

MARKS OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN

Romans 12:9-21

Introduction: What Behavior Marks a True Believer?

I. Personal Behavior (v.9, 11-12)

- A. Christians are Genuine: "Let love be genuine" (v.9a)
 - o How does our culture value more about what's on the outside than inside?
 - o What defines Christians is that they are not fakes or hypocrites. We really believe what we are saying!

"They [unbelievers] will hardly believe a man that seemeth not to believe himself. If one bid you run for your lives because a bear or enemy is at your backs, and yet does not mend his own pace, you will be tempted to think he is but in jest, and there really is no danger as he alleges."
--Richard Baxter
- B. Christians Love Righteousness: "Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (v.9b)
 - o Our world defines love as never making distinctions between right and wrong; to do so, it is argued, is to be judgmental and hateful
 - o But, Christians are not ambivalent, unconcerned, or undecided about right and wrong.

**Simple point: we should love what God loves

 - o Notice Paul includes *both* the positive (love good) and negative (abhor evil). Why do you think we prefer to do the former, but are silent about the latter?
- C. Christians are Zealous: "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit" (v.11)
 - o Christian life is marked by *energy* and *passion* for the things of God!
 - o Why do you think apathy is one of the most dangerous sins?
- D. Christians are Persevering: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (v.12)
 - o If we are to persevere through the ups and downs of the Christian life, all three of these things must be true of us
 - o How do hope, patience, and prayer all relate to each other and need each other?

II. Behavior in Relation to Other Believers (v.10, 13, 15-16)

A. Love and Honor One Another (v.10, 16)

- o Paul invokes the language of family: "brotherly affection"
- o Christian relationships should be marked by honor, not slander, backbiting, gossip, and competition
- o Opposite of honor is being "haughty" and refusing to associate with "lowly" (v.16)

B. Meet Each Other's Needs (v.13)

- o Paul likely has physical needs in mind here, something that was a major issue in the early church
- o "Hospitality" is repeatedly put forth in Scripture as the mark of a Christian
 - ** Earliest Christians in the Greco-Roman world were known for the generosity and kindness to one another (and strangers)

C. Share Each Other's Burdens (v. 15)

- o Paul likely has emotional burdens in mind here
- o If we are one in Christ, then when one part of the body hurts, all parts hurt

III. Behavior in Relation to Enemies (v.14, 17-21)

A. Do Not Repay Anyone for Evil (v.17a, 19)

- o Paul recognizes the reality of enemies and assumes that evil will be done to you
- o How do you resist taking revenge?
 - Remember that Christ did not retaliate
 - Entrust yourself to the justice of God which is perfect

B. Actively do Good to Your Enemies (v.14, 20-21)

- o Paul takes it to the next level: it's one thing to not retaliate, it's another to do good!
- o Reasons to do good to your enemies:
 - Christ was good to his enemies
 - God was good to you when you were an enemy
 - Your goodness can convict your enemy of sin and lead them to Christ

Discussion Groups

1. Honestly share your level of “zeal” for the things of God right now? What’s stifling your zeal? What can be done to address this?

2. Why do you think people in the church struggle with Paul’s call to “outdo one another in showing honor”? If the church does struggle with this, how can we change the tone of Christian community away from competition and backbiting?

3. How does Paul’s teaching on enemies help you think about facing a hostile world today? How does it change your expectations about what you will experience in this life?
