

SESSION 4

COMMITTED TO HIS CHURCH

THE POINT:
COMMITMENT TO
CHRIST INCLUDES A
COMMITMENT TO HIS
BODY, THE CHURCH.

ROMANS /// 12:3-16

MEMORY VERSE

³ For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. ⁴ Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, ⁵ in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

⁶ According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; ⁷ if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; ⁸ if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.

¹⁰ Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. ¹³ Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

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KEYWORDS

a: Sensibly (v. 3) – To be of sound mind. As part of a renewed mind, the Christian is to think wisely about one's self and what one's function is to be in the church.

b: Hypocrisy (v. 9) – Love should be free from hidden agendas. God calls us to real and sincere love.

WHAT ARE REASONS WE SHOULD LOVE THE CHURCH?

“Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.” Many of us have used that timeworn phrase, but as we get to know a friend’s friend, we may change our tune. Just because we have something in common with a friend doesn’t mean we have anything in common with his other friends.

Friendships are one thing, but it’s a different matter with those we love. If someone said to you, “I love you, but I can’t stand your spouse,” it would probably be devastating. Someone can’t truly love another person without also loving that person’s spouse. Such a negative attitude would be a barrier in a relationship.

We hear a similar statement in our culture: “I love Jesus, but I don’t love the church.” Maybe they’ve been hurt by people in the church or they found commitment to the church is too demanding or difficult. Whatever the reason, this sentiment is far from the heart of God. After all, the church is the bride of Christ.

We are to love that which Christ loves, and that includes His bride, the church.

We Are One Body in Christ

// Romans 12:3-5

Regardless of our view of the church, as Christ’s followers we are connected to the church. “We . . . are one body in Christ.” We don’t lose our individuality, but we are inseparably connected to other Christians. We may differ in our race, ethnic background, gender, and socioeconomic status, but we are all one in Christ.

Our bodies illustrate how we are one in the church. Different parts of our bodies look different and do different things, but every part makes up who we are. We’re one body made of different, unique, and amazing parts. Our body parts can’t be changed; they remain part of our bodies. The same is true for the church.

Paul explained it like this: we are not only individually connected to Christ, but we’re “individually members of one another.” We need each other and belong to each other. Christ formed His church; we need each other in order



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for the church to function as a healthy body.

HOW DOES BEING A PART OF THE CHURCH BENEFIT US?

The world looks at diversity and creates division; we should not. We shouldn't separate ourselves based on race, politics, socioeconomic status, or anything else. Within the church, divisions shouldn't exist. Christ reaches into our divisions and brings people to faith in Him. He loves us all equally and brings us together through shared faith.

This means, no believer is “to think of himself more highly than he should think.” Rather, we're to “think sensibly,” acknowledging that we're not better than anyone. We're not only unique, we're uniquely gifted by God. We “are one body in Christ.”

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR A CHURCH TO SEE ITSELF AS ONE BODY IN CHRIST?

We Have Gifts to Support Each Other

// Romans 12:6-8

We need each other to grow, flourish, and become everything God has called us to be. God gives believers different gifts so we can help and support each other. We often refer to these gifts as

“spiritual gifts.” When we are saved, each one of us—each member of the body of Christ—is given a unique gifting that we are to use for the purpose of helping the body of Christ—the church—be everything she has been created and called to be.

Paul only listed a few of these gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and showing mercy. This isn't the complete list of gifts. Paul also referred to gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11, and each list is different. He stated, “We are to do that which is obvious to us and which we feel compelled and capable of doing.”

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN OTHERS USING THEIR GIFTS WITHIN THE CHURCH?

Our human tendency is to think some gifts are more important than others. Conversely, far too many Christians believe they don't play an important role in the kingdom of God. They think to themselves, “I'm not a pastor, worship leader, or missionary, so I'm not that important.” That idea cannot be derived from this passage! In Ephesians 4, Paul stated:

“From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by



DIGGING DEEPER GOD'S GRACE

In Romans 12:3, Paul wrote about God's grace to him. In 12:6, he turned attention to ways God graces all Christians with gifts for use in the ministries of the church. When Paul brought up the idea of gifts, the word he used derives from the Greek word for “grace,” underscoring the remarkable connection between God's grace and believers' gifts. The Holy Spirit graces the church with spiritual gifts He distributes to Christians for them to use in carrying out the Lord's work together. Paul noted the gifts were different even though all of them came from the same gracious God.

In what ways do we extend God's grace to others when we use our spiritual gifts?



every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part” (Eph. 4:16).

It bears repeating: “The whole body . . . promotes the growth of the body.” We are each part of the whole body. Regardless of our spiritual gifts, we’re each critical to the life and ministry of the body of Christ.

The church does not function and grow only because preachers preach and teachers teach. The body grows as each one of us uses the gifts God graciously gave us. The church can’t reach its full potential until all individual parts use the gifts God has given them for the good and growth of the body.

Unfortunately, there are no perfect churches. We create

a bigger problem when we point the blame at different parts of the body. “Evaluating and placing blame” is not a spiritual gift. Instead, we must exercise our gifts “according to the grace given to us,” and we are to do our part to build up and work for the health of our church.

WHAT ARE SOME OBSTACLES THAT WOULD PREVENT US FROM USING OUR GIFTS AS GOD INTENDED?

We Are to Love and Serve Together

// Romans 12:9-16

In verse 12, Paul gave us the “secret ingredient” that enables the body of Christ to grow, thrive, and become the healthiest version of itself: “love.” This is the Greek word *agape*, a word that expresses the essential nature of God

(1 John 4:8). This is not a term that describes emotions; it is a word about how we act. We are not called to have just warm and fuzzy feelings about the church; rather, we are to love the church by serving her with our hearts and lives. We act with a love-infused, “all-in” commitment to Christ’s church

Paul built on this *agape* love by referring to *philadelphia*: brotherly love. We are to “love one another deeply as brothers and sisters.”

HOW DOES GENUINE CHRISTIAN LOVE DIFFER FROM THE WORLD’S IDEA OF LOVE?

In these verses, Paul gave us a picture of what sacrificial love looks like. These verses point out the action steps of love. Consider how we are to carry out these actions with Christlike love. Don’t be lazy. Be fervent (passion).

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Serve. Rejoice. Be patient. Pray persistently (continually). Contribute (give). Show hospitality (friendly). Bless. Weep with those that weep. Live in harmony (in agreement). Don't be haughty (feel superior). Don't think of yourself too highly. This is what love looks like.

What a beautiful picture it is! Surely anyone among us would want to be a part of a church full of members like that, but this beautiful picture of what the church is to be begins with you and me. Why should we love and serve the church in this sacrificial way? Because that is exactly how Christ loved us. Jesus didn't sit back in heaven, fold His arms, and tell us to get our act together before He would love us. Despite all our failures and shortcomings, He left the glory of heaven, put on our broken flesh, and came to this planet for one reason: to love us. "God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). If Jesus loves us—His bride—in this sacrificial way, how then can we not love her in the same way?

WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROMOTE HARMONY IN THE CHURCH?

DID YOU KNOW?

Minister Richard Allen is credited with opening the first national African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in Philadelphia in 1794. Allen converted to Methodism at the age of 17, after hearing a white itinerant Methodist preacher preach against slavery. Later, he became a preacher at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church where blacks and whites worshiped together. But Allen became frustrated with the limitations placed on him and black congregants, which included segregating pews. Also, the church leadership designated Allen's service to a different place. He believed the move to be bigoted and started what would become Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church today. It's the oldest property to be owned continuously by African-Americans.¹³

WHAT TYPE OF BOND DO THE STRUGGLES BLACKS EXPERIENCED IN THE EARLY YEARS OF CHURCH CREATE IN TODAY'S CHURCHES?

LIVE IT

The ingredients of a healthy church include loving one another, serving, and using our gifts for His glory. Every believer has something to offer the church. We can't sit in a sanctuary and watch those serving and not use our God-given gift(s). The growth of a healthy church depends on our willingness to work together and use our gifts for His glory.

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- Identify the spiritual gift(s) God has given you. Ask your pastor or others in your group how you might utilize your gift to minister, strengthen, and support your church.
- If you know a fellow believer who is not using his or her spiritual gift, lovingly confront and encourage the person to carry out his role in the body of Christ.

DAILY READINGS

1. DEVOTED HEART // PSALM 119:9-10

Have you heard the phrase: “it’s a heart issue”? It means, what your heart is devoted to directs your emotions, desires, words, and actions. The psalmist provided a formula for developing a godly heart issue. When we seek God’s wisdom through His Word, it causes us to check ourselves and make a change, according to God’s guidance. Further, the psalmist challenged us to seek God’s Word and not stray from it, intentionally or unintentionally. A heart devoted to God is a heart seeking and following His Word.

Allow God’s Word to change your heart as well as your life.

2. LISTEN // DEUTERONOMY 27:9

Some people don’t listen when you’re talking to them, especially when it’s a subject on which you don’t agree. They hear the words you are saying, but they are “not listening.” Their focus is on saying what is on their minds so they can push their point. Listening is active, but hearing is passive. In this verse, the Israelites (and us) are advised to actively listen to God. This is listening without considering our own opinions or perspectives. It is active listening that naturally leads to actively obeying God’s Word.

We should listen with open hearts and minds to what God says to us in His Word.

3. PLANNED RESCUE // GALATIANS 1:3-4

The U.S. Coast Guard rescues people from dangerous situations on the water. They ensure the safety and security of the nation’s waterways. Their power to rescue does not extend beyond the water. God planned our rescue from sin before we knew we were in trouble. His reach is not limited like the

Coast Guard. But no matter where we are in this evil world, or what we are going through, God can reach us. Through Jesus, we have been freed from the clutches of the enemy.

**Praise God, we were rescued from our sin.
Now let us live our lives for Him.**

4. KEEP PRAYING // COLOSSIANS 4:2-4

Paul advised the church at Colosse to be devoted to prayer. He explained that prayer should be specific and filled with gratitude. We should not just pray for ourselves but also for other believers. Paul even asked for prayer for himself. He was not concerned about his safety, but he was concerned about his ability to boldly and clearly proclaim the Word of God. Like Paul, we all need prayer.

Therefore, we should keep praying so God’s will is fulfilled through you and through the lives of other believers.

5. DON’T WORRY—PRAY // PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Stress from life’s circumstances can cause worry. Paul tells us that the secret to obtaining God’s peace in our lives is found in prayer. He made it clear that there are no circumstances that cannot be impacted by the power of prayer. He said “in everything” we should pray. And when we pray, the Spirit of God calms our hearts, giving us peace we can’t understand. God’s peace is different from the peace of the world. We can’t get it on our own. It comes when we give God control of our circumstances through prayer. The choice is yours; you can worry or pray.

But if you want to worry less and have peace, you should pray!