

Session 4

August 14, 2022

HONOR YOUR NEIGHBOR

Romans 12:9-21

Generally speaking, the first half of Romans 12 gives instructions for *worship in the church*. It begins with believers presenting themselves as living sacrifices, which is identified as an act of spiritual worship (v. 1). This idea is enhanced by intentional conformity to Christ (v. 2) which is an act of worship as well. Verses 3-8 then move to *service in the church*, which is to be done with humility and the fervent exercise of the spiritual gifts bestowed to the church. Our focal passage then addresses the *attitude of the church*. Here Paul abandons the long, thought-out treatises that mark most of the epistle, and very nearly blurts out a string of commands; the “do’s and don’ts” of Christian behavior within the body. Throughout, the twin themes of personal humility and public honor are evident.

Show honor through love (vv. 9-13). It is not surprising that the apostle begins with love, since it is the basis of both the gospel and Christian ethics. In this case, love (*agape*) is to be without hypocrisy. The term used means *unfeigned, honest, or genuine*. The remainder of verse 9 must be taken in the context of such genuine love. Hence, evil has no place in a love relationship and must be abhorred, while that which is good should be embraced. Verse 10 extends that love to family-type affection within the congregation, emphasizing a different word for love (*phileo*) which denotes *brotherly love* or *companionship*. The final part of verse 10 is interesting. The word for “outdo” in the Holman Bible (or “preferring” in the KJV) means “to lead the way.” Hence, believers should always be looking to set the example (or “come in first”) when it comes to honoring one another. The remainder of the section lists clear exhortations for diligence and service (v. 11), encourages joy, patience, and prayer (v. 12), and urges meeting the needs of fellow believers (v. 13). For reflection: *I said earlier that the general theme of these verses is humility and honor. But how do verses 11-13 relate to those concepts?*

Show honor through consistency (vv. 14:16). The middle-ground in these verses is *consistency*. It begins with *self-control* when under attack (v. 14). This admonition is a paraphrase of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:44. Next comes consistency in *empathy* (v. 15), and in *unity* (v. 16), ending with consistency in *Christ-like attitude* (see Phil. 2: 5 ff). For reflection: *Again, the context here is in the church. How do you think consistency in your own behavior shows honor to others? What are the best ways to build consistency into your spiritual disciplines?*

Show honor through restraint (vv. 17-21). Here, the discipline of self-control is again emphasized. If the original sin is pride (and it is), and we wrestle with that same desire to be our own God (which we do), then it is only natural to want to take on God’s role as judge, jury, and executioner when someone crosses us! The problem is, that responsibility belongs to God and God alone (v. 19). What makes it even harder is the duty placed on believers to turn the other cheek, give up the extra coat, and walk the extra mile (see Matt. 5:38-42). Those early teachings of Jesus are reiterated here by Paul. Verse 20 is a restatement of Proverbs 25:21-22. The *heaping of hot coals* refers to both bringing shame upon the enemy as well as the eventual scorn of God (see Ps. 140:10). The point here is that the believer is to show honor to all; not only by refusing

to act as the avenger, but by actually demonstrating compassion when the situation would normally call for one's wrath. For reflection: *Romans 5:10 says that we were once God's enemies. How might His example of compassion help us to demonstrate the same to others?*