

“LET LOVE BE GENUINE, III.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 12:9-12

Introduction.

I continue to urge you to read Romans 12:9-21 every day, in your own devotions and with your family at dinner. Talk about it. Stir it up. Drink from this well of wisdom for life.

Paul won't let any of us be content with where we are. He relentlessly pushes us to not be conformed to the way the world acts and thinks, but to be truly transformed by the renewing of our minds by the Holy Spirit, to keep growing and becoming more like Christ.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

When we think of being competitive we usually think of sports, or similar challenges where we want to be first, or win. Competition in the church should be in showing honor, deference, kindness, love. Surpass one another, excel in preferring one another. Beat others to the punch in giving praise, expressing gratitude, putting them above or ahead of ourselves.

Paul is not just saying honor your fellow brothers and sisters as yourself but honor one another above yourself.

Philippians 2:3-5 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but *in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

The church is that one place where honor is shown to everyone, rich and poor, young and old, immigrants, different ranks or stations in life, disadvantaged, handicapped.

In order to honor someone, you must be able recognize and acknowledge something of value in them. Do we see our fellow Christians as purchased by the highest price, filled with the Holy Spirit, adopted as a child of God, made in the image of God, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and made into the likeness of Jesus?

The Gospel teaches us to think differently about each other. C.S. Lewis said there are no ordinary people, no mere mortals, we are immortal creatures. Every human being is created in the image of God, a little lower than the angels, higher than every other created being. Created to live forever. There are no worthless pieces of trash.

The reason racism and prejudice are sins is because they fail to recognize the truth about the honor and dignity God has given us and expects us to show.

The reason abortion is evil is because it fails to recognize babies as created by God and in His image and deserving of honor.

Honor is a foreign concept in our culture; we don't value honor in our culture. We have seen a lot of ugliness and dishonoring these past few weeks. A lot of disrespect, contempt, looking down the nose. Let's strive to create a community of honor here in a culture of contempt. A community where we see value and significance in each other, where we treat everyone like they are important.

Cast out of your heart contempt, hatred, anger, bitterness, rage, in a word the pride that leads to these things, thinking we are superior or better than others. May we not be like that, may we be salt and light, setting a better example.

Honor brings out the best in people, contempt brings out the worst. Honor creates a place of trust, contempt brings distrust.

Ask God who you have dishonored, who you need to speak words of value, respect, praise, honor. Don't hold back showing honor, don't give it just to those you like or who like you.

Prefer *to* honor rather than *be* honored, love *to* honor more than you love *to be* honored. What an example of not being conformed to the way the world thinks and acts.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

Romans 12:11

11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Once again, Paul exhorts us with words that are easy to understand. This is not rocket science, this is not complicated. Three phrases, three exhortations, three imperative commands for us to do. They are plain, simple, yet somehow hard to do.

In the sovereign and good providence and purposes of God, He has brought us here this morning to hear and face up to these words. These words are a call to each one of us to become more spiritually fervent than we are right now.

This is a call to leave here differently than when we came. Let us not be guilty of being only a hearer of the Word and not a doer. We are all called to be salt, and light shining in the darkness.

Do not be slothful in zeal.

Again why does Paul say this? Because it is human nature to be lazy, slothful.

Our flesh is weak and lazy. All of us by nature want to be lazy, we look for easy ways or shortcuts to do things. It is in every boy's and girl's hearts to be lazy, to not want to do hard or difficult things, and we never completely shake it especially in matters of our faith or spiritual life.

My five boys would have been lazy if I had let them. As parents we have to train laziness out of our children. We have to teach them the value of hard work, of doing good work, of doing the hardest things first, of not procrastinating.

Don't resent it when your parents tell you to do things and to work hard and get the job done. They are helping you learn something very important for later in life.

God did that with Joshua when He sent him to conquer the Promised land. The very first job God gave Joshua was the hardest. Jericho was the most fortified of all the cities in the Promised Land. It had the highest and thickest walls.

I have seen people diligent when it comes to business or financial pursuits or making economic gain, but who do you know applies themselves in equal measure to the things of the Spirit.

Paul tells young Timothy to "to fan into flame the gift of God" that is in him (II Timothy 1:6). Ask the Holy Spirit to light a fire in you and fan the flame for what is truly good and eternal.

When asked to do something, do it, and do it well.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

We have Christ as our example. Let us model His eagerness, earnestness, zeal, passion.

Be fervent in spirit.

This is saying the same thing in a positive way. Negatively, don't be slothful in zeal. Positively, be fervent in spirit.

The word fervent here means burning or to boil over. Be burning/boiling in spirit.

