

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## Romans 12:11-12 “The Spiritual Responsibilities of Every Believer”

Intro. In Romans chapter 12 Paul deals with some of the most important practical aspects of living the Christian life. He lays the foundation for Christian living in vv.1-2. Then he deals with the important role of a believer in the local church in vv.3-8. Then, most of the rest of the chapter deals with day to day Christian responsibilities, mostly in relationship with other people. It may seem strange that the only verses that deal with the deeper aspects of spirituality are the two verses of my text today. The lesson from this may be that God doesn't have much use for a spirituality that does not make you a better person in relationship to other people. Conduct is so important.

In these verses of my text we will learn more about the inward qualities and activities of the Christian. Let's suppose that you have just become a Christian. What should you now do? Well in our text of Scripture we will cover three important areas of the Christian life. First, you need to serve the Lord. Then you need to learn how a Christian should respond to the trials of life. And then finally, you should learn to pray. In this text of Scripture Paul gives a series of 6 brief phrases that are full of meaning. So look with me first of all at the fact that:

### I. WE SHOULD SERVE THE LORD

In v.11 Paul says that we are to be “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” The first two phrases modify the last phrase of this verse “serving the Lord.” So that is the main thought here. All Christians are to serve the Lord. We have already seen from vv.3-8 that we all have received a spiritual gift to enable us to serve the Lord in the local church effectively. While service in the local church is one of the best ways to serve the Lord, there are other ways to serve the Lord besides an organized ministry of the local church. If you work hard at providing a good Christian home for your children you are serving the Lord. If you are a good Christian wife or husband, you are serving the Lord. If you are a witness for Christ on the job, you are serving the Lord.

Are you obedient to this verse, actively serving the Lord? I didn't ask if you attend church. I asked if you are actively serving the Lord.

Having extended that challenge, let us now consider the manner of our service, which is what most of this verse deals with. How are we to serve the Lord? First of all, we are to serve the Lord:

A. Obediently – Romans 12 uses three distinct words for the idea of “service” or serving. The first one is in v.1 (*latreuo*), which refers the service of worship. V.7 talks about the practical service of caring for others' needs (*diakoneo*). However, in v.11 the word Paul uses (*douleuo*) literally refers to the service of slavery. Slavery was a common way of life in the Roman Empire. The emphasis here is that we see ourselves as slaves of Christ. Thus, we are to serve the Lord with total obedience. Whatever He tells us to do, we should do. Serving Jesus Christ should not be considered optional for the Christian.

How can we serve the Lord with such obedience? Perhaps the best way is to remind ourselves of what Christ has done for us. He died for us, and saved us from the condemnation of sin. He is working to save us from the curse of sin. We should respond with loving obedience. Are you obedient to the call to serve the Lord?

Furthermore, we are to serve the Lord:

B. Continually – The word “serving” is a present tense. This indicates that Paul had in mind service that is of an ongoing nature. We are not to serve the Lord only on Sunday or at special times of the year, like Christmas & Easter. Furthermore, we are to serve the Lord in all realms of life. In everything we do, we are to do it as unto the Lord. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Do you serve the Lord regularly, or only occasionally? We are also to serve the Lord:

C. Diligently – In v.11 Paul says we are to be “not lagging in diligence.” “Lagging” is from *okneros*, which is from the verb meaning, “to be slow, to hesitate.” Some people are slow, reluctant, or hesitant about serving the Lord. The word also refers to idleness or laziness. We are not to be that way. “Diligence” is translated “business” in the King James Version. That makes it sound like this command has something to do with businessmen, and it has been erroneously used in that way. But when the King James was first translated, the old English word simply meant being busy at something (busy ness). The Greek word (*spoude*) has an opposite meaning from the one translated “lagging.” It refers to haste, speed; eagerness, earnestness, diligence, to be energetic. A better translation from the Greek text would be: “Not lazy in zeal.”

Yet avoiding hard work is the trend of our day. I remember when I worked one summer at a paper mill that the job foreman told me to slow down and quit working so hard. When I was growing up you had to get up to change the channel on the TV. Imagine that! Now they provide a remote control for just about everything. Even my gas logs have a remote control!

