

32. A manual for being a Christian

November 30, 2008

Let's think about the stereo types of Christians by non-believers:

- "Christians are narrow-minded people, because they would not agree or accept - new concepts of religions. They think that they are the only ones who go to heaven." My response: It is not what we came up with, but what Jesus did. So it is true.

- "Christians are mostly hypocrites. They talk about love, but many of them are hateful."

My response: First of all, I apologize on behalf of those hateful Christians. Christians are not perfect, they are just forgiven by the grace of God. This excuse is often offered by those who want to continue to live in darkness. They do not want to be brought into the light of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not say, "Follow the church," or "Follow the church leaders." Jesus says, "Follow me".

Church is not a meeting place for saints, but a hospital for sinners. The worst sin you can commit is to say, "No" to God. It is a "Son" issue, not a "sin" issue. You will find hypocrites in the church because we are all sinners. You will also find many people who are trying to live their life according to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

- "Christian leaders, especially those who are on TV, are con-artists and they are out there to get money out of you.

My response: I have to agree with them to some degrees.

In my opinion, the best sermon ever recorded in human history is the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus. I know what you are thinking, "No, duh. It was by Jesus, what else do you expect?" Yes, that was obvious. We can read Matthew 5 through 7 in less than a half hour and it touches every area of human life. In the same fashion through next five verses, apostle Paul provides a brief summary of being a true Christians, not a hypocrite. He doesn't waste any words here. He just blazes the trails of what-to-dos and how-to-dos.

To keep the whole thing in context, let's quickly go over chapter 12. We were reminded that we ought to present our bodies a living sacrifice and not to be conformed to the world but be transformed ourselves by renewing of our minds. Then the apostle told us that the main reasons for the spiritual gifts are to bring glory to the Lord and to edify the body of Jesus Christ in grace with humility which is love for others. Here we have 13 commands we must carry out.

A. LOVE WITHOUT HYPOCRISY

Romans 12:9a Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

Love with hypocrisy isn't real love at all. Some of what masquerades as "love" in the Christian community is laced with hypocrisy, and must be stopped. If you say you love someone in Christ, but your action doesn't go along with what you say, then it is not true love and it is love with hypocrisy.

When we love without hypocrisy, we don't want to deceive others, but act and speak in truth. If we're upset with somebody, for example, we don't just smile and say, "Everything's fine!" We deal with the problem honestly and with the person gently.

Ephesians 4:15-16 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The word 'abhor' is not just any word of 'not liking'. It is the strongest word you can find. It is "to hate or detest with horror". We must hate our own sins as well as others' like God hates our sins. Just hating sin is not good enough, but we must cling to what is good.

According to those so-called intelligent liberal people, they think that all the Christians are pathetically ignorant enough to believe in an unseen God and to follow Him without any objection. By their ideology, since there is no such thing as absolute and objective truth, no one set of standards can apply to everyone. And they insist that everyone should be tolerant to everybody else's belief except Christianity. How convenient for them!

However, God opposes the world's distorted view of "tolerance." He has made it clear in His Word that His standards are objective, true, absolute, and apply to everyone. There is no other valid standard than His own. And He, above all, knows the damage sin can do. It's not something to be winked at, shrugged off, or tolerated away. Evil should be hated, and good should be clung to.

The ancient Greek word for 'cling' is 'kollao' which means 'to glue'. We need to glue ourselves to the right things, the godly things, not evil ones.

B. WITH BROTHERLY LOVE, GIVING PREFERENCE TO ONE ANOTHER

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

One of the few things church people don't care for is 'clique'. I don't know where we get this mentality other than some snobby college fraternities and sororities which have no place in the body of Jesus Christ. Clique is nothing more than elitism which is against the teaching of Jesus Christ. It is mentioned in 1 John 2:16-17.

1 John 2:16-17 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

In my Christian life, I've witnessed enough cliques that caused problems that I insist not having any clique in our church. Then I realized that it is not something I can force people not to have, rather it is something individuals must realize that elitism is against the Word of God, because it is nothing more than a pride.

If you think that you are better than someone else because you have more money, better education, a lot smarter, or better looking, these are nothing more than outward elements which our God doesn't care for. It is because pride is the ground where all the other sins grow.

1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

When we have affectionate brotherly love for one another, it gives room for those who are wrong to repent and be right with God and others.

I am sure you all remember how Jesus' twelve disciples constantly argued over who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Even right after Jesus washed their feet and told them to humble themselves, but they still were arguing who was the greatest on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

To 'honor' someone means to value and respect them. Paul wants us to give this respect, this affirmation, to others rather than seeking it for ourselves.

