



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Transformed Commitment

Romans 12.11-13

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Introduction

John Kassen tells of visiting a man named Joe, who had stopped attending church. He was getting up in years, but was still in fairly good health. When Kassen arrived, it was obvious Joe did not want to let him in. Asked if there was some problem that needed attention, Joe said, "No, I'm just getting older and it's harder to get around and difficult to make it to church anymore." He lived about a mile from the building and did not have a car. Could the church help? "I don't know who I would ask for a ride," Joe said; his tone said he didn't want Kassen to arrange one, either. Well, what if they added Joe to the regular shut-in visitation? They could bring him Communion and a tape recording of a service to listen to at his convenience. Would he like that? Looking down and away, Joe replied, "That wouldn't work because I'm gone so much. You'd seldom find me at home."¹

Funny, isn't it, how we can justify things, even where our commitment to Christ is concerned? Our text might help by focusing on some commitment keys.

- Remember the theme: this is still "living sacrifice" transformation (12.1-2).
- It is still grounded in the determination to humbly think rightly about oneself (12.3).
- This is body life, the use of gifts in the right manner (12.4-8).
- These and following traits are to be grounded in the right view of love found in 12.9-10.

In vv. 11-13, we find three broad groups of commitment traits that we can think of in terms of *motives, attitudes, and behaviors*.

Motives

1. "Do not be slothful in zeal" (ESV; "not lagging behind in diligence" – NASB).
 - a. "Not slothful" (ὀκνηρός, *oknēros*) refers to a person showing hesitation through weariness, sloth, fear, shyness or reserve. Jewish wisdom literature often warned against this (cf. Proverbs 6.6, 9; 20.4; 21.25; 22.13; 26.13-16; 31.27).
 - b. Coupled with "diligence" (σπουδή, *spoudē*; "spare no effort"), we are reminded that effort is vital to our walk; maturity doesn't just "come to" us.
2. "Fervent in spirit" points to the zeal that drives the diligence.

- a. "Fervent" (participle from ζέω, *zeō*) has the sense of "bubble, boil" as of water or the heat needed in fermentation or smelting. It is used for hot emotions like passion or rage. This is an appropriate emotional fervor for Christian living.
- b. But it is not excitement for excitement's sake, for Paul introduces the idea of the spirit (or perhaps Spirit) as that which sets boundaries for the energy.
 - i. The two phrases hang together (whether "spirit" is human or divine), "the one emphasizing the elements of human discipline necessary if the inner fire of the Spirit is to maintain the temperature of the body at normal vitality."
 - ii. The idea is that of "an inner drive matched by personal discipline"²
3. "Serve the Lord" keeps the first two phrases in this triplet in check.
 - a. "The imagery of the slave is a reminder that what is in view is not personal satisfaction or flights of spirituality, but the will and command of the master" (Dunn, 754).
 - b. "The love which binds a congregation together needs that inner spontaneity bubbling up within if it is to remain fresh and personally real, but it can easily become too experiential and 'frothy' unless it expresses also the fundamental commitment to Christ as Lord and is motivated by the desire to serve him" (Dunn, 753-754).

Attitudes

1. "Rejoice in hope" – with hope understood in the Hebrew sense of confident trust, not tentative wishing. Confident hope is the only kind that can truly hope.
2. "Be patient in tribulation" is better translated "persevering in tribulation" (NASB).
 - a. "Persevere" (participle, ὑπομένω, *hypomenō*) means to bear up under, endure.
 - b. The idea is that of continuing to press on with the zeal, fervency, and service because of the hope that originates with the mercies of God (12.1), the foundation for living-sacrifice, transformed living.
3. "Constant in prayer" is again better in the NASB: "[being] devoted to prayer."
 - a. The word (participle from προσκαρτερέω, *proskartereō*) refers to persistence, to sticking to, remaining busy with, busily engaged in.
 - b. It is sometimes used to refer to staying close to a task or person, (Mark 3.9; Acts 2.46; 8.13; 10.7; Rom 13.6), but is often used of prayer (and teaching) (Acts 1.14; 2.42; 6.4; Col 4.2).
 - c. In this context, the idea involved is part of the attitude of devotion to God wherein lies our hope and from whom we gain strength for endurance.

Behavior

Verse 13 both continues the emphasis on the interconnectedness of the body and serves as a transition to vv. 14-21's focus on outside resistance and persecution. Sometimes, what we need in times that call for endurance is mutual assistance at a more tangible level.

1. The focus returns to "one another" (v. 10) and serves to remind us again that we are not isolationists in our walk of faith.
2. It's a reciprocal focus: just as we need support from others at times, so we are to seek opportunities to give others support as they need it.

Paul specifies two tasks.

1. "Contribut[ing] [participle] to the needs of the saints" – we can translate "sharing in" (κοινωνέω, *koinōneō*) (used again in 15.26 for the collection Paul gathered.)
2. "Seek to show hospitality" ("practicing hospitality" – NASB; participle).
 - a. "Seeking" reinforces the meaning of the word that is often translated "persecute" or "pursue" (διώκω, *diōkō*) (see Rom 12.14; also Matt 5.10-12). Hospitality is something to be purposefully sought.
 - b. But, what is hospitality (φιλοξενία, *philoxenia*, lover of strangers)?
 - i. In the ancient world, inns were dangerous and unfit. In both Jewish and Greek traditions, "hospitality to the stranger was deeply rooted and highly regarded in ancient society" (Dunn, 743).
 - ii. Judaism commanded it (Lev 19.34; Deut 10.19) and gave examples (Gen 18).
 - iii. "Hospitality was a key feature of Jesus' ministry, both in his dependence on it (Mark 1:29-31; 14:3; Luke 10:38-42) and in his practice and commendation of it as a model of divine generosity (Mark 2:15-17; Matt. 11:19 // Luke 7:34; Luke 14:1-24). The early mission would also depend on such hospitality (e.g., Mark 6:8-11 pars.; Acts 16:15; 18:3; see also 16:1-2, 13, 23)" (Dunn, 744).
 - c. Paul commends it as an expectation of brotherliness in the body.

Conclusion

These verses help us appreciate the wisdom of D. Elton Trueblood: "In our modern world, our real danger comes not from irreligion, but from mild religion."³

As we are doing throughout our study of this section, let's ask how we're doing with the living-sacrifice lifestyle:

1. Are we keeping up our fervor for service, or marking off the traditions?
2. Are we living in hope, bearing up and relying on God through the challenges of life?
3. Are we demonstrating real concern for our fellow body members?

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Notes

¹ Edward K. Rowell and Bonnie L. Steffen, eds. *Humor for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 34.

² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 753.

³ Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 26.