

11.22.15
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Leading up to our verses for today, Paul talks about Christians being one body in Christ. Living a Christian life depends on being a part of this body. Understanding that is the key to our verses today. It helps us recognize that the actions Paul is calling us to are the response to being in Christ. Because we are new people, we live new lives in Christ. Therefore, we represent Christ to the world. When people look at us, they should be thinking, "That's what it means to follow Christ." The question is are they saying, "I want to live like that," or are they saying, "I don't want to be like him/her," or possibly the worst, "His/her life doesn't look any different from mine." Paul is calling us to be different because of what Christ has done for us. Because we are the ones who have salvation, we are the ones who represent the person who gave it to us.

Being the face of Christ in the world today is a scary job for Christians. Sometimes we don't know what to do. Sometimes we fail at what we try to do. But Paul has answers for both of those fears. We ask, "How should I act in public as to glorify God and show the gospel of Jesus?" and Paul writes saying, "Here are a few ways that people will know you're different, that you're Christian." Being a Christian changes your life. It changes the way you think, the way you act, the way you relate. So Paul gives us a list of these changes. We already see these changes in our lives. These are the ways we treat our friends and family. Now Paul pushes us to treat our neighbors the same way.

Paul starts with sincere love. He hits at the heart of why we already show these things to our friends and family. We act this way with them because we sincerely love them. A sincere love holds no grudges. It empathizes, understands, lifts up, honors, respects, and is passionate. When a friend makes a joke about me, I laugh it off, understanding that it's just a joke. When someone I don't know or someone I just met makes a joke about me, I get upset with that person. Even though they meant it in the same light-hearted context, because I don't have a relationship with them, I take it a different way. I don't attempt to understand their action because I don't have a sincere love for them. This is why Paul starts with this. If we don't work on sincerely loving all people, the other actions that Christ calls us to are much harder to carry out. "Love must be sincere" because we were loved sincerely.

This sincere love leads to a life of joy in Christ. The next verse in our text says hate what is evil and cling to what is good. In short, it defines our morality. Christ loved us and we put our faith in him. This means we place our faith in his word as well. If he says something is wrong, we believe him and live life accordingly. He says, "I am the one who is coming back to judge the living and the dead. I know what the Father desires and does not desire. Listen to me, please my Father." So we hate what is evil. As Christians we oppose abortion, because God says that all life is precious. We stand out because of this. As Christians we oppose gay marriage, because God tells us it is wrong through Paul and many others. We stand out because of this. As Christians we avoid premarital sex, because God says sex is a gift reserved for marriage. We stand out because of this. We desire all people to reject what is evil and come to Christ. So we join Jesus in his mission when we hate what is evil.

We also stand out when we cling to what is good. In high school, a group of Christian friends and I became known as the group that never swore. You'd be amazed how many people asked us, "Why don't you swear? They're just words, man." We stood out because we clung to what was good. When I was in college, a group of Christian friends and I went to a Denny's and found a \$20 bill on the sidewalk outside. Instead of pocketing it and using it for our meal, we gave it to the waitress and told her someone dropped it, in case they came looking for it. I still

remember the surprised look in her eyes as we handed her that money, looking for nothing in return. We stood out because we clung to what was good. Because of these things, the love of Christ was shown that day.

Christian living deals with actions, but it's also about reactions. Paul calls us to be joyful, patient, and faithful in response to a variety of situations. The Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians to perfect the interworking of emotions. Many people know what it's like to lose a job. Depression comes swiftly and tries to keep us down. As Christians, we are patient and trust in God. We know He has a plan for us, that He will take care of us. The loss of a job will not be the end of our life. It can be a hard time for us, but it is our faith that keeps us from giving up. Then the day comes when we get a job interview. The interview went good, but we still feel nervous. Hope sometimes only seems like a good thing if what we hope for actually comes true. But as we wait, we sit back, thank God for the opportunity at another job, and know that if we are not chosen, it's not the end. If there is one job opening, there may be another. If not, we continue to trust that God our Father will provide. And while we wait, we pray. We pray for peace, understanding, and help. In one single, common situation emotions of every kind abound. As Christians, with the help of the Holy Spirit, our emotions respond in ways that aren't normal. By looking back on what Christ has done we can find our strength in times of weakness. These uncommon responses show Christ at work in us, and people notice. The gospel is showing simply through our emotional reaction.

But Christian living isn't only about how we act or react. A big part of it is also how we interact. God has called us to take a deeper step and actually engage our neighbors, not just be a showcase to them. Paul begins to use that phrase, "One another." Do you remember a few Sundays ago when Pastor Carl embodied the friend of Levi in his sermon? Levi didn't just keep the gospel to himself; he shared it with his friend. He was devoted to his friend in brotherly love. He was so devoted that when he found the way to salvation, he couldn't go another day without sharing it with someone he cared about. He valued the salvation of his friend above all else at that moment. That's what it means to honor someone above yourself. It means putting the life and needs of someone else above your own. At that moment, they become the person you need to serve. One day in college I was driving down the highway to a friend's apartment. Up ahead I saw a car on the side of the road, with a man standing back looking at it. I thought to myself, "You know what? I have some extra time. I'll see what's wrong." I pulled over to the side of the road, got out of my car, and called out to the guy. Turns out his serpentine belt, the singular belt that causes most engine parts to run, had snapped. I asked if he needed to call a tow truck or if he needed a ride. He responded saying he had already called a couple people, he was just waiting now. Then he said something I'll always remember. He said, "Thanks for stopping. Thousands of cars pass by, but no one ever seems to stop." I didn't actually get to help him, but in the small act of stopping, I was the one person who was different. I didn't get to share the Gospel that day, but I got to be the example of Christ to that man. Sincere love has no agenda. It is simply love.

