

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

- WELCOME!
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INTRODUCTION:

In the eleven plus months that my family has been here, Traci, the girls and I have made a very close connection with the members of this church.

- We have friendships here that in some ways are closer than even many of our own blood relatives.
- Our Christian family is meant to be a very close knit unit.
- Jesus expressed this when he said, "...*who are my mother, and my brothers?*"
- The bond that we have as fellow Christians should be just as strong as a marriage bond.
- I'm sure this is why John's vision in the book of **Revelation** included the church as the bride of Christ.
- Paul expressed the closeness of our bond with the church by saying that we are all part of the one body of Christ.

This morning, I wanted for us to consider our Christian bonds with one another, because I think we have a very good thing going for us at this congregation.

- And yet, I also believe that our bonds of friendship and our bonds of love can grow even stronger.

Let's begin by asking ourselves some questions... Do we demonstrate those Christian bonds in our every day living? Do we prove our love to one another? Are we as unified as we could be?

- And when others see how we treat one another, do they see the love of Christ in us?
- One of the ways for us to have an impact in reaching out to our community is by our actions and our attitudes toward one another.

You are probably familiar with the song... **"We are one in the spirit, we are one in the Lord... And we pray that all unity may one day be restored and they'll know we are Christians by our love"**

- The second verse says, **"We will work with each other, we will work side by side... And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride"**
- The last verse says, **"We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand... And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land."**

You see our relationship with one another is very important to God and we need to be unified as we strive to shine our lights brightly in a very dark world.

- Before we get to our main text in **Romans 12**, I would just like to emphasize for a minute or two, how much the Bible talks about relationships.
- I looked up the words **"one another"** in the New Testament and found a couple dozen different things that are specifically commanded for Christians to do for one another.

Probably the most important command is found in **John 15:12**, Jesus said, **"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."**... a few verses later, he repeated, **"This I command you, that you love one another."**

- What a foundational element of the Lord's church! God is love... and His church must reflect that love.
- Take note of another command of Jesus... In **Mark 9:50**, He said, **"...be at peace with one another."**

Paul repeated these, but also said, **"...let us not judge one another"** in **Romans 14:13**.

Romans 15:5 **"...be of the same mind with one another"**

- **Verse 7** **"...accept one another..."**

- Verse 14 “...admonish one another.”
- Romans 16:16 “Greet one another...”
- 1 Corinthians 7:5 “Stop depriving one another...”
- 1 Corinthians 11:33 “...wait for one another.”
- 1 Corinthians 12:25 “...care for one another.”
- Galatians 5:13 “...through love serve one another.”
- “...challeng[e] one another.”
- Ephesians 4:2 “...show tolerance for one another in love...”
- “Be kind to one another,”
- Ephesians 5:21 “...and be subject to one another...”
- Philippians 2:3 “...regard one another as more important than yourselves...”
- Colossians 3:9 “...Do not lie to one another,”
- Verse 13 “...bear with one another...”
 - Verse 16 “...teach and admonish one another...”
- 1 Thessalonians 4:18 “...comfort one another...”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 “...encourage one another and build up one another...”
- Verse 15 “...seek after that which is good for one another...”

Clearly, there is a huge emphasis in the scriptures about us tending to the needs and having the right attitude towards our brothers and sisters in Christ and it is very unfortunate (and it is very sad) when we can't even get along with other Christians.

- Since there are so many passages about our dealings with one another, there is no possible way that we could study them all here this morning.
- Therefore, I would like for us to focus our attention on one specific passage that does an excellent job of summarizing the type of attitudes God expects from us.
- If you haven't turned there already, please turn in your Bibles to **Romans 12**.

Keep in mind that at the time Paul was writing to the Romans, he had been visiting many different congregations of the Lord's church as he was collecting money for the needy church in Jerusalem.

- Paul felt that this gesture by the Gentiles would show their love for their Christian brothers and would demonstrate unity in the church.
- The entirety of **Romans 12** is about giving themselves as a living sacrifice and being acceptable to God.
- Paul was instructing them to keep their focus on the things which are most important—on loving one another and on their commitment to the Lord and being united as the one body in Christ.
- With these thoughts in mind, let us read **Romans 12:10-16**...

*10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;
 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;
 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,
 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.
 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.
 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.*

I believe that this passage has some very practical applications to the Lord's church not only in Salem, but in every gathering of Christians around the world.

I. Our devotion to loving one another should be our first priority.

The first thing that I notice in this passage is that Paul goes straight to the heart of the matter!