Now let’s see how we should apply this command. First, we are not to be lazy in our spiritual life. We often are diligent in the physical realm. We spend much time keeping ourselves healthy and attractive. But spiritual laziness is the cause of spiritual defeat. Every Christian should ponder this matter of lazy spiritual living. Many church members need to take this verse, write it out in big letters, and pin it up on the ceiling above their bed on Saturday night! Don’t be lazy about coming to church on Sunday morning!

Secondly, based on the context, we should be diligent in our service to the Lord, and in His church. Teachers, be diligent about preparing your lessons. Choir members, be diligent about coming to rehearsals. Committee workers, be diligent about attending meetings, and doing the work assigned to your committee. Leaders, we have already seen from v.8 that you are to be diligent in your duties. We should be very conscientious about doing a good job in serving the Lord. Yet many of us, if we would sit quietly down and think of how we go about our Christian life, which ought to be our highest business, would have great cause for being ashamed. Don’t grow lazy in the work of the Lord.

Finally, we should not be lazy, but diligent in other realms of life. There are a number of other scriptures that speak against being lazy in general. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.” Proverbs 18:9 says, “He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.” You see, Ecclesiastes 10:18 says, “Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.” In Ephesians 5:16 Paul said that we should live wisely, “redeeming the time...” Students, be diligent in your school work.

When I committed my life to the Lord at age 17, I became much more diligent in my schoolwork, and my grades improved quite a bit. Employees, be diligent on the job. All of us should be diligent with our responsibilities at home, whether it's cleaning house or your room, doing the laundry, taking out the garbage, or just picking up after yourself!

Furthermore, we are to serve the Lord:

D. Fervently – In the middle phrase of v.11, Paul says we are to be “fervent in spirit.” “Fervent” is from a word which means, “to boil.” We have too many lukewarm or cold Christians (Rev. 3:15-16). Fervency is the fuel that empowers diligence. Apollos was described as being fervent in spirit. Acts 18:25 says “being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord...” Paul the Apostle was a zealous worker. We can become weary in doing good. We can lose our zeal and excitement. So the Christian life needs to be filled with dynamic energy. There is a need for zeal in the work of the Lord. The Christian life ought to be filled with enthusiasm, zeal, excitement, joy, and dedication. There ought to be a glow and enthusiasm about you as a Christian that causes others to want what you have.

People can get excited about many things: a new house, a new car, or new clothes. They get excited over a sports team. Sometimes they act like idiots in their enthusiasm at the games, or even in front of the TV. When some people fall in love, the bells really ring. I wonder if we've ever experienced the same or greater intensity in serving the Lord Jesus Christ? Serving the Lord should be an exciting and joyful experience.

You say, “Preacher, how can I be fervent? Sometimes I just don't feel well. It's just not my personality to be fervent.” The answer may be found in how we interpret the phrase “fervent in spirit.” “Spirit” either refers to the human spirit (Murray) or to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps most commentators believe it is a reference to the Holy Spirit, partially because of the definite article before the word “spirit.” [However, the article is used at the beginning of every phrase of vv.10-13, so this argument is not conclusive]. If so, Paul is saying that we are to rely upon the Holy Spirit to produce this fervency from within. We should be so filled with the Holy Spirit that we radiate with the presence of Jesus Christ. This glow of the Spirit is the warmth of the soul touched by the love of Christ. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in all believers, will glow through those who allow Him to fill and direct their lives. On the other hand, Paul may simply be saying that we should have spiritual fervency, and not just fervency in the flesh (locative of sphere), or produced by the flesh.

But this boiling love and joy and diligence should do something in our lives. Boiling water makes steam, does it not? And what is to be done with the steam that comes off the “boiling spirit?” There may be too little outlet provided for the fervor to work in. I cannot understand any man believing the truths on which the whole New Testament insists, and keeping himself cool, or as our friends call it, “moderate.”

