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Grace Evangelical Church
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"Sticking Together"
Romans 12:9-21

I remember my mother telling me about the some brothers who lived in the farm next to them in the Hyde Valley northwest of Barneveld. They enjoyed, it seemed, wrestling and teasing each other among themselves. However, when someone would start fighting one of them, the boys would immediately join together and fight the opposition. In spite of their brotherly rivalry, they knew something about sticking together.

Our text today in Romans 12:9-21 gives us some spiritual encouragement about sticking together in our personal lives, our family lives, and our church life.

Note verse 10 of Romans 12.

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

I. Why could the apostle Paul write that statement?

1. The Spirit of God is guiding Paul to write these words.

Of course Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, that is the Spirit of God is guiding Paul to write that statement. This means it is what God had to say to the Roman believers in A.D. 57-58, when Paul wrote this letter to them. It is also what God is saying to us today because the Word of God is eternal, meaning that the Word of God, the Bible, is contemporary for all time, applicable to you and me in our daily lives.

2. God is the ultimate reason, example, and eternal basis for our devotion to one another.

(1) God is the ultimate reason as the eternal God and Creator for our devotion to one another.

What do I mean by that? The answer comes by taking a look at the Trinity or the Triunity relationship of the God, the Father, God, the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

OLD TESTAMENT

∞ **In the Old Testament there was more indirect revelation of the Triunity.**

∞ **Words in Genesis 1:26 - "Let us make man in our image," imply a plurality in the Godhead. The name of God, Elohim is in the plural suggesting a plurality in the Godhead as well.**

∞ **Isaiah 48:16** is a great passage to set for the Triunity in the Old Testament in a more specific way, "Come near to ME, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, from the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit."

The Lord God would be the Father, Me, would be the preincarnate Christ, and His Spirit would be the Holy Spirit, showing here the unity in the Godhead.

NEW TESTAMENT

When we come to the New Testament,

∞ **We find at the conception** of Christ that God the Father sent His angel Gabriel to Mary to give her the announcement that she would bear the Savior, Jesus, and He would be conceived in her by the Holy Spirit.

∞ **At the beginning of Christ's ministry**, after Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit like a dove ascended upon Christ, and a voice out of heaven, the voice of Jesus' Father saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:16-17).

∞ **During Christ's ministry on planet earth.**

John 5:19-20 gives us these words of Jesus Christ.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing' and greater works than these will He show Him, so that you will marvel."

John 15:9ff- Words of our Lord.

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My father's commandments and abide in His love."

John 15:26 – Words of our Lord.

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of me."

In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit came and has been active in the world in His ministry to unbelievers and believers, glorifying Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1 gives the ministry of the Godhead. God the Father makes a choice of people, God, the Son, provides the redemption for humanity, and the Holy Spirit applies that salvation to the believer in Jesus Christ. I take time to talk about the Triunity for a few minutes, because the Triunity is the only reason the historic biblical Christianity is distinct from all other religions and ideas of men.

If there is no Triunity as cults and world religions believe today, there is no real ultimate reason for our human relationships to be devoted to one another as Paul writes in our text today in Romans 12:10.

Without the Triunity, we have no eternal reason upon which to live in harmony. Oh, we may do it because of human goodness, but that is here today and gone tomorrow.

What is needed is an eternal relationship where it can be demonstrated for all to see that there is an eternal devotion to each other in that relationship which is without any flaw or defect – complete harmony in their relationship.

For what do we see in the various Scriptures we read from particularly in the gospel records and the Ephesian letter?

We see an eternal devotion to each other in the Godhead, with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each one is devoted eternally to the other as they each work together in harmony in their different roles to accomplish redemption for the world.

The ultimate reason for Paul saying that believers in Christ should be devoted to one another, then, is that God, the Father, God, the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are devoted to one another. The One God, as Creator, existing in three coequal persons is the one and only reason for being devoted to one another.

Looking at ourselves and others, we know that there is no ultimate reason to be devoted to each other. We have breakdowns in our devotion to each other. Only in the Triunity is there that ultimate reason to be devoted to one another.

Which means secondly,

(2) God is the ultimate example to us of being devoted to one another.

Where is there an eternal example in humanity of individuals devoted to one another perfectly in complete harmony without flaw or defect?

No where that I know of except in the relationship of the Triunity. **That's why Paul told the Ephesians believers to be "Imitators of God, as beloved children."**

Thusly, those who deny the trinitarian relationship in the God head, don't have a reason for or the ultimate example of an eternal relationship that is devoted to each other in perfect harmony. In fact, the only reason and example is what is seen among humans, and that is flawed and marred in

different dimensions, and in some instances far removed from any evidence of the image of God left in the human race.

See the trickery of the evil one to cause people to distort and deny the Trinity, or to deny God altogether. When the trinity is distorted and denied, man is left on his own, and we only have to read Romans 1, in the devolution of man, to see what happens when man worships the creature rather than the Creator. Sad to say, our culture is on the slippery slope and has progressed to the bottom of the hill. Only God's grace in Christ can bring the change as people turn to the Savior in saving faith.

But there is something more about the eternal God's devotion in the Godhead.

(3) God is the eternal basis for our devotion to one another.

Where is that found? None other than in the cross, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ knew what His main mission was in coming to earth. He came not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. In the garden, He was learning obedience before His crucifixion, and He submitted to His Heavenly Father going to cross to be your sin bearer and mine.

On the cross, being our sin bearer, Jesus felt that God His Father had forsaken Him, but God His Father hadn't forsaken Him. God loved His Son, and was pleased in Him that He was obedient to death even the death of the cross.

The devotion of the Father to the Son, and the Son to the Father is at it's height at the cross. And the Holy Spirit was there strengthening the Son to carry out winning salvation for all who would accept Him as Savior.

In the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, God provided the eternal basis upon which something new could happen for Him and something new could happen for us. What is that?

Since all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, we are under the judgment of God by being a part of the Adamic human race, making us enemies of God.

Since God is holy and just and demands that our lives be punished for our sin, there is a great gulf between us and God – He is not our friend.

But something happened when Christ died in our place on the cross, being made sin for us. God's wrath was satisfied, **propitiation**, and a change was made for you and me, to no longer be God's enemies but His friends, the great teaching of **reconciliation** to God.

Now through accepting Christ as one's personal Savior, the believer becomes a friend of God, and discovers that God is totally devoted to Him and her forever.

Romans 8:38-39 – No one or nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The believer in Christ is secure in the Father's hand, the Savior's hand (John 10:28-29), and is sealed unto the day of redemption by the Holy Spirit of God living within him or her.

The cross of Christ, His death, burial, and bodily resurrection become the eternal basis for God's eternal devotion to the believer in Jesus Christ. The believer in Christ is the Lord's eternally.

Which leads us to our second question.

II. How does God's devotion to the believer in Christ work out in the believer's devotion to one another?

That's where our text in Romans 12:10 comes in. Let's look at the words in this verse. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love."

1. In brotherly love – It's the word from which Philadelphia comes, the city of brotherly love – Phileo love - the showing of kindness, having affection for. It is the kind of love that exists between brothers and sisters in a family relationship.

The term, brothers, adelphos is used some 250 times in the New Testament. The term actually means to be of the same womb. It means that brothers and sisters come from the same family relationship physically.

Put into the spiritual dimension, it means that, through faith in Christ, we are brothers and sisters in Christ having been born from above by the same Spirit of God through faith in Christ, possessing Christ's eternal life and, are members of the same family, God's forever family, the church of Jesus Christ.

Yes, we are God's adopted sons – placed as mature believers in Christ, being heirs of God and joint heirs of Jesus Christ, bearing the same title as Christ, called God's sons – referring to men and women, boys and girls (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5-6).

As Romans 12:5 from our text last week told us, we are members one of another in the body of Christ.

Since all believers have been born from above by the Spirit of God having His same eternal life, they can be and should be in the Spirit's power devoted to one another.

2. Be devoted - Have tender affection- show loving affection, be devoted to one another like in a family relationship.

3. To one another – individually, in your family relationships, in your **church relationships**.

What the Scripture is saying here is that since God has given each believer His life through one's faith in Christ all believers should be devoted to one another as He is devoted to each believer.

As God sticks together with each believer in Christ, each believer should stick together for each other. Their commitment to each other should be eternal.

Now this has different dimensions, I realize, individually, as husband and wife and children in a family relationship, and then the church family, but brotherly love for each member in Christ's body should be evidenced among all believers.

Which leads to my last question.

III. What are the evidences in the believer's life individually, in a family setting, and in the church family, that the believers are devoted to one another in brotherly love?

Note the teaching in this passage of Romans 12:9-21. Here is what being devoted to one another in brotherly love is all about.

1. Exhortations to believers devoted to one another in brotherly love (12:9-16).

(1) Give preference to one another in honor (12:10b). Give each believer his or her the respect that he or she deserves in the Lord. Honor one another in the Lord, realize that each one is made in the image of the Lord.

Each individual is as valuable as the other in the sight of God, our status in life, our heritage, whatever, does not make anyone better than the other in the body of Christ. God sees all believers as one in Him, His children, His Sons and Daughters.

Such doesn't always happen in individual settings, in the family setting, even a church setting sometimes. A person, who has not been respected and honored, may be hurt emotionally by rejection, and thusly the individual is afraid to reach out and be the person God created him or her to be.

The true incident is told about Nancy who could do nothing to please her father, especially when she couldn't obtain a B average in high school. She withdrew from trying to please him. This attitude carried over into her adult life. She seemed continually withdrawn. Nancy needed to be honored for who she was, made in the image of God not based upon her performance.

I believe it was Josh McDowell who said that in the family relationship catch your kids doing something good and praise them and honor them, build up their person, telling them how great they are.

- (2) **Love must be without hypocrisy (12:9a).** Let Christ's love in you be real – sincere – not fake or put on. The word for love is agape – Calvary love – which is eternal love, that never gives up, it is unconditional love, sacrificial love, willing to go the extra mile for someone not expecting anything in return.
- (3) **Know the difference between good and evil (12:9b).** Good is always related to the will of good as revealed in His word. Evil, of course, is that which is directly opposed to the Lord, and comes from the evil one and from the old Adamic nature that still lingers in our hearts.

Believers devoted to the Lord and each other have a keen sensitivity to what is good and what is evil. They seek to have a heart for what is good and shun what is evil.

- (4) **Don't be slothful (12:11a)** – Don't be lazy in your spiritual life. Don't be a cynical and half-hearted follower of Jesus Christ. Be disciplined, be organized, have a purpose in life to serve the Lord in whatever capacity and occupation He puts you in. Don't be a drag on others as an individual. Don't be a drag on your family, or the church family. Be a person who is with it in Jesus Christ.
- (5) **Serve (continually) the Lord with a fervent, boiling spirit, a spirit with zeal (12:11b).** Paul tells the Colossians to serve the Lord heartily, with enthusiasm, really put some "soul" into living for and serving the Lord. Get in there and go for it.

One of the keys for being devoted to one another with a servant's attitude is to forget about one's self. "What's mine is mine, and what's yours is mine." If a person is always thinking about himself or herself, that individual will not be excited about serving others. Such causes a breakdown in individual relationships, and especially in the family relationship between husband and wife, and the children. When selfishness prevails in the family relationship, the unity of the family is in jeopardy. In fact the family unity is where each one learns to be a giving person, and not concerned about one's own little world.

- (6) **Be joyful in hope (continually) , the expectation that something good is going to happen because God is in control (12:a).** We sure need to hear that today as we look at what's happening to our culture and in Washington D.C. Hope is the anticipation that God is going to act for our good and His glory. That's why there is always hope in our challenges and difficulties. God is there working in and through us to accomplish His will for us. Then we have that daily hope of the glorious appearing and the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, which should be a purifying hope for each of us as believers in the Lord.
- (7) **Bearing up (continually) in persecution, in trials– Don't give up (12:b).**
The Lord is your strength and fortress.

(8) Be devoted (continually) to prayer – be a prayer warrior (12:12c).

Praying for those in body of Christ here, our missionary family, our communities that they will have a hunger for Christ, for our nation, for our world, for the spread of the gospel world-wide. **Don't give up in what you are praying for whatever is on your heart.**

Your prayer life is also a way to check up on how devoted you are to God and to one another as individuals, as members of a family, or in the church family. We need to ask ourselves when we pray, "Are our prayers centered on what we want God to provide for us and do for us? Or do our prayers center on the needs of others that we know and the desire to see God work in various aspects of life that center on bringing His righteousness to bear on various situations? Certainly, we have individual needs we can pray for, but others should be at the top of our prayer list, if we honor and prefer others.

(9) Contributing (continually) to the needs of saints – reach out and help the believers who have different needs, materially and physically (12:13a).

(10) Practice hospitality (continually) – have others into your home, enjoy the fellowship of being one in Christ (12:13b).

In the New Testament times, there were not motels such as Holiday Inns. Believers traveling would know of other believers in other towns, but not having met them, they would stop and they would be received with open arms.

(11) Give a blessing (command, present tense) to those who you may receive persecution from (12:14a).

(12) Never curse them. Bless even those who may persecute you and disagree with you (12:14b).

(13) Rejoice (continually) with those who rejoice – enter into the joys of others, don't be jealous of their good news and celebration of God's blessings (12:15a), thinking that they must be better than me. Honor others who have good news, praising God with them.

(14) Weep (continually) with those who weep – empathize and sympathize with them who have reason to weep and be sad (12:15b).

Let people know that you care for them in their sadness. Sometimes it is not in words, but just being there with a person.

(15) Be of the same mind (continually) to one another – have the mind of Christ, selflessness, humbleness, proper view of yourself and of God (12: 16a).

(16) Do not be haughty of mind (continually) – be not arrogant – conceited – a know it all (12:16b).

(17) Associate with the lowly (the humble)– those who know who they are in Christ, and are not proud of it, but realize that it is only because of God's grace that one is a member of God's family (12:16c).

(18) Do not be wise (stop being wise continually – present imperative - in your own estimation (12:16d).

Have God's view of yourself, knowing you are only are what you are by the grace of God as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:10. That will keep any believer in the proper perspective of himself.

Note that Paul ends this section, Romans 12:9-16, the same way that he begins it. Devotion to one another has its roots in the attitude of Christ, the mind of Christ at work in the believer, being selfless, and seeking to serve one another – to make the other person feel worthwhile and be successful.

But then Paul goes on and talks briefly how the believers devoted to one another should relate to those who don't know the Savior personally.

2. Exhortations to believers devoted to one another in brotherly love as they relate to unbelievers (Romans 12:17-21).

- (1) **Never pay back evil for evil (12:17a).**
If someone treats you negatively, don't respond in kind. Show the attitude of Christ in forgiveness and grace. Think of Christ on the cross. He forgave those who were crucifying Him. What a powerful example for us to follow.
- (2) **Respect (continually) what is right in the sight of all men (12:17b).**
Realize that there are moral standards, not based upon men's changing ideas but rather on God's unchanging eternal truth in Jesus Christ and His eternal Word.
- (3) **As far as it depends on you, be at peace (at all times) with all men. Be a peace maker among believers and unbelievers (12:18).**
Reason for doing that is that through faith in Christ you are at peace with God and He has forgiven you, so you should forgive others and be at peace with them (Ephesians 4:32).
- (4) **Never be taking your own revenge. Let God take care of that (12:19).**
God will eventually make all things right.
- (5) **Provide food for your enemy, give him a drink if he is thirsty, in so doing you may cause him to repent (12:20).**
- (6) **Always do the good (what is the will of God) and evil will be overcome (12:21).**
Of course that needs to be done in the mind of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's summarize briefly this life-changing passage of Scripture in Romans 12:9-21.

1. Devotion to one another in brotherly love has its roots in the Godhead – the Trinity – of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 15-16; Ephesians 5:1; Romans 8:38-39).

Their devotion to one another in their eternal relationship is the eternal reason, example, and basis for our being devoted to one another in brotherly love. No eternal Trinity, we have only man's marred and time bound devotion to one another that is here today and gone tomorrow, and can eventually end up in complete devolution.

2. Through faith in Jesus Christ, His death, burial, and bodily resurrection, the believer receives the life of God so that he or she can be devoted to one another in the power of the Holy Spirit as God is devoted to him or her (Romans 12:10; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:32).

3. The key to being devoted to one another in brotherly love is to let the mind of Christ live out through the believer's life which will result in respecting one another, identifying with one another, praying for one another, serving one another, and going to bat for one another, while living a life of godliness in the joy of the Lord (Romans 12:16; I Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:1-10).

4. Believers devoted to one another in brotherly love will demonstrate their devotedness to the Lord and each other in their relationships with unbelievers by respecting them and showing them Christ's love and goodness (Romans 12:17-21; Colossians 4:5).

The bottom line in being devoted to one another in brotherly love is loyalty.

One of the most fantastic human examples of devotion to one another is Moses in the Old Testament.

While Moses was on the mountain received the 10 commandments, the people in the camp below became impatient and at their request, Aaron built a golden calf for them to worship. God became very angry with the people and wanted to annihilate them, and make for Moses a great nation (Exodus 32:10). What did Moses say in Exodus 32:11-12? His response is unbelievable.

"O LORD, why does your anger burn against your people whom you have brought out from the land of Egypt with your great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He brought them out, to kill them in the mountains to wipe them off the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on Your people."

Moses' loyalty to such fickle people was almost too good to be true. Later in the same chapter Moses was again speaking with the Lord in Exodus 32:31:

"Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if you will, forgive their sin, and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written."

What is Moses saying here? "If you destroy this people, then, You'll have to destroy me too."

Keep in mind here that Moses was completely innocent in this situation. He was up on the mountain when this grave sin of idolatry was committed. He was free and clear in God's sight. He chose to side with his brethren, and stand in the gap for his people. An amazing picture of what Christ did for us by going to the cross to be our sin bearer to win for us His forgiveness and grace through faith. If you want to think about loyalty, meditate not just upon Moses but upon the ONE who gave His life for us, the innocent Christ who became sin for us.

It's easy, as Moses could have done, to dwell on the guilt and disobedience of the people, or we might say differences of opinions, misunderstandings, all the negatives that go into breaking down relationships. Instead of focusing on all of that negative stuff, Moses asked for forgiveness for His people's idolatry, Why? Moses was devoted in brotherly love to Israel as his brothers. He exhibited true undying loyalty to them.

On this memorial day weekend we also think of the loyalty of those who gave their lives in the ultimate sacrifice on the battlefield that we might enjoy the freedoms we still have in this country.

A young man from our previous church in Des Moines, while serving in Iraq was killed by a road side bomb going to retrieve some wounded soldiers.

The other evening on television a young man who was killed in Iraq was honored for throwing himself on a grenade which killed him and saved the life of his comrades.

We praise the Lord today for the loyalty of our veterans and all those serving in the different branches of the United States military.

May we as followers of Christ be found devoted to Christ and devoted to one another in brotherly love today and every day.