practical sections on sanctified living for Christ that you'll find anywhere in the New Testament.

In this chapter, Paul lays out a number of rapid-fire exhortations that epitomize what living for Jesus is all about!

Last week we got as far as verse 12:

Romans 12:9–13 (NKJV)

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹ not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³ **distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.**

Distributing is from *koinōneō*, which means to share in, or share with—the noun *koinōnia* is often translated “fellowship” or “communion.”

It's the same Greek word used in Acts 2:42—

Acts 2:42 (NKJV)

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and **fellowship**, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

It's a word we really don't have an English equivalent for—which means we have to use several words in the English to capture the meaning of this one Greek word.

It basically means ‘*having things in common.*’

The Latin form “*communio*” is where we get the word “communion” from.

In fact, this word is translated “*communion*” in 1 Corinthians 10:16, 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. It's translated “*distribution (sharing)*” in 2 Corinthians 9:13; and “*contribution*” in Romans 15:26. But it's most frequently translated “*fellowship*” in the New Testament—a word that describes the interaction of believers with one another in the early church.

- It means the sharing of one's life and possessions with another.
- It speaks of their unity, their oneness—the intimacy they had and the love they shared.

It was a whole lot more than cake and coffee after the service—it describes **lives that were interconnected with each other**—lives that were dependent on one another.

Koinonia has a variant that is closely related to it, *koinonikos*, which means—“*generous*.”

Those who are ‘in Christ’ (saved) have God’s nature within them—which means that because God by nature is generous—so are His people generous with those around them.

We see this exemplified in Acts 4:32-35—

Acts 4:32, 34-35 (NKJV)

³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common...

³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

Some teach from these verses that the early church practiced a form of *Communism*—that ***they lived a communal lifestyle***—and so should we as Christians today.

Those early believers didn’t practice Communism, ***they practiced ‘commonism’***—and there’s a big difference.

- In Communism the government says: “*What’s yours is mine—I’ll take it*”.
- With “Commonism” the Christian says: “*What’s mine is yours—I’ll share it*.”

How do we know that the early church didn’t practice Communism?

Acts 2:44-45 (NKJV)

⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common [*a form of ‘koinonia’*],

⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

The Greek is literally—“*...and were continually selling their possessions and goods, and were continually dividing them among all...*” In other words, they never just sold everything at one time and moved in together as some teach. They still owned their own homes which they met in throughout the week going from ‘house to house’ eating together as Acts 2:46 tells us.

These possessions they were selling as needs arose were—land holdings that individual members owned and extra houses some owned which were sold (at various times) to meet the needs of others. Their sharing was completely voluntary (unlike Communism) and motivated by love not by commandment or constraint by the apostles.

We see this clearly when Peter was confronting Ananias when he and his wife lied about some land that they owned and sold—claiming they had given all the money to the church:

Acts 5:4 (NKJV)

⁴ “While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?...”

This confirms that the selling of personal property was no command from God that those early Christians had to follow.

One pastor has rightly said—

“...God has designed the family to be an independent unit. And that the church is made up of families that are living in a connected but not in a communal environment. Otherwise when a family entered the church they would cease being a family in the biblical sense and everyone would come under the authority of a few elders which would be a perversion of what God intended the church to be.”

Communism produces no joy—but communism (Christian fellowship) produces great joy.

William MacDonald—

“Needy saints are everywhere—the unemployed, those who have been drained by medical bills, forgotten preachers and missionaries in obscure places, and senior citizens whose resources have dwindled. True Body-life means sharing with those who are in need.”

Romans 12:13 (NKJV)

¹³ **distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.**

The literal meaning of that phrase in the Greek is, *“pursuing the love of strangers.”*

“The idea is to “pursue” people you don’t know with hospitality. This is love in action, not just feelings.”

Hebrews 13:2 (NLT)

² Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

Now we come to verses 14-21 which deals with our *responses* in various situations.

Romans 12:14 (NKJV)

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

Romans 12:14 (NLT)

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them.

Nothing goes against our fallen human nature more than this admonition that we are not to *hate* those who persecute us—but that we *bless* them as well! This comes from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus commanded His disciples—

Luke 6:27–31 (NKJV)

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹ To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. ³¹ And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

Nothing speaks of supernatural Kingdom living more than this!

Romans 12:15–16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** ¹⁶ **Be of the same mind toward one another...**

The idea being expressed here is that of ‘*empathy*.’ Sometimes people confuse *empathy* with *sympathy*—they are not the same.

One author explains the difference—

“Empathy is feeling with someone by understanding and sharing their emotions from their perspective, while sympathy is feeling for someone, acknowledging their misfortune from a more detached viewpoint. Empathy is an emotional connection, or “walking in their shoes,” whereas sympathy is a feeling of pity or sorrow for their situation, like looking down at them from higher ground.

Empathy is the capacity for sharing vicariously the feelings and emotions of others. Our tendency is to be jealous when others rejoice, and to pass by when they mourn. God’s way is to enter into the joys and sorrows of those around us.”

