

Maintaining Peace and Harmony in the Christian Family

Romans 12:9-13

Romans 12:9-13 - *“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.”*

Background Notes

Romans 12 begins the practical application section of Paul’s letter to the Romans. In view of the great doctrinal teachings in Romans 1 through 11, how should we live? How should our salvation by grace through faith be worked out in our daily lives? In verses 1-2 we saw what our response should be in order to know the will of God for our lives. In verses 3-8 we saw what our response should be in reference to the Church, the body of Christ, and the proper use of our spiritual gifts to help the body to grow and mature spiritually.

Now in verses 9 through 13 we see what our response should be in regard to fellow believers, so that we can maintain peace and harmony in the Christian family. In these verses a number of directives are given on how we should relate to one another. In fact, twelve directives are given to us, and these twelve directives will be the twelve sub-points for our one doctrinal point.

Doctrinal Point

The godly believer practices the biblical directives for peace with fellow believers.

Psalm 133 says, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* It’s great when peace and harmony are maintained between all believers, but it’s not always easy. What are the biblical directives for maintaining peace and harmony in the Christian family? The twelve biblical directives are:

a) Love without hypocrisy. *“Let love be without hypocrisy” (v9).*

Our love for fellow believers should be free from ulterior motives and free from “attached strings.” Are there any strings attached to your love or your brothers and sisters here in this fellowship? Is it possible that your motive in “loving” others is to gain something for yourself?

The word that's used for "love" here is that well-known Greek word, *agape*. *Agape* love is an "in spite of" type of love. "I love you in spite of what you've said about me" or "I love you in spite of what you've done to me." *Agape* love is not an emotional feelings type of love, but a volitional type of love. *Agape* love is an act of the will; it is a **voluntary denial of self** in the interest of others. That kind of love maintains peace in the fellowship.

b) Abhor what is evil and cling to what is good. *"Let love be without hypocrisy" (v9).*

Notice that this directive is sandwiched between two directives about love. Love for the family and within the family must sometimes be tough love. It doesn't compromise with wrongdoing or sweep sin under the rug.

Just this past week a young Christian couple came to me and said that they have a problem. A couple months ago they showed love to a single Christian young man who didn't have anywhere to stay and didn't have a job. They told him that he could stay with them for a few days in their one-bedroom apartment – sleeping on the living room coach. Two months later he's still there, and he's not actively looking for work or another place to live. Although he does have some money, he's not paying any room and board. I told them, "This is wrong. This is sin!" To make a long story short, I counseled this couple to use "tough love" with the young man – they should give him a couple of days of notice and then force him to leave. In our love for our fellow-believers, we must abhor what is evil and wrong and cling to and encourage what is good and right.

c) Show brotherly love to one another. *"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love..." (v10).*

Agape love is an act of the will, and that is the Greek word used for "love" in verse 9. Here in verse 10 the Greek word that is translated "love" is *phileo*. *Phileo* love is the warm, tender, family affection type of love, and that kind of love does involve emotions. I see this type of love at Sunday morning church fellowship times -- we are a family! We're not just acquaintances -- we truly are brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's show brotherly love to one another.

d) Honor one another above yourselves. *"In honor giving preference to one another..." (v10).*

If you had the task of arranging assigned seating for a fellowship meal at the church, and if the best place, next to the guest speaker, was at one end of the table and the place of "lower honor" was at the other end of the table -- where would you place yourself? The best seat? Do you always seek to get the prestige, praise and honor when a job is done well at your church -- or do you honor other workers on the committee above yourself? When you honor one another above yourself, it tends for peace and harmony within the Christian family.

e) Continue to be diligent. *"Not lagging in diligence..." (v11).*

Be diligent in the things of the Lord! Don't get lazy in your commitment. Sluggards disrupt the harmony and peace in the family. It's better to burn out than to rust! Continue to be diligent!