It means no trifling with Christianity, no playing at religion, no slothfulness in following Christ, but rather have an earnestness and a dedication to finishing what He has begun.

You remember what Jesus said about being lukewarm, especially toward the things of God, toward spiritual things, toward Jesus and righteousness and truth.

What are we passionate about? Is it cars, trucks, money, your job, your kids, vacations, hunting? Is it sports or sports teams, the Seahawks, the Mariners, the Sounders, LCS football, basketball, soccer, volleyball? What in the spiritual realm even comes close to your passion for worldly things?

What sort of fire is burning in your heart? Is it a fire from the Lord, by the Lord, for the Lord? What in your spiritual life is are you joyful about, enjoying to the full?

When Jesus gave us the first and greatest commandment, what did he say? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27). God himself promised: "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

The catechism question tells us our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

I know all about how reserved Reformed people are and Dutch Reformed in particular. I was raised Presbyterian and I still haven't got cured of it. We work at keeping our faith and our worship and our spiritual life in check, you know, all things in moderation, right? But when it becomes half-hearted, it becomes dull and then dead.

We need to stop making an idol of being so dignified and controlled. We would do well to be a little more self-forgetful and put our heart and soul into our worship. At the very least sing more boldly.

David danced before the Lord to the point of embarrassing his wife. Paul urged men to lift up holy hands in prayer.

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, He came in fire. You cannot light this fire on your own. It must be lit by the Holy Spirit. But once lit we are to continue to be fervent, fanning the flame that is already in us.

Intensity matters. Zeal matters. Wholeheartedness matters. Don't settle for less.

How can you stir up your zeal and fervency in the Spirit? How can you turn up the heat?

First of all, you have to have the Holy Spirit and you receive the Holy Spirit when you confess your sin and surrender your life to Jesus Christ fully believing and trusting in Him for your life.

- Then pray. He who asks not, has not. Ask God for more fervency and zeal for Him. **Psalm 139:23-24** Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
- Remember the Gospel, think about the cross, remember what you once were, consider what you have been saved from, what God has done for you, His abounding grace.
- Take time to be in Scripture. Every day, find time to be alone.
- Examine your life, your schedule, your priorities. Examine what you care about, does it matter spiritually or eternally? Is it all about you?
- Go to bed on time and get up on time.
- Stop giving in to the desires of the flesh that are dampening your spiritual fire.
- Resist doubt, uncertainty, anxiety that dull the flame.
- Look for the distractions in your life that quench the Holy Spirit.
Social media, video games, binging online.
- Read books by the great saints who have found success in keeping the fire burning.
- Read Pilgrims Progress. Go to Banner of Truth publishers and click on their Puritan Paperbacks series and the Pocket Puritans series, inexpensive classis. Fire kindling.
- Put a Bible app on your phone and read it when you have those down time moments rather than scrolling through texts, emails, and other apps.
- Work hard on developing a forgiving attitude, be quick to forgive.

- Root out bitterness, unforgiveness, anger, grudges.
- Take yourself less seriously.
- Resist the drift to becoming lukewarm.
- Stop complaining about life, the news, the government, things you can't do anything about.

You are not here to condemn all the bad things that are going on in the world. We know they're bad. The world is perishing. You do not need to add your condemnation. What this world needs is a church full of fervent good Samaritans who are salt and light.

- Start praising what is good, where you see God's grace.
- Use every opportunity to bring the healing light of the Holy Spirit to those who are cold and lifeless around you.
- Only those who have the Spirit of God can bring the gospel to a sin-sick world, cold, lifeless, dead. Don't sit back, self-satisfied and comfortable in your own little world.

Do all of this in the power of the Holy Spirit, with humility by His enabling power and grace.

Serve the Lord

This is what all of these imperative exhortations are, serving the Lord with love and gladness.

Peter put it best when he said that "whoever serves," let it be "by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11). Serving the Lord flows out of complete dependence upon God and His grace and strength and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Do all that you do as unto the Lord, with a desire to honor, obey and please the Lord. Christ is the greatest person in the universe and serving Christ is the greatest privilege in the world. Pleasing Christ is infinitely more important than pleasing people. Christ is better than the approval of men.

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. ... You are serving the Lord Christ.

Let's change our hearts and change our culture with the fire of the Holy Spirit fueling our love. Brothers and sisters, do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, until He returns.

Prayer: Father, make us more of a loving congregation, practicing love, showing love, deferring, showing preference and honor, diligent in serving the Lord through our loving each other, without sibling rivalry. Set our minds on the great reality of your Fatherhood over us all and grow us into a family of believers that loves each other with tender affection, calling on you in the name of Jesus for the power and presence of your Holy Spirit poured out in our midst.