

“LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER, III.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 12:16-18

Introduction.

We just kicked off the fundraising stage of our Phase III building project, in which you are invited to invest in the building of our church's future. But there is a more important building project in front of us. Romans 12 is an invitation to build our church family spiritually. And of the two this is far more important. It doesn't do any good to build a church building if we are not building the Church of Jesus Christ that meets in the building.

Romans 1-11 laid the foundation of the Gospel and now Romans 12 builds on that foundation.

God's mercy and forgiveness are meant to leave a lasting impression on us, a life changing impression, a heart transforming impression.

If our Christianity doesn't impact our relationships with each other and especially those who hurt us or wrong us or let us down, if our Christianity doesn't work at this basic level of human interaction then it isn't working. Christ is real in our lives when it shows in how we deal with rights and wrongs, with injustice and unfairness, with rejoicing and weeping, with the lowly.

Are you struggling with Romans 12? Are you wrestling between being conformed to the ways of this world and being transformed by the renewing of your mind? Is the Spirit convicting you? Are you resisting or are you humbly submitting and surrendering?

All of this is unnatural. Our natural impulse, our fleshly instinct is to do the opposite of all these things. This is only possible as we submit ourselves to the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:9 sets the standard, let love be genuine, without hypocrisy. And from there Paul fleshes out in very practical ways what genuine love looks like when it is lived out in the community of believers. Mostly it looks like humility and genuine care and concern for others; not being conformed to the ways of the world, getting rid of pride.

We must guard against that four-letter word called pride. This is the focus of verse 16.

12:16 Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty, associate with the lowly, never be wise in your own sight.

Live in harmony with one another.

Another translation is be of the same mind with each other, be on the same page with each other.

How do diverse, different, sometimes incompatible people live together in harmony? The Jews and the Gentiles were hugely incompatible. But the reality is our sin makes all of us incompatible in significant ways. Just ask any married couple.

So what does this harmony look like? What is the nature of this agreement? Does it mean we are of the same mind about everything? No, of course not, that's impossible. It is agreement about what is most essential to the Gospel and to our witness to a watching world.

Our agreement is to be about Jesus Christ and salvation in His name. It is about faith and obedience given to Christ alone. It is about love for God and each other. Paul said he desired to know one thing, Christ and Him crucified. The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.

But we could agree about the Gospel and still blow this place up. After all on that foundation we are all of us living stones of all different sizes and shapes and opinions and ideas. So what else do we need?

We agree that on secondary matters, we will show love and grace and humility. We won't parade our differences, stirring up strife. We aren't argumentative, pugnacious and obstinate. We will treat each other with brotherly affection and be accommodating, showing deference, honoring one another. We will work at harmony, not acrimony (harshness, bitterness, ill will).

And how does that happen? How does it work in our homes? It is called communication. Husbands and wives, parents and children get on the same page by talking, respectfully listening and engaging. That means husbands talking, and it means teenagers talking to their parents.

Promote harmony by stopping complaining and criticizing, but speaking well of each other. If someone was speaking poorly of your wife, would you try to stop? What if someone was criticizing or speaking poorly of Jesus' wife? You know, His Church. Seek harmony.

These next three commands all contribute to living in harmony, and killing pride which is the enemy of harmony.

Do not be haughty.

It means not being haughty, proud, puffed up, full of yourself. Don't parade your pride, in words, in social media, in conversations. Pride kills harmony, pride hinders Church unity. The goal here is to live in harmony with each other.

It is amazing how much good can be accomplished when you one cares about getting credit. Or when we are able to say like John the Baptist, "He must increase, I must decrease."

Micah 6:8 What is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (and with each other).

Associate with the lowly

Do you realize Jesus spent His entire life on earth associating with the lowly? Everyone was beneath Him, less than Him, not anywhere as important as Him.

Does anything represent the Gospel better than doing what Christ did when He stooped down to associate with the likes of us. And He never did it in a demeaning or condescending manner. Never once did He say or imply, "you guys sure are lucky to have such a great or kind a Savior like me."

We all like to associate with important people, people we put on a pedestal. What does the grace of God enable us to do? To be gracious, to notice and spend time with those who are different, difficult, troubled, broken, people who drain us and don't give back. Let's admit it, that's hard, that takes a work of God's grace.

Associate with others no matter what their station in life, but especially with those we would in the flesh be inclined to avoid or look down on.

