

In chapter 12 Paul lays out some practical applications of the gospel. He makes it clear that the gospel is not just something to be known; it is to be embraced and lived out on a day-to-day basis. The gospel results in a transformed life (12:1–2) with Christians being united and living in community for the glory of God (12:2–8). Just as the body (the whole) doesn't exist for a part, neither does the church exist for the individual. Rather, all the parts exist that the whole might function as God intended.

If there is one legitimate criticism we might level against the contemporary church, it is that it appears to be lacking the vibrant, common life within the Christian community that the NT envisions. In American Christian culture we treat our faith as a personal affair and the gathering of the church as a spectator event. In reality, our salvation is to result in a community of people living out their Christian life together.

***12:9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.***

One of the key characteristics of the Christian community is the love that exists among its members; however, there is an ever-present danger that love would be corrupted by hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy shows itself in two ways. One way is that it tries to make the outside look better than the inside. That is, we put forward external behavior that doesn't match what we really feel inside (Matt. 15:7; 23:25–27). The second way that hypocrisy shows itself is when we hold other people to standards that we don't keep ourselves (Lk. 6:42). We highlight other people's sins to make ourselves feel superior.

The main aim of hypocrisy is to get the praise and approval of other people. In Matthew 6:2 Jesus said, "When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, *that they may be praised by others.*" In Matthew 6:5 He said, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, *that they may be seen by others.*" Love is not like that. It is not hypocritical. It does not crave the praise of men.

The bottom line is that hypocrisy masks what is true. Love does not. Love is being truthful about ourselves to others and being honest with others about their lives as well.

The words "abhor" and "cling" are strong verbs. "Abhor" means to "loath," or "be disgusted with" (*Liddell and Scott Lexicon*). It is to develop a moral sense of horror toward something. "Abhor" starkly contrasts the lighthearted way that we often tend to treat evil. To abhor evil means that we are to see evil for what it is, we are to call it by its proper name, we are to understand it for what it represents, and we are to hate it.

To "cling" literally means to be glued to something. The word is used of dirt clinging to feet or clothing. "*Cling to what is good*" means to embrace and love what is good.

By using such strong language we see that God is not mainly interested in us doing right as an intellectual decision; that alone does not signal moral transformation. Believers are to have an intense aversion for evil and glue themselves to all moral goodness. That is, we are not simply to avoid evil; we are to hate it. We are not just to choose good; we are to embrace and love it.

***12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;***

The Greek adjective “devoted” (φιλόστοργοι) only appears here in the New Testament but it is not a rare word in other literature of the time. It most commonly describes the natural, tender affection between parents and children (Cranfield, *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 632). The King James Version translates the first part of verse 12 as, “*Be kindly affectioned one to another . . .*” Although this is awkward English it conveys the idea fairly well. Paul is talking about a deep, affectionate, devoted, loving, family feeling. This is stressed further by the words, “in brotherly love” (τῇ φιλαδέλφειᾳ). In Philippians 1:8 Paul said, “I long for you all with the *affection* of Christ Jesus.” The word for affection is literally, “intestines” or “inner organs.” It expresses Paul’s deep inner feelings toward his fellow believers. In short, we are told to love each other with the same deep and warm affections that we have toward those who are closest to us. The church is not primarily a human organization; it is the family of God and those born into it should love each other with filial love.

To “give preference” has the idea of “going before” or “leading.” Figuratively, it means to set an example. We are to set an example, or take the lead in honoring others above ourselves. Rather than seeking honor we are to give honor (compare Luke 14:7–11). Rather than seeking advantage we are to give advantage. Rather than wanting to be first we should put others first.

This also reminds us that etiquette is something of importance. There is a connection between manners and morality. Etiquette reflects the values (the ethics) of society. It is a system that organizes society so that we live out the ethic. If a society were to respect every human being as someone made in the image of God, it will treat each person with dignity that would be lived out in manners. As we observe a decline in etiquette in America we are really seeing a decline in society. Although cultural manners may change, Christian etiquette should not; in every generation and culture Christians should demonstrate love and preference toward one another.

***12:11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;***

Paul next encourages us not to lag behind in diligence, to be fervent in spirit, and to serve the Lord (12:11).

To lag behind in something and to be fervent in something express nearly the same idea in a negative and a positive way. Yet the two expressions also balance one another. To lag behind is to be lazy; it is not to be diligent. If all Paul had said was, "do not lag behind" he would leave the impression that working for God or keeping busy is what is most important. But all we do needs to be done with fervency of spirit. The word "fervent" in Greek means "boiling." We are to boil in our spirits in serving God, not just act mechanically, devoid of emotion or heart desire. Had Paul only mentioned that we are to be fervent in spirit, some may think it is enough to feel zealous about serving the Lord but never actually do anything. But this is balanced with the command to act—to not lag behind in diligence. Both diligence in action and fervency of heart are to characterize our service of the Lord.

***12:12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,***

In spiritual matters we are to be consistent, active, and motivated by our desire to serve Christ. Furthermore, we must keep rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, and being devoted to prayer (all three verbs are in the present tense indicating continuous activity).

Hope, in the Bible, is not a word used of uncertainty; rather it is "a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future. Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future; it expects it to happen. And it not only expects it to happen; it is confident that it will happen" (sermon by John Piper, "What is Hope?" , April 6, 1986 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)).

In verse 11 God commanded us to abhor evil and be fervent in spirit. Now we are commanded to rejoice in hope. All of these commands are commands to *feel* a particular way . . . but how can we be commanded to feel something?

It should first be pointed out that God has the right to command us how we should feel.

If we ought to feel joy in the Lord, He commands, "Rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 4:4). If we ought to feel the sorrow of sympathy, He commands