If you serve Christ with diligence & zeal, you will usually face adversity from Satan and others. Many Christians in Paul's day faced persecution. I believe that even in our country, we are going to experience more and more persecution as we take a stand for the Lord. So Paul goes on to deal with another important command:

## II. LIVE FOR THE LORD IN ADVERSITY

Paul said in v.12 that we are to be “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation...” The word “tribulation” literally refers to pressure, and so Paul has in mind those troubles and trials that

tend to create stress in our lives. Job once said, “As sparks fly from an anvil, so is man born unto trouble.” Trials and tribulations are just a part of this sin-cursed world in which we are living, and Christians are not exempt. And so people have developed different ways to cope with life’s adversities. In Paul’s day there were the stoics. They endeavored to keep a stiff upper lip and make a bold show, as though this were self-sufficient to meet life. They try not to let troubles bother them. The Epicureans dealt with life’s troubles in an opposite way. They shrugged their shoulders and decided that it was best to compensate for life’s troubles by living wholly for self, and suck every possible pleasure from each day. When troubles come, they try to act as though they don’t exist. We have plenty of people who follow that philosophy today. The entertainment industry tends to fair better during recessions and depressions than other industries.

Then we have the “Go With the Flow” types. When things are going well, they are happy. When things are not, they are unhappy. They just accept the reality of life’s troubles, and often sadness and a general grey tone comes over them, broken only by occasional bursts of foolish laughter. Others simply try their best to escape or avoid life’s troubles. If they have trouble on the job, they change jobs. If they have trouble in the marriage, they change spouses. And when they can’t avoid trouble, they escape through drugs and alcohol.

Yet how is a Christian to face trouble & tribulation? Paul gives 3 important ways to face adversity and troubles:

A. We Should Rejoice in Our Hope – That’s what Paul says we should do in v.12. It is easy to be glad and rejoice when circumstances are going well. But Paul encourages us to rejoice even in times of trial. As Paul wrote, “sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). It is a Christian duty to be joyful (Phil. 4). Many of us have just enough religion to make us sad and somber, but not enough to make us glad.

But how can we rejoice, even when things are bad all around us? True joy is not a matter of circumstances. It is not a matter of temperament, so much as a matter of faith. Paul is saying here that we should rejoice because of our hope. Instead of focusing on your troubles, focus instead on our Christian hope. You realize that things may be difficult right now, but God has promised us a much brighter future, and we can rejoice in that. You see, the hope is the cause or the ground of the joy.

We all know that certain hope brings joy. I remember when I was in college; I had a tough schedule and some tough courses. But one thing that kept me going was the hope that in a few months or weeks the semester would be over and I would be able to go home to George and relax with my family and see my girlfriend Cheryl! If we by faith can grasp the certainty of our hope, then we too can rejoice. It is our hope for the future that keeps us going.

There are two objects of hope in particular that give us joy. First of all, based on the previous verse, we can rejoice in our hope of heavenly reward. Our service to the Lord is motivated by our hope for the day when we will rest from our labors and be rewarded. I serve because someday I want to stand before the Lord and hear Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant.” Because of the hope of our future resurrection, Paul exhorts us to “therefore...be...steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Secondly, it is our hope of eternal life and heavenly glory. No matter how dark the world is, or how hard the task is, we eagerly anticipate future glory. Hebrews 12:2 says that we should look “unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross...” Because of our hope we can rejoice even when the circumstances are bad. Hope delivers us from the present fear of death. It

comforts us when our saved loved one die. It helps us see the present world of misery in a different light, knowing that it shall end in God's time. But we do grieve at sin and suffering. We are not insensitive to it. But yet we still can maintain a gentle, constant joy because of the hope that we have. Since God is God and we are His, this is the only way to live. Rejoice in hope!! Praise Him!!

So as you face tribulation and trials, remember to focus on your hope as a Christian, and you will be able to rejoice even in the midst of your trials.

Furthermore, as we face trials and difficulties:

B. We Should Remain Steadfast – In the middle of v.12 Paul says we are to be “patient in tribulation.” “Patient” is from *hupomeno* – to abide under. This word suggests that we are not to try to escape our tribulations, but remain under them until God removes them. We remain under the test in a God-honoring manner to learn the lessons it was sent to teach. Most people seek to escape troubles through drugs or alcohol, or by getting away from your problems in some way.