Paul calls us to be zealous for serving Christ. This means never avoiding a situation we can help, never keeping to ourselves, never hiding that we are Christian. Being zealous all the time can be tiring. Many Christians get burned out being, "go, go, go!" all the time. But Paul isn't calling us to destroy ourselves. He is calling us to be zealous "according to the grace given us". Zeal will look different for each Christian. We're not all extroverts on the verge of exploding to tell every single person we meet about Christ. For others, zeal looks like the worker who answers "I went to church" to the question, "What did you do this weekend?" It's the answer "Because Christ loves me" to the "Why" we so often hear. Zeal is the love and passion of

sharing our faith in moments big and in moments small. Whether it's inviting the neighbor over for dinner or to church or just saying "God bless" as a conversation closer, we are called to let our zeal for Christ show to our neighbors.

And it's important to note that there are no limiting factors on who we call "neighbor". Paul talks about helping those who are in need and associating with people of low position. Who we are zealous toward and who we practice hospitality toward are not set to any standards. We put our pride aside and realize that everyone is worthy of our time and everyone needs Christ. Paul is calling us to humility. This, perhaps, may be the most outstanding quality seen in Christians. In a country that thrives on being in control, having power, and dividing everyone into classes, putting others first is a radical idea, especially if that person would be seen as "below" you. You may or may not know that Trinity works with Portal Industries to hire disabled workers to clean the church and school. This takes extra effort. Society would look at these people and say, "Why bother?" This is when we look back at them and say, "This is my brother and this is my sister. They needed a job, so we gave them one." Humility stands out. And Paul calls us to do this individually. The things the world sees as "low" we see as "worthy", equal. It's also simple. You can volunteer at a food shelter, putting others' time and money above your own. You can open your house to someone who needs a place to stay. You can donate that Christmas bonus to a good organization instead of using it to buy a new TV. How we use our time, talents, and treasures causes us to stand out. And it's all down by simply being humble.

With our attention turned to our neighbor, Paul calls us to a few more actions we can replicate. However, these last ones sometimes aren't as easy as others. Paul tells us that Christians aren't the only people we need to live in harmony with. He says, "Live at peace with everyone." One of my favorite quotes is, "The door to the heart opens inward." If someone is pressing back against the door, nothing can get in. We need to be at peace with our neighbors if we want them to care about what we say and do. Too often it is the Christian and not the Christian faith that turns people off to Christianity. Have you ever wondered why Jesus came and fulfilled the needs of people first before bringing them the gospel? He created situations where there was peace and harmony between them before he spoke his message. As Christians, we follow the example of Christ. Sometimes this requires forgiveness, but we remember how freely Christ gave it to the people he helped. Live a life of peace and you will be amazed how many hearts and ears are open to what you care about. Jesus knew this and now Paul tells us the same.

The amazing thing about living in harmony with one another is that it leads to unity. It allows us to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." When we open our hearts to each other, we learn to empathize with each other's joys and pains. When your friend's mother passes away, you feel a very real pain, even though you had no direct connection to her. This is our sincere love connecting our heart to the heart of someone we love. And it's not just so that we feel sad too. There's a very interesting result when you mourn with others. The one who is mourning finds that the pain passes much quicker when it is shared among friends and family. When we share our joys, they double. When we share our pain, it halves. This is the way God created us and why Paul says this is good Christian living. The results of living for Christ are never fruitless, even in the smaller things.

The last idea Paul writes about is captured in a very basic sentence, "Bless those who persecute you." Now, let's put some context on this. Most scholars date the letter to the Romans between 55 and 58 A.D. In 54 A.D. a man named Nero came to the throne. While we don't know what he did right at the beginning of his reign, but the time of 1 Timothy around 64 A.D., Nero

was torturing and killing Christians. Yet at the same time, Paul tells Christians to pray for their leader. Christianity is consistent on this point, even at a time when it would be the hardest. This means praying for your boss even if he's a jerk. It's wishing nothing but well upon the unbeliever who makes fun of your faith. It's being kind to the rude customer at work. We do not repay evil with evil. We repay evil with good. After all, that's what God did for us. We sinned against Him, rejected His words, and killed His Son. And instead of casting down fire and lightning he said, "You are forgiven." Joining Jesus in his mission means doing the same.

For the next few chapters, Paul continues to talk about how Christians ought to live, but in chapter 13 verse 14, he uses a phrase to show us how this is done. He says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Put on. Imagine putting on a t-shirt. Imagine that t-shirt had a Green Bay Packers logo on it. What team do you think people would assume you root for? The Packers of course! This is what Paul is telling us: wear your faith on your sleeve. That's how a Christian lives this kind of life. Not by reading them every day and following them like commandments, but by trusting in Jesus. Trust that he has taken your sin upon himself. Trust that he has given you salvation in its place. Trust that he is coming back again to bring you to him. Trust that he is watching over you and living inside of you every day. Trust that Jesus is equipping you to join him on his mission. When you trust in Christ for all things, it will be evident in your life. The joy that comes from faith will show and those around you will notice the difference and ask. Then you can tell them why you live so radically. Joining Jesus in his mission isn't complicated. It's done by simply sharing. Your life, your love, your faith.