f) Be fervent in spirit. *“Fervent in spirit...” (v11).*

What does the word “fervent” mean, anyway? It’s the opposite of lukewarm. Do you remember that the Lord rebuked the church of Laodicea for being lukewarm (Revelation 3)? Let’s be fervent in spirit. If the Lord were to take your spiritual temperature right now, what would it be? Let’s be fervent in spirit.

g) Serve the Lord. *“Serving the Lord...” (v11).*

Well, serving the Lord should be obvious, so why is that mentioned here in this list of directives for maintaining peace in the Christian family? Putting the emphasis on the **Lord**, and on **serving the Lord** goes a long way to maintaining harmony in the family. When we remember that it is ultimately the **Lord** that we serve, and not just the ordinary (and sometimes ornery!) brothers and sisters in the fellowship, it does help to maintain peace and harmony within the fellowship.

h) Rejoice in hope. *“Rejoicing in hope...” (v12).*

We can rejoice in hope because our future hope is **sure**! Aren’t you glad that your future hope doesn’t depend on the success of the Chicago Bears? Not much hope there – or in any other football team! Our future hope is sure and secure because it’s in the **Lord**! The more we focus on that future hope and not on our problems with fellow believers, the more there will be peace and harmony in the fellowship.

i) Endure affliction. *“Patient in affliction...” (v12).*

Patient in tribulation. The word that’s translated “affliction” or tribulation here is a word that includes the big trials of life, like serious disease or the death of a loved one, and the small sufferings as well – the sufferings that come from the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of people. Do you have any afflictions like that right now? Is a situation or person in the fellowship giving you problems or “bugging” you? Do you feel like throwing in the towel? Do feel like leaving? Do you even feel like fighting it out with the person? Well, don’t!

What’s the biblical directive for maintaining peace and harmony in the family? **Endure** affliction! Be **patient** in tribulation! Remember, God knows all about it, and it won’t last forever. We may have to endure certain afflictions for the rest of our lives, but heaven is coming, right? Affliction will not last forever. Endure affliction!

j) Persevere in prayer. *“Continuing steadfastly in prayer...” (v12).*

Prayer is not always easy. I think that all of us would agree that we wish that we had a better prayer life. I know that when I get to heaven, I’ll regret that I didn’t pray more. We need to **persevere** in prayer – especially to maintain peace in the family. Never stop praying for one another. Set aside more time to pray. Martin Luther said he was so busy in the work of the Lord that he had to spend more time in prayer. Persevere in prayer.

k) Share with believers who are in need. *“Distributing to the needs of the saints...” (v13).*

When Paul wrote this letter to the Romans he was in Corinth, and one of the things he was doing there was taking up a collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem. It was important then, and it's important today. Look around you -- are any of your brothers or sisters in need? Is someone out of a job? Has someone fallen on hard times? Do the elderly Christians in your church have sufficient means to live with dignity? Share with the saints who are in need.

Margie and I know a Christian woman has fallen on hard times. She's a single mother, she lost her job, and we heard that she's behind in her rent. We have a responsibility to check out that situation and very possibly help her in this need. Sharing with the saints who are in need is intrinsic to the peace and harmony of the Christian family.

l) Practice hospitality. *“Given to hospitality...” (v13).*

Do you have an open-door policy or a closed-door policy at your home? If it's a Christian home, it should have an open door policy. Not all the time, of course, but you should be getting together with the saints in your home as well as here in the church. And don't play favorites! It's particularly important to invite new believers and those who need to be drawn closer in the fellowship into your home. Hospitality goes a long way toward maintaining peace and harmony within the Christian fellowship.

The godly believer practices the biblical directives for peace with fellow believers.

Practical Application

Remember to do your “daily dozen.”

How many of you have heard that expression before? I think that it comes from the military and it has to do with a daily workout of twelve physical exercises.

Well, it's not a bad idea to do our physical daily dozen, but **all** of us do need to do the dozen exercises that we looked at here in Romans 12:9-13. And we need to do them daily -- not just when we “feel spiritual.” We must remember to carry out these twelve directives in order to maintain a peace and harmony in the fellowship, because this is pleasing to God.