C. FERVENT IN SPIRIT

Romans 12:11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;
The church is no place for laziness. Everything we do for the Lord we must do in excellence for His glory.

Complacency and lethargy can easily set in any Christian's heart if he or she has been in the Lord for some time. To them, it can be another Sunday to take care of children in the Children's ministry, or another Midweek Service in the nursery, or another day in whatever the ministry they are involved and do their volunteer work. It's business as usual.

Anything we do for the Lord must not be half hearted, we must put our hearts and minds in it. As we are learning this important truth today, we must change our attitude toward our service to the Lord and His church.

What if for some reason we know that the rapture is going to happen tomorrow – even though we will never know the exact date as the Bible tells us – would you do your volunteer work in the same way you've been doing? If you've been serving at the Nursery or Children's ministry, would you just do the things you've been doing or would you put your heart and soul into those children to tell them about Jesus?

I am not saying that you are not doing your best now, but do you put your urgency behind it? The way I look at this world, we are literally living in the borrowed time and at the end of the time before the Rapture happens. We need to snatch as many lost souls as we can before that time arrives.

To make it happen, we are going to equip all of you with the tools of evangelism in January, next year. We will have one day class of evangelism so that you guys can go out and tell others about Jesus around your neighborhood, as your work place, at your school, at grocery stores, and at public events.

Jesus doesn't need lawyers to defend His sacrifice for us, but He needs witnesses to tell others about Him.

D. HOPE, PATIENCE AND PRAYER

Romans 12:12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

We Christians should not put our hope in the things of the world, rather hope in Jesus Christ, our ultimate reward with Jesus and eternal life in heaven. We hold a confident expectation of the Lord's return and the glory to follow. When we lift our eyes from the struggles of today and ponder the coming wonder, our love will be raised up by the joy of our beautiful hope.

Jesus promised that tribulation will come to all of us. Of course, this is not the 7 year Great Tribulation, but difficulties in our lives. Our God uses trials and persecutions to shape us and mold us into the image of His Son Jesus. But because of His everlasting love for us, we can face our tormentors with endurance. No matter what happens to us, we know that God is in control and that He will work all things together for good.

Prayer is our lifeline to God. In the raging sea of life, we can be easily drowned. At the end of that lifeline, our God is holding us with His powerful right hand. Only when we are joined with God, through prayers, His comfort and power can help us to be patient in suffering and rejoice in our hope.

But what does prayer have to do with love? It's in prayer that we learn to love. When we pray for those who hurt us, trouble us, make us angry, or just plain irritate us, our hearts open and our capacity to care grows. By taking everything to God who is the Source of love and wisdom, He deepens our understanding of others and our ability to extend our hearts in love and forgiveness.

E. GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY

Romans 12:13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Many of you participated in the Operation Christmas Child program lately. From Green Valley, Nogales and Sahuarita area, we were able to collect 837 shoe boxes and our church alone had 128 boxes for the needy children of the third world countries. That was very generous of you guys.

In our church case, we take out 15% of your tithes and offerings for the missions fund. After that we take out another 10% for the benevolence fund so that we can help out those who are in needs in our church. Some of you are more generous than others to help those who are in need here by giving extra. The Lord knows who you are and what you've done in His name and He will reward you.

James 2:15-16 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

At the same time, I need to mention this: If you are not tithing and you are not helping others because you are concerned about your possible rainy days, God might send storms to your life since you are rejecting God's commandments to help the needy and you're being selfish that you may learn not to depend on your own wealth. I know that some of you are ignoring what I am saying now and telling yourself, "I will keep my money for myself." If that is your mindset, I really feel sorry for your selfishness and having an idol in your heart.

Money may not help someone who is grieving or lonely or sick. Sometimes the best gift we can give is our arm around somebody's shoulder, just being there and cry with them or laugh with them, or our gentleness. Rich and poor alike need these touches of generous love.

Apostle Paul also urges us to be hospitable to strangers. The Greek word for 'hospitality' is 'philoxenia' which means 'love to strangers'. These strangers can be against what we believe and cherish. Can you feel that the Lord is setting us up for what He is about to teach more next week? Yes, we will learn more about it on next Sunday.

This is love in action, not just feelings.

F. APPLICATIONS

Normally I come up with a few applications for us to apply in our lives at the end of the most of my teachings as you all know. But today, we already know the applications. We just have to do them. So let's go over these applications from v9-13.

Romans 12:9-13 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality