

Dartmouth Bible Church
N. Dartmouth, MA

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ROMANS 12 - A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR A CHURCH COVENANT

The Back of the Christian's Hand Romans 12: 1,2

Introduction: We have been talking for a couple of weeks now about the subject of our Church Covenant here at Dartmouth Bible Church. We are somewhat unusual today in even having such a document because most churches no longer use church covenants. But as we said in the Adult Sunday School class last week, the use of a church covenant, or agreement, is something which many Bible-believing (evangelical) churches DID practice in earlier centuries, and it is a spiritually profitable thing to do.

A church covenant is "a solemn agreement between the members of a church, as that they will act together in harmony with the precepts (principles) of the Gospel" (The American College Dictionary). It is not an oath. It is not a legalistic document which the church leadership can use to bop people across the head with. But a church covenant is a statement of mutual agreement to live and grow together in the Word of God, under the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is a philosophy of the Christian life. It is a guideline for what sort of things we are striving for. It is a goals statement for the church members. It is a succinct statement of our identity as a corporate part of the universal Body of Christ.

For the next several weeks we will be looking at the twelfth chapter of Romans. Today we will look at Romans 12: 1,2. I have entitled this message "The Back of the Christian's Hand" because most of you probably know these two verses LIKE the back of your hand.

As we consider the role of our church covenant, I believe we can find no more appropriate passage of Scripture as a backdrop than the twelfth chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Rome. Romans has 16 chapters, the first 11 of which are doctrinal in content. Romans is the greatest single piece of Christian literature ever written. It is disputed by virtually no one as being authentically from the pen of Paul, and anyone who would be a teacher of Christian truth must wrestle with its content. The doctrine in Romans 1-11 is more the meat of the Word of God than it is the milk. There are difficult sections which deal with difficult issues. But you can invest your time in no finer reading than in Paul's Letter to the Romans.

But after dealing with many heavy topics, and drawing out the basic truths of justification, sanctification, the sinful nature of man, the absolute sovereignty of God, and so forth, Paul now turns to matters at hand specifically in the lives of the Roman Christians. This is what the last five chapters of the book deal with.

The basis of holy living is sound doctrine. The basis of our church covenant, which spells out specific areas of commitment for church

members, is the doctrinal foundation set down earlier in the Constitu. Holy living flows out of being grounded in sound doctrine. You should never apologize for being doctrinally minded. I will surely never say, "I'm sorry for screening everything through the system of truth layed out in the Bible."

So Paul's turning point in this letter comes on the heels of the greatest exposition of Christian truth ever written...Only after talking about what Jesus has already accomplished in HIS sacrifice, does he now turn to the matter of how OUR lives are to be a sacrifice.

ROMANS 12: 1 Paul now appeals to the Roman Christians AND TO US, to live completely for Christ. Under the Old Covenant (agreement, testament) animals which were free from blemish were presented and devoted or given over to God. Under the New Covenant (agreement, testament) "a nobler and more spiritual service is to be rendered" (Charles Hodge, Comm. on Romans). We are at once temple, priest and sacrifice, all at once, as Jesus Christ was on the cross.

Sometimes you may hear Bible teachers tell you that the aorist tense in the word "present" means this is a once and for all act of giving yourself into God's hands. This is not the true meaning of the aorist tense. Here, the aorist infinitive tells us to ADOPT AN ONGOING ATTITUDE OF DECISION in living the Christian life. It is not just one crisis decision that you make as a Christian, that "now I am going to live a life obedient to the Lord." It is a series of innumerable decisions. You wake up tomorrow morning and you say, "Lord help me TODAY to live for you." You face a temptation on Wednesday afternoon and you say to yourself, "OK, SELF--YOU ARE THE LORD'S VESSEL. YOU MUST DO WHAT PLEASES HIM. You decide often and as a LIFESTYLE to make decisions which honor the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word!"

The verse says to present our bodies. We must work on sanctifying our minds. We must work on letting the Lord heal and regenerate our emotions. But HERE the apostle urges and pleads with us to begin by turning over our BODIES to the Lordship of Christ:

Some of us, I know, feel like saying, "Lord, surely you don't want THIS body! Let me tell you something about it. It's got B.O. It snores. It has a bad heart, Lord. It has a dirty mind. You don't want this body. I have trouble with this body. It is always tripping me up. My spirit is great and I worship you with my soul; but the body, Lord, that's what gets me down." But the Lord says, "Bring your body." Ray Stedman, Sermon.

Sometimes we get into discussions about "free-will." I do not believe the non-Christian has technically a free will. His will is in bondage to the flesh. It is blinded to spiritual truth and is the slave of original and habitual sin. But the WILL OF THE CHRISTIAN is another matter! I believe that in Christ our wills are revitalized. That is why the apostle bids us to make a free-will offering of our bodies.

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. I Corinthians 6:20

The presenting of the body to God implies not only the avoiding of sins that are committed with or against the body, but the using of the body as a servant of the soul in the service of God. Matthew Henry's Comm.

Sometimes people who say they are born-again Christians but do not go to church much, tell preachers that, "Well I was with you folks in spirit last Sunday. My body was on the golf course, but my spirit was with my brothers and sisters there worshipping the Lord."

Sometimes Christians will write a check to the church or to some mission agency, and believe they have done at least what is required of them, if not BEYOND. But where is the body? Its back at home pursuing self-interests.

Do you see, dear ones, that your heart never leaves your body? You will BE at those locations that you are most interested in. Come June, I will BE in South Carver attending Rail Fan Day at Edaville Railroad, because THAT'S WHERE MY HEART IS! I won't say to Bob, "Well, here's a check--you just deliver it for me...Or well, I was with you in spirit." Where your body is that's where your deepest affections lie. Also what you do with your body shows your greatest loyalties.

Another point on the kind of sacrifice Paul speaks of: it is living sacrifice. Its not like the blood of a sacrificial animal from the Old Testament arrangement: the blood drips down for a few minutes and then has expended itself. But the kind of life we are to live as true Christians is to be characterized by a "perpetual sacrifice never to be neglected or recalled" (Hodge).

The trouble with a sacrifice that is still alive, is that it tends to keep crawling off the altar...

Now let me say a word to a number of you here in Dartmouth Bible Church who have said to me on several occasions, "I get so weary of having a guilt trip laid on me." I sympathize. Bible teaching which seeks to motivate out of guilt is NOT Bible teaching in keeping with the spirit of the New Testament.

You must each work out your own salvation. But you must be working on it. You must be working on it with fear and trembling. You must not become complacent with having reached a certain plateau of spirituality, and say, "Well, I'm content here, I think I'll stay here for five years or so." That is not the mindset of a living sacrifice. A living sacrifice will be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to probe into new areas of your life, heretofore untouched by His sanctifying work. The Lord will be gentle and understanding with you, but you must be willing to be instructed in new areas of your life. You must be teachable. You must also be available. And you must be willing to change!

THAT is the kind of commitment we are to have to the Lord. That is the kind of worship and service which pleases Him.

ROMANS 12: 2 It's also on Paul's heart to say something about the gravitational pull of the world on us, even after we are saved. The idea is that Christians are not to think they are better than those in the world around them. They are to BE better than those in the world around them. Christians are not to be pressed into the world's mold. Now I love America. I love Massachusetts. And I'm coming to love New Bedford. And even in New Bedford there are peculiarities of the Willow Street/Cedar Street area. I am a citizen of my town and I am to be the salt of the earth on Willow Street. But I am not to be influenced in my lifestyle by the sinful tendencies of my surroundings. And if you think its tough living in your neighborhood, or with your job situation, or in YOUR family, just try living in Rome in about 60 AD, as a Christian. The Romans did not yet even RECOGNIZE Christianity as much more than just another wacky variant of Judaism. They got a kick out of killing Christians in fact, from time to time. Prostitution was not only legal, it was part of the state economy. Diseases had no cures. Christians (nor anyone else) had any welfare. There was no quasi-Christian Moral Majority (or Liberty Foundation) to lobby for Judeo-Christian values on a national level.

And in THIS ENVIRONMENT Christians were urged to avoid conformity with their world's values. Christians are to radically different. We are to be concerned MOSTLY about doing the will of God. You say, "Well I don't know what the will of God is." And I say, "Get to know the Book." And you say, "Yes, but the Book doesn't say anything about whether to invest in real estate, C.D.'s, Treasury bills or Westport Quahog Commodities Corporation." Indeed it doesn't, but it does speak alot to the question about attitudes about money, and wisdom in how to handle it.

Well what does all of this have to do with the Church Covenant that we have among the members here at Dartmouth Bible Church? Let me make a few suggestions:

1. A church covenant is just a page and a half of words. There is nothing mystical about it. But it is a statement of what our philsofhy of the Christian life is. It spells out our goals as Christians, based on our binding together as living sacrifices. We are not just church-going folk!
2. Membership in a church and ascribing to a church covenant are aids in withstanding the storm of the world. This is not melodrama (I Peter 5:8,9). In the "Wizard of Oz" the three heros were searching for things they already had! Scarecrow got a diploma, because he was already brilliant. Lion got a medal. He was really a noble creature already. Tin Man got a testimonial because he had within him already a big heart! We have a Church Covenant, because we already have a New Covenant with the living God, and with His Son. And He has already BOUND US TOGETHER IN HIM! That is the realtiy!

ROMANS 12 - A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR A CHURCH COVENANT

Sound Thinking and the Ministry Romans 12: 3-8

Introduction: In too many churches today the measure of success that is used is how thoroughly the members have been entertained. A worship service is considered a good one if the special music was performed in a particularly skillful fashion, if the preacher succeeded in making the people laugh often and his illustrations were intriguing. The music played during the offering (the "offeratory") was especially moving. And if an outside reporter was present, the review of the service would read something like, "the church service at XYZ Church left one with a lasting feeling of religiosity, much like that gratifying sensation you have when you leave the theatre at the close of a fine play..."

The yardstick of success used on many church worship services today is not so much whether the God of the Bible was pleased and ministered to Himself by it, as whether the service "came together" skillfully and whether the key players knew their parts.

But for a group of Christians who meet for an hour or an hour and a half each week, the goal should be much simpler. The yardstick of success is whether the Living God was worshipped according to those criteria set down in the Word of God. Was Jesus Christ honored, praised and loved by the whole group? Was the leading of the Holy Spirit followed? Did each individual person come with praises to offer God the most pressing thing on his or her mind? Did that little group come together to edify and build one another up? Was the encouragement of my brothers and sisters paramount in my mind? Did I leave the service a little more motivated (perhaps ALOT more motivated) to walk this week in obedience to the Scripture?

At Dartmouth Bible Church we entertain a Church Covenant among the members. A church covenant is an agreement among the members to act together in harmony with the principles of the Gospel. The covenant is not something which is hung over our heads as a legalistic taskmaster. It is a guideline or a goals statement as to what our ambitions are as a church!

Section 5 of our Church Covenant reads as follows:

To be willing to serve faithfully in some activity in the church body according to my spiritual gift(s) and abilities, taking care to assume only such duties consistent with my conduct and can be effectively performed, and to improve my service by prayerful study of God's Word.

In Dartmouth Bible Church you will be regularly encouraged to find some place of ministry which you are comfortable in and enjoy. Occasionally I have been informed by someone in our Body that they have no time nor inclination to serve in any capacity. It is a small minority, probably smaller than in most churches. I hope to show you this morning that our

goals include the Scriptural use of every member of the Body of Christ in the service and worship of the Lord. Our worship goes beyond Sunday mornings, 10:55 AM to 12:15 PM. My whole life is to be filled with worship and service to the Lord who has saved me by His grace. I am not just to be on my best behavior between 10:55 AM and 12:15 PM on Sundays--washed and scrubbed, spit and polished for a little over an hour each week.

Paul has told me in I Corinthians 6: 9-11,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Spirit of our God.

So dear ones, when we come together for worship, we come together as a group of sinners, washed in the blood of the Lamb! And THEREFORE, we should be prepared and should come ready to serve one another, out of our love and gratitude for what Jesus has done for us.

What I am saying, is that a believer's devotion (consecration) to God, and his transformed lifestyle are DEMONSTRATED in his exercising his spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ. This is the main point this morning.

Romans 12:3 An inflated view of oneself is out of place in the Christian life (John Witmer, B.K. Comm.). If a Christian is walking with the Lord, living the life of a living sacrifice, attempting to avoid conformity with the self-actualized philosophies of the world, he is going to recognize that any abilities and gifts he has are by the grace of God.

But I do not think that pride in using spiritual gifts is a problem so much here at Dartmouth Bible Church. I think the reverse is more the case...some of you are not sure whether you HAVE a spiritual gift or two, and you struggle with insecurity rather than pride.

The second part of the verse tells us to have sound judgement in evaluating ourselves. The Greek word is "sophronein," and it means literally to USE SOUND THINKING. What we need in Dartmouth Bible Church is Christians who know right where they are. We need believers who know how God has equipped them to minister, and who do not doubt that ability even when things are not going all that smoothly.

If you are a Christian this morning, the Bible clearly teaches that you have been allotted a measure of faith. You have AT LEAST one gift, one TOOL that God has given you to use in the Body. If our church covenant is to have any use, then each Christian here needs to KNOW what your gift is, and use it in the Body faithfully.

I know that a number of you are unsure of yourselves. Some of you labor under an uncertainty about whether you CAN effectively minister to your brothers and sisters. Let me assure you that there is NO ONE in this room that is UNABLE to be greatly used of God. You may be timid, shy, or tentative about having an impact in someone else's life...But on the

authority of the Word of God, I tell you that you are necessary to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in this locality.

Romans 12: 4,5 Churches can be many things. They can be slick organizations. They might be supper clubs. Some churches resemble little colleges. I know one church in the city of Dallas, Texas which is practically a small country! They have a parking garage, swimming pool, bowling alley and racket ball courts, all of this in a decent, Bible-believing church. But WHAT GOD IS DESIGING IN US, is that we are a Body, in many deliberate ways like a human body.

There is one head, Christ. He is the boss of this church. He is the brains in this church. He wears the pants in this family. All members in the body take their cue from the Head, Jesus Christ. If a member is not controlled by the head, it is a strange thing, much like that involuntary TWITCH a person can get, which distracts and annoys. If you are a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, then you are concerned with doing GOD'S will and with recognizing Jesus Christ as Lord of your life. And He is Lord over your place in this body too.

When a person becomes a Christian--I mean, when they trust Christ and are truly born again--they are immediately grafted into the Body of Christ. They become part of the world-wide family who are heading for heaven by God's sovereign grace. And they become significant, HOPEFULLY, on a local basis. The FACT of belonging is not open to question. No pastor or leader or church member ever has the right to say to a Christian, "Well, you don't belong here in this church." By virtue of a person's being a Christian, he belongs in the Body. There may be one portion of the Body where he fits better than another part, but he has the right to participate in the activities of the Body, so long as he truly is a Christian, and does not disqualify himself by teaching error or by having an immoral influence.

My membership here is not something that I can turn on and off at my leisure. I am not talking about my OFFICIAL membership in Dartmouth Bible Church--I am talking about my ORGANIC membership in the universal Body of Christ. In GOD'S EYES, I AM a part of the Body. My gifts are different than yours. My interests and abilities may not be the same as yours. But I serve a purpose. You serve a purpose in the Body too, just as important as mine. Since God would have us to use sound thinking in respect to our place and function in the Body, we must remember that

God has composed the Body, giving more abundant honor to that which lacked, that there should be no division in the Body, but that the members should have the same care for one another (I Cor.12: 24,25).

You see, God is working to equalize us--some people are EXCEPTIONALLY GIFTED. They are not the most important though! Some people have only one or two gifts, and they might not have those refined with a high degree of skill--the Lord is working in them, leading the really gifted to esteem them, the Body to appreciate them!

I remember we had a talent show in a church I worked at in Virginia. And we had in the church a girl named Debbie, who had alot of problems. She was a teenager with a drug problem, family problems and wasn't very attractive (which seems to be particularly

important to teenage girls)...But she did step out and try to defeat the discouragement she lived with, and asked if she could play her guitar and sing a song at this talent show we had. She did not sing very well, and she fumbled with the chords on the guitar, but she did something few else were willing to do--sing a solo. And the applause for her was ecstatic.

The Body of Christ NEEDS the abilities and gifts you have. Therefore it is important to think soundly about yourself--not to overestimate yourself, and NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF, in properly evaluating what God has given you and what He intends for you to do in this church.

By my estimate between 25 and 30 of the adults in this church are attempting to exercise the use of some spiritual ability for the building up of this church. Right now we are ministering to a total of about 75 adults. We need to shoot for 100% of the Christians in this church using their gifts and abilities for the building up of the Body. Now this is not some new program, "SPRING INTO SPRING WITH YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT!" But we need to be looking each other over, looking and seeing what we do well, and encouraging one another to exploit the gifts God has given us, and hanging in there with one another as we try them out, learn to use them and perfect them.

Now I do not know if we have all the spiritual gifts that are in operation today, here in Dartmouth Bible Church...in fact I rather doubt it. But there aren't that many gifts, and I am persuaded we have represented even here this morning, the major gifts, if we could cultivate them.

Romans 12: 6-8 Now Paul lists for us seven spiritual gifts that apparently existed in the church located in ancient Rome. The gifts we have differ--but the bottom line is not the technical features of the gift, it is the USE of the gifts:

I could have a tool box and in it might be a shiny new Snap-On ratchet wrench. Now to me Snap-On makes the finest tools around. But it is useless if it is not used, it doesn't matter how shiny it is...if there is a K-Mart open-ended wrench, old, scratched up, worn...that is the trusty old tool that has been useful. Our spiritual gifts should be like that old trusty wrench--well used and dependable!

The Greek grammar is abrupt here. In fact your translation probably supplies the words, "let each exercise them (the gifts) accordingly." Paul wants the Romans to just be USING their gifts. Here are the gifts, and how their use is to be characterised:

1. Prophecy. This is the communication of God's message to strengthen, encourage and comfort. And it was to be exercised in accordance with the body of truth already revealed. This gift represents that set of spiritual gifts which I am persuaded have expended thier usefulness to the church. The sign gifts were FOUNDATIONAL. They were given to authenticate the new message of the apostles of the risen Messiah.

2. Serving. Some people just get a kick out of serving. We all need to cultivate having a "no strings attached" servant-heart for one another, but some are GIFTED to do this, and they are to be diligent, and not grow weary of doing this. This is the Greek word "diakonian" from which we derive the office of "deacon." The Office of deacon is a spiritual gift, and I hope we have a number in this church who are willing to exercise this gift, as SURELY the Lord has amply supplied us with people who HAVE this gift.
3. Teaching. Some people are spiritually enabled to communicate biblical truth in a special way. This seems to be the gift alot of people WANT. It is also a gift which needs to be developed. But after trial, and the Body evaluates the trial, a person should never press their own evaluation. The bottom line in DISCOVERING a gift, is the response it receives from those on whom it is exercised.
4. Exhortation. Some Christians have the special ability to challenge without threatening. All of us have the responsibility to exhort one another as the need arises, but some are specially equipped to do this. Note also, that each of us NEEDS to be exhorted from time to time, regardless of whether our pride APPROVES of the timing! This gift along with teaching and serving should accompany anyone aspiring to the office of shepherd.
5. Some people love to give. They get a charge out of helping others financially, with their possessions or just of their own selves; their time and presence and personal or emotional energy. Note here: a poor person is not disqualified from having the gift of giving. The person with this gift is to exercise it with GENEROSITY, not skimpily.
6. Diligence is needed in leaders. The word means "to stand out in front." The leadership of the Body requires "stick-to-it-iveness." It takes hard work and determination. The person with the gift of leading does not discourage easily--that's part of the gift.
7. The last gift is one of my favorites. By that I mean I value it highly, although I'm not sure that I have it. But I think there are a number in this church who have it. It is the gift of mercy. This is the showing of kindness to those who have not necessarily earned it, who just plain NEED it. This is the person who loves and accepts regardless of what the needy one looks, smells, sounds like. The gift is to be exercised CHEERFULLY, that is not in sadness, and surely not grudgingly. Would that there were many with this gift. I would rather pastor a church full of this gift, than one full of people persuaded that they are all gifted teachers!

Dear ones, let's commit ourselves to our covenant. Let's agree to discover, and faithfully use the gifts the Lord has given us! It is question of good STEWARDSHIP of the abundant grace of our Lord!

ROMANS 12 - A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR A CHURCH COVENANT

Nine Ways to Love Your Brother
Romans 12: 10-13

Introduction: Do you remember the song from a few years ago, "Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover?"

"Just slip out the back, Jack. No need to be coy, Roy.
Just hop on the bus, Gus. No need to discuss much...
Just drop off the key, Lee; and get yourself free."

Well this morning, instead of fifty ways to leave your lover, we're going to discuss "nine ways to love your brother." We have spent the last several weeks considering our Church Covenant. Our concentration has been on the responsibility we have to one another in the Body of Christ; that church is not just a place to go on Sundays, for church-going type folk, but that really the church is much like a human body, as God intends it. And much like the human body,

"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.
if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."
I Corinthians 12:26

In dealing with Romans 12: 3-8 last week, we suggested that a believer's devotion to God and his transformed lifestyle are DEMONSTRATED in his exercising his spiritual gift(s) in the Body of Christ.

If you desire to see evidence in your life of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, one thing you can do is to begin to pray for the Lord to show you how to serve Him in the Body; that is, how to use and develop your spiritual gift(s).

And now this morning, we see some GUIDELINES on how to go about ministering among ourselves. How should the quality of church life here be characterized? It is always sad to me to hear about churches where there is strife. **NOTHING IS MORE CONTRADICTORY TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE THAN NEWS OF INTERNAL TROUBLES IN A BIBLE-BELIEVING CHURCH!**

But the Apostle Paul gives us some good instruction about how to avoid strife in a church.

Romans 12: 9 Christians should be distinguished from all other men on the face of the earth, by the fact that 1) they speak the truth; and that 2) they speak it in love. The kind of love that Jesus Christ demonstrated throughout His life and on the cross was a HIGH LOVE. It was completely disinterested in what it received in return. The kind of love we are to have practiced in our midst is this same quality of love. It is sincere. It is not hypocritical!

From time to time I will be speaking to a non-Christian, and they will tell me that the reason they don't go to church any place is because the church is FULL of hypocrites. And they assume that since the church houses God-worshippers who are hypocritical, that therefore their God must also be hypocritical, or at least condoning of His worshippers being hypocritical...Nothing should be further from the truth! The Christian Church should be the one place on earth where hypocrisy--saying one thing, and doing another--is STRICTLY FORBIDDEN!

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. I John 3:18

Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had for her. Gen. 29:20

The second half of verse nine seems rather extreme! And the language Paul uses is INTENTIONALLY dramatic, to show how we as a Body are to live radically different lifestyles from the world. I am persuaded that if we took this verse seriously, as God intends us to, we would look ALOT more like Christ...

Hating what is evil: Loving God and loving the brethren entails DETESTING evil. Yes, we are still sinners ourselves. But we should not compromise in our attitudes about what is evil inside of us, and in the world. We should not cut the world slack on issues of right and wrong. Christians are to be the salt of the earth, and even if it is unpopular, we should not let up the seige on what is clearly and biblically wrong in society. We should not be arrogant or self-righteous. But we should keep it clear in our OWN HEADS, and not grow SLEEPY about what God hates...and we should commit ourselves to hating it to. Your pet issue may be apartheid. Your pet issue may be pornography. Your pet issue may be abortion, or it may be "substance abuse." Whatever, we are to have a COMPREHENSIVE POLICY of abhorring what God abhors.

Clinging to what is good: Lest we become thought of as just being negative kill-joys, let's commit ourselves EQUALLY to holding on tightly to what is good. The best example I can think of is the FAMILY! Are we going to slowly be seduced by the world's slick and sophisticated DEVALUATION of the family?

Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence, and if anything worthy of praise, LET YOUR MIND DWELL ON THESE THINGS. Philipians 4:8

Now Paul tells us nine ways to love your brother. As we grow as a church--as we discover more and more of how God has endowed OUR church in the spiritual gifts department: here's the "modus operandi"; the way to go about it; the instruction manual...

Verse 10: There is to be a loyalty among Christians that the Christian takes DELIGHT in being with his brothers and sisters in Christ. Whatever OUTSIDE pressures I must face in life; whatever INTERNAL stresses I have to put up with in the church, at the bottom line, I am to be devoted to you...this is what our Church Covenant is intended to REFLECT. This is what Church Membership is intended to REFLECT. When I approach someone about considering the possibility of joining our church, and I receive a tentative reply, or a flat out, "Thanks, but no thanks," I hurt for the Body, because refusal to commit to a local church is the same thing as saying, "the church is not worth my commitment."

Some people refuse membership because it is nice to float from one church to another: no responsibility. No risks...But the text of verse 10 calls us to GIVE PREFERENCE to one another--no strings attached. Is the betterment of your brother or sister sitting next to you MORE IMPORTANT than you making sure you've "put in your two cents?" Is peace in the Body more important than getting YOUR way on the walls project? Or on some other minor, or even major issue?

I feel we have a lot of devotion here right now. Will it continue? Will we commit ourselves to learning PERSEVERANCE in devotion and giving preference to one another? Or will we degenerate, as most churches do in time?...

Verse 11: Once we have learned what real Christian love IS--and I think this takes some learning--most of us when we first come to Christ do not naturally KNOW how to love with the love of Christ--but once we have learned something of what brotherly love LOOKS LIKE, then we must DETERMINE to be diligent; to make it not just the practice at certain times of the year, but to practice it and practice it and continue to practice it...hanging in there with each other, for YEARS!

"Fervent in spirit" means to "boil with enthusiasm" and the Greek word is used only here in the New Testament and in Acts 18:25 of Apollos.

Are we excited to be with one another? Or do we grow bored, impatient and distasteful of one another? I love to be with Christians--and I need to learn to see fellowship as something to be excited about, and to become efficient at being part of the Body of Christ--so that my brother and sister has some profit to gain by MY being involved in the Body.

After all, the right perspective to have is that my being part of Dartmouth Bible Church is out of service to the Lord--Every thing I do in the Body is an act of worship of one kind or another...

Verse 12: It should not be ONLY my CHARISMATIC brethren who know how to REJOICE IN HOPE! Perhaps we can learn something from them about this feature of the Body of Christ: rejoicing in hope. If there is one thing our services EVERY SUNDAY should communicate: there is hope! Not a false hope; not an imaginary hope. Not a hope of fantasy...But a real, objective, concrete, tangible kind of hope, and a reason to press on in the Christian life--or reason to BECOME a Christian!

Sometimes tribulation comes upon Christians, and sometimes it is SEVERE tribulation. That is not when the church should abandon a Christian, it is when the church should MOST RALLY around their members!

And the best tool (or WEAPON) we have is to a people of PRAYER--Prayer is powerful. Let us never DE-EMPHASIZE it here at Dartmouth Bible Church. Let us never hear in these walls, "Well, we pray too much." We are a LONG WAY from that being possible!

Verse 13: There are some people who have the gift of giving...there are some people who are gifted at showing mercy to those who need it, reGARDless of whether the recipient is deserving or not...These should be the people leading seminars on giving and showing mercy! Our pockets should be open to one another--not so we can PICK EACH OTHERS' POCKETS, --but contributing to various causes or individual needs as the Holy Spirit makes us aware and burdened for them. Cf. Acts 2:44,45; 4:32,34-37; 11:27-30; I Cor.16:1-4; 2 Cor.8,9; Rom.15:25-27.

Let me affirm you my dear ones. We are a church who does this like no church I have ever been associated with. But let's not pat ourselves on the back too long...because the old man, the old nature and the devil would love nothing better than to SPOIL this in our church. Let's keep our hearts fresh and humble in these things.

The ninth way to love "sincerely" is to "pursue friendliness with strangers." Are we cynical? Or are we open to people we do not know. Are we in-grown? Or are we willing to make HOSPITALITY part of our regular lives...

Dear ones, let's be different! Let's be ruled, overseen and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. Let's honor the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by making these nine directives about Body-life a reality in our little church.

From time to time we have a visitor, or I am talking with someone outside about our church. They might ask, "Are we a Spirit-filled church?" My brethren, the measure of that, according to the Bible, is not do we speak in foreign languages...the measure of being a Spirit-filled church is in the quality of love we practice!