Jesus is the greatest example of steadfastness in the face of trouble. He endured much suffering 12 hours or so before He was crucified. He endured incredible suffering while on the cross. He could have escaped it all by slipping into the darkness minutes before He was arrested. He could have escaped it all by calling 12 legions of angels to rescue Him. Instead, He remained steadfast, and drank every drop of suffering from the cup of wrath that we deserve. Thus Hebrews 12:3 says that we should “consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself...”

Why should you be willing to patiently remain under trails? Why not escape from trials and tribulations?

1. Adversity provides a great witness for the Lord – Sometimes God demonstrates His power by delivering us from trouble. But perhaps more often He demonstrates His power by enabling us to continue with joy even under the most trying of circumstances.

2. With Christ adversity makes you a better person - I believe that one of the reasons the Lord allows the pressure to remain is to keep us in communion with Him. We can grow spiritually during such times. Back in Romans 5:3-4 Paul said, “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” James 1:2-3 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” Every problem has a purpose. So instead of trying to escape your problems, you should ask God for the strength to persevere until He has accomplished His purpose for allowing this trial in your life.

How can we acquire this character quality? One way is found right here in the same verse. The more we rejoice in our hope, the more we can persevere through our trials. We can stay under pressure because we know what's coming. Perseverance is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Trust in the Spirit to give you the strength to abide under trials.

A third way we should respond to the trials of life is this:

C. We Should Pray - Of course, trials tend to drive us to our knees in prayer. In fact, I read in *Christianity Today* that 97% of patients pray the night before they have heart surgery (2/4/2002). Prayer is the means ordained of God for the supply of grace sufficient for every crisis and particularly against the faintheartedness to which affliction tempts us.

However, pray is not just something we do in times of crisis. So another major responsibility of the Christian is this:

### III. WE SHOULD BE DEVOTED TO PRAYER

In the last of v.12 Paul says that we are to be “continuing steadfastly in prayer.” Prayer is one of the most important things you can do as a Christian. It is an important aspect of our service to God. But what is prayer? Prayer is nothing more than simply talking to God. For most of us, we can talk with someone more freely if we know them, and have something in common with them. If you pray very little, it may be because you do not know the Lord, or you do not know the Lord very well. So get to know the Lord through His Word the Bible, and then you will find that it is much easier to talk to Him.

Now Paul says one thing in particular about prayer here in this verse. He says that we are to be “continuing steadfastly in prayer.” “Continuing steadfastly” is from one Greek word (*proskartereo*), to be devoted to, to persist in. We are to be busily engaged in prayer. The same word is used with reference to prayer in Acts 6:4, where the apostles said, “but we will give ourselves continually to prayer....” So we are not to pray just when troubles come our way, but we are to pray with regularity, and persistently.

What are you devoted to? Some of you are devoted to keeping up your appearance and you will spend at least an hour each day on that. Some of you are devoted to a TV program. You will not miss it. Some of you are devoted to watching your football or basketball team. You wouldn't miss it if at all possible. But the question is, are you as devoted to prayer as you are to some other things in life? If not, what does that tell you about yourself? Is there a need to rearrange your priorities? Do you need a closer walk with the Lord? Don't put yourself in a situation where God has to allow some trial into your life just to hear from you more often. Be devoted to prayer. Set aside time each day for prayer. Some are devoted to our Wednesday prayer meeting. Some are devoted to our Friday morning prayer meeting. Whether we are facing trials or not, we are to be devoted to prayer. Do you know what we call our time of daily Bible reading & prayer? We call it a devotional. That's because we are to be devoted to Bible reading & prayer.

Conclusion: I have shared with you some of the more important aspects of living the Christian life. We should serve with Lord diligently and fervently. We should face the trials and troubles of life by rejoicing in our hope, and with perseverance and prayer. Have you been falling short in any of these areas of living the Christian life? If so, it may be that you are not yet a true Christian. To live the Christian life you must first become a Christian! So I invite you to repent of your sin, and trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Others of you just need to confess your failure to God, receive His forgiveness, and make a commit to put into practice the commands that we have looked at today. Tomorrow night you should be able to reflect back on the last 36 hours and see a difference in how you have lived. It's time for a new beginning in your Christian life.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, “God's Discipline” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *Supernatural Living: Study Notes on Romans 12:9-21* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)

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