We could not live our lives in the comfortable and convenient way we do if it was not for the countless people who serve us every day, making our lives easier and better.

The baristas at your favorite coffee shop, the stockers of shelves at Safeway, the check-out person. The store clerk, the grocery cart collector at Costco, the office workers, secretaries, bank tellers, the delivery truck drivers, sanitation workers, post office workers, housekeeping staff at the hospital and care homes. Yard workers, house cleaners, oil changers, flagmen who keep us safe in construction sites. Airport personnel. We are served by so many people.

Do you notice them, do you acknowledge their existence, do you thank them? Don't ever think someone is beneath you, less than you. Is there someone you don't pay any attention to, someone not worth your time? Don't be haughty, associate with the lowly.

The truth of the matter is we all look down on someone. One race looks down on another race, everyone is a racist toward someone.

We look down on the poor and homeless.

Management looks down on labor.

Teachers look down on students.

Husbands look down on their wives.

12-year-olds look down on 6-year-olds.

Teenagers look down on – everyone, whoever isn't cool.

Love each other, siblings don't look down on siblings, love each other, at home, school, work.

I know people who are drawn to the lowly, they are on the lookout, looking for opportunities. They are examples of being a new creature, of being Christ-like, transformed from the inside out.

Consider the condescension of Christ in stooping so low to become like us and bend down to earth. As we have received what we don't deserve, so let us give and share in the same way, reflecting God's grace and giving Him the glory.

Every person we meet is a human being like me and I am a sinner like him. May we all be growing in humility and compassion.

There is no aristocracy in the church, no royalty, pedestals, no higher or lower social or economic status, no social distinctions. We are one flock under Christ, a priesthood of all believers. This is why I asked the council if they would just have one appreciation day for all the staff.

Never be wise in your own sight.

Another translation says don't be conceited. Don't be superior in your estimation of yourself. Show restraint. Be humble. Let there be no pride or contempt in your heart. Don't have a high opinion of yourself or of your wisdom.

But doesn't the Bible say to be wise and to pursue wisdom? Yes we are commanded to grow in wisdom. And one of the clearest characteristics of a person who is growing in wisdom is their growing understanding of how much they lack wisdom, and that the wisdom they have is not their own doing, but from God.

When we exalt ourselves over others we break the unity of the body. A chief virtue among Christians is submission, showing deference to others, making allowances for others, preferring to honor others rather than take it for ourselves. Humility is the sign of true wisdom.

A mind being transformed and renewed by the Gospel doesn't think too highly of themselves. They humbly seek wisdom from others. They are not like those who think they are wise yet resist receiving wisdom or advice from others, they refuse input or any help from others. Self-sufficiency is a form of pride, that hurts harmony rather than builds it.

Having a high view of my opinion or my perspective breaks the harmony of our relationship. Nothing is so contrary to the previous 19 exhortations as a self-inflated opinion of oneself.

Don't be wise in your own conceit. Show honor, deference, grace, the humility of Christ. Walk humbly with God and each other.

12:17 Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

Notice what Paul added here. We have been saying all these exhortations are a picture of the Gospel lived out in practical ways. And Paul says here, the world is watching. Our actions are salt and light, our actions reflect Jesus. So live and act in a way that brings honor to Christ and His Gospel and His Church.

Give thought to what is honorable, think about it, aim at it, seek it. Give it careful consideration.

Do your life and your actions match what you profess to believe; or are you acting in an inconsistent manner, in a way that dishonors your profession of faith? Do you have the faith in Christ to do what you know is right and believe He will work all things out for His glory and your greater good and for the sake of your testimony.

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. Think like Paul.

II Corinthians 8:21 We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

Philippians 4:8 Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Implications and application.

I feel conflicted in my heart about preaching these things to you. *First*, I am painfully aware of my own need to hear and obey this truth and how far short of it I fall. I am a hypocrite in these things. I own that, I acknowledge that, I confess it and I continually ask God for help to grow in this grace. But man is it slow.

Second, I am guarded because I don't want to come across as works righteousness. Do this and your will be saved, do this and you will be a good righteous Christian. Do this and it doesn't matter about your heart.

No, we are saved by grace, by the righteousness of Christ freely given to us and received by faith. We are saved by grace so that we can be enabled by His Spirit to do these things. We are saved by faith alone, but that faith is never alone, it shows itself, it bears fruit. By our fruit our faith will be known and proved. Make Romans 12 the response of a grateful heart for the huge mercies of God He has shown us.