The greatest example of empathy in the Bible (as opposed to mere sympathy) was the incarnation!

Romans 12:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

To “**Be of the same mind one toward another**” doesn’t mean uniformity of thought—but that we are to have the ‘mind of Christ.’

To be of the same mind toward one another does not mean that we must always agree on nonessential matters—it is not so much uniformity of mind as harmony of relationships.

And yet, as one author put—

“It’s difficult to believe how people who claim to believe in and obey the same Lord can’t seem to walk in unity with each other. Churches have been shattered by divisions over issues as small as the color of the carpet in the fellowship hall — and as large as the direction and philosophy of a church’s overall ministry.”

Critics of Christianity will often say, “*If the same Holy Spirit fills all Christians, binding us together with each other in unity as one Body, devoted to one Lord—then why is there so much division in the Church?*”

(Some towns have a “First Baptist” or “First Presbyterian”—and then a “Second”, a “Third”, a “Fourth” etc.). The cults like the Jehovah’s Witnesses point to this as proof that the “unity” in their group is proof that they are the one true church—Why?

Because they claim that their unity is the result of the Father answering the Son’s prayer in John 17:20-21—proving that *they* are in fact the one and only true church.

First of all, don’t confuse forced *uniformity* with spiritual unity.

Every cult in the world has forced uniformity masquerading as spiritual unity (the cult demands absolute unwavering monolithic uniformity to the doctrines and rules of the group down to the smallest detail)—but it isn’t true spiritual unity coming from the Holy Spirit.

➤ (Listen for Insight: Heaven’s Gate cult of 1997)

We need to understand that diversity of thought and beliefs don’t automatically equal division.

Unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive of one another—we evangelicals can differ on non-essential doctrines and still be in unity with each other when it comes to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

In other words, Christians can disagree over things like the timing of the Rapture; are the gifts of the Holy Spirit still around; is the Millennial Kingdom literal or allegorical—we can believe different things about doctrinal non-essentials and still be in unity with each other in Christ.

Also, when it comes to *why* there is disunity and division in churches, remember as Jesus warned—Satan has sowed ‘tares’ among the ‘wheat’ (false Christians among the true).

This is especially true in these last days—and that has led to all kinds of fighting and division in the local church—it’s a ‘mixed-multitude’ situation.

Furthermore, another reason there is division in churches is because—they are loaded with carnal Christians whose pride, selfishness and childishness are a big factor in all of the division and infighting that characterizes many churches—as it was in the church in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 3:1–3 (NLT)

¹ Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn’t talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. ² I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren’t ready for anything stronger. And you still aren’t ready, ³ for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren’t you living like people of the world?

But even among those who are genuine Christians, who have walked with Jesus for many years and *are* mature in their faith—there can *still* be disunity and division among them.

In Philippians 4, Paul addressed two ladies in the church there in Philippi who could not get along with each other. Paul says, in verse 2, *“I plead with Euodia, and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.”*

Were these women just a couple of immature troublemakers? No, Paul makes it clear in verse 3 that they were committed, serious-minded Christian workers who had labored with Paul for the glory of Jesus and the work of God’s Kingdom—and yet they were having trouble getting along.

So, the question remains and often the criticism by unbelievers is valid—if we all serve one Lord as Christians why is there so much division among those who are called by His name? I mean, if we are joined together by the same Holy Spirit and are a part of Jesus’ Body on the earth—why is unity with one another so hard and division so common in the local church today?

Why do churches split—for the same reason marriages fail when the Bible teaches that God joined both man and woman together in marriage making them one with each other—just like He made us one in Christ in the local church?

It’s because we’re all different—but somewhere at some point we got it into our heads that unity is only going to become a reality if we’re all exactly alike and agree on pretty much everything.

True unity doesn’t happen when we force each other to become cookie cutters of one another—remember that unity isn’t uniformity. True unity comes by loving each other for who we are without trying to make each other carbon copies or ‘clones’ of ourselves.

So let me say it again—to **“Be of the same mind one toward another”** doesn’t mean uniformity of thought—but that we are to have the mind of Christ.

To **“have the mind of Christ”** means to look at life from the Savior’s point of view, having His values and desires in mind—it means to think God’s thoughts and not think as the world thinks.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV)

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5)—what kind of a mind did Christ have—a humble mind.

William MacDonald—

“We have been considering Christ as an example of One who suffered unjustly. He suffered at the hands of wicked men for the cause of righteousness. Since this was so, His followers should arm themselves with the same mind. They should expect to suffer for His name. They should be prepared to endure persecution because they are Christians.”

Warren Wiersbe—

“He, Jesus did not think of Himself; He thought of others. His outlook (or attitude) was that of unselfish concern for others. This is “the mind of Christ,” an attitude that says, “I cannot keep my privileges for myself, I must use them for others; and to do this, I will gladly lay them aside and pay whatever price is necessary.”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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