- He puts the first things first! If we put our devotion to one another in brotherly love as a first priority, many of the other things that he mentions are going to fall into place!
- If we are devoted to loving one another, giving preference to one another will come natural!
- If we are devoted to loving one another, a natural result will be our diligence and fervent serving of the Lord! We'll do these things, because we care for those around us!

- If we are devoted to loving one another, we will contribute to the needs of the saints and we will practice hospitality!
- We will bless those who persecute us and we will rejoice and weep with those who are doing the same!
- We will be of the same mind toward one another and we will be humble in dealing with others.

Paul recognized that our devotion to one another in brotherly love is a part of some of the greatest commands that Jesus ever gave!

- And when we are devoted to loving one another, all of the other things will fall into place.
- You see, Paul didn't just say that he loved the Romans. He showed that he loved them.
- Just the fact that he wrote to them, was a demonstration that he cared about what was going on there!

Let me share with you, some of the opening remarks that Paul wrote to the **Romans** in the **first chapter**... beginning at **verse 9**... As we read what Paul wrote, consider the love that he was demonstrating to them...

9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,

10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Did you notice that he has unceasingly been making mention of them and did you see how many times Paul told them that he longed to be with them?

- Throughout that passage, Paul is making it perfectly clear that he is devoted to them in brotherly love.
- It is throughout the letter of **Romans**, however another even more powerful example of his INCREDIBLE love for his fellow Christians is found at the beginning of **Romans 9**... "***I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh...***"
- Now... I can honestly say that I love all of you!
- I sincerely care about the spiritual welfare of every single person in this room!
- And if I learned that you would all be saved if I would simply give my life... I honestly believe that I would probably do that! (possibly depending upon how painful the death would be... 😊)
- However... Paul didn't say he would give his life for them. He said he would give his SOUL for them!
- He would be "***accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of [his] brethren...***" ... **NOT ME!!!**
- Sorry honey, but I honestly don't think I would give up my soul for my wife! Or my kids!

That might sound selfish... and callous... but I think that is the honest truth. My soul? I don't think so!

- But Paul, clearly demonstrated his complete devotion to one another in brotherly love!

Brothers and sisters, that is what is going to cause this church to grow!

- I can put studies together that are miraculously good... they could be superb works with the best possible theological arguments, but unless people feel loved when they walk through those back doors, they are probably not going to come back!
- People must see our love for one another! They must see our devotion to one another!
- They must see us giving preference to one another!
- And if they don't see these things, they'll just think we're just another church.

- We want them to know we are Christians by our love, by our love... and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

I'd like everyone to just kind of pause for just a second and take a look at the people around and behind you...

- Take a good look at who's here and involved in this worship service...
- If there is someone here that you could not look in the eye and say, "I love you!" to there is something that needs to be done to correct that.
- Now... I understand that we might have our differences with some...
- I understand that we just don't think the same way as someone else does...
- Perhaps someone carries themselves in a way that rubs you the wrong way...
- And there may even be some "history" behind the way you feel about someone...
- But let's put the "history" behind us! (May be none of this applies to you... And that's ok too!)
- But, let's put our focus back where it should be and focus on the greatest commandment.
- If we truly love God with all of our heart, mind, and strength, we are also going to carry out the second greatest commandment... to love one another.
- We must mend our broken relationships

Mending broken relationships can be very difficult to do, however, sweeping them under the rug is not the right solution.

- Do you realize that if you sweep a small pile of dirt under the rug that it will still be there when you lift the rug?
- Do you realize that if you keep sweeping dirt under the rug, that after a few weeks, months or years that dirt will still be there? And guess what? It's going to reveal itself from time to time!
- And if you sweep enough stuff under the rug, it's eventually going to become very obvious to everyone around. And it will probably even trip you!

If we are to love our enemies and pray for them, as Jesus said in **Matthew 5:44**... how much more should we be loving our brothers and sisters and how much more should we be praying for one another as Jesus instructed!

- I personally believe, the more we focus on loving one another, the more active we will be in church events, in outreach, and in serving the Lord as a whole.
- Paul alludes to that in **verse 11**... "*not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*"
- The more diligent we are in serving the Lord, the stronger the church will be!
- The love we have will light a fire beneath us and we won't be able to hold back in reaching out to those in our lives around us because of our love for them.
- Solomon said it this way in the **Song of Solomon 8:7**, "*Many waters cannot quench love...*"

II. Practical application of our devotion to loving one another...

Let us take a moment here... to shift gears and talk about our practical application of what we have been talking about.

- How do we show our love? What can we do to demonstrate God's love within us?
- Well... Paul answered that for us too!

First of all, let us have the right attitude toward others.

Paul gave a list of things that go along with being devoted to one another in brotherly love.

- Paul starts in **verse 10** by saying that we need to "*give preference to one another in honor...*"
- This clearly an issue of selfishness. Honor others, before honoring yourself.
- The NRVS makes it out like it is almost a competition... "*outdo one another in showing honor.*"
- Be respectful toward one another... Even if you're joking, be careful not to dishonor someone!

According to U.S. News & World Report (4/22/96), 89 % of Americans think incivility (or rudeness and lack of respect) is a serious problem:

- 73 % - Think mean-spirited political campaigns are to blame:
- 67 % - Think rock music is to blame
- 52 % - Think talk radio is to blame:
- 1 % - Think their own behavior is uncivil.
- But the apostle Paul said... we need to try to *“outdo one another in showing honor.”*

In **verses 13**, we see more application of our right attitude toward one another.

- Paul speaks of *“contributing to the needs of the saints.”*
- This ties directly with the second half of that verse, which speaks of *“practicing hospitality.”*
- I say that they are directly tied, because how do we know each other’s needs if we don’t spend time together? We need to visit with one another.

Last week, I received an email from Justin Odom over in the Fairfield congregation.

- I was just one of many who received this email.
- He was curious about how often the other preachers visit church members and some reasons why.
- He then forwarded some of the responses that he had gotten.
- I’d like to read for you a portion of what one of the area preachers feels about visitation of the shut ins.
- **“I feel it is good for Shut-ins to be kept in the fellowship of God's family. They often need encouragement and everyone likes to be reassured that they are loved. Their faithfulness is also an encouragement to me. I also want to be able to keep the rest of the church informed about them. Our members tend not to visit shut-ins who are not physically related to them or in their immediate peer group.”** He also said, **“You can get to know a lot about a person when they are lonely and feel like talking.”**
- Just by spending time with each other, we are *“contributing to the needs of the saints.”*
- I’d like to encourage all of us here this morning, to make it a point to show hospitality to one another.
- Not just to the shut ins, but to take advantage of opportunities we have to get to know other members of the Lord’s church.

In **verse 14**, Paul addresses keeping a positive attitude—he says, *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*

- It is very easy to be negative toward those who do not treat us kindly, however, we need to be the better person and need to resist the temptation to be bitter.

As we move forward in our text, we see another application of a right attitude toward one another.

- In **verse 15**, we *“rejoice with those who rejoice, and we weep with those who weep.”*

I’d like to share with you a story that I think applies to what we have been looking at this morning...

A mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife open a package. “What food might this contain?” the mouse wondered. He was devastated to discover it was a mousetrap. Retreating to the farmyard the mouse proclaimed the warning. “There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!” The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, “Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is a grave concern to you but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it.”

The mouse turned to the pig and told him, “There is a mousetrap in the house!” The pig sympathized, but said, “I am so very sorry, Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured you are in my prayers.”

The mouse turned to the cow and said, “There is a mousetrap in the house!” The cow said, “Wow, Mr. Mouse. I’m sorry for you, but it’s no skin off my nose.”

So the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmer’s mousetrap... alone.

That very night a sound was heard throughout the house—like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey. The farmer’s wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer’s wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital and she returned home with a fever. Everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup’s main ingredient.

But his wife’s sickness continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them the farmer butchered the pig. The farmer’s wife did not get well and she died, So many people came for her funeral. The farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide enough meat for all of them. The mouse looked upon it all from his crack in the wall with great sadness.

When a brother or sister in Christ has an issue of concern in their lives, are we close enough to them that we can weep with them?

- When one of our members needs something do we actually do something about it?
- Or do we do as the chicken and think, “**I cannot be bothered by it**”?
- Do we do as the pig and simply say, “**Be assured you are in my prayers**”?
- Or do we do as the cow and think, “**it’s no skin off my nose**”
- We need to be showing compassion for one another.
- Let us rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

SUMMARY:

You see, people absolutely **MUST** see our love for one another... They **MUST** see our devotion to one another... They **MUST** see us giving preference to one another... They **MUST** see us being of the same mind toward one another!

Before we close, I’d like us to think about when the church was first established... Think about how devoted they were to one another...

- In **Acts 2:46**, it says, “*And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people...*”
- Let’s do what we can to get back to the ways of the 1st century church.
- Let’s focus on demonstrating our love to one another by our actions, not just by our words.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

As always, we would like to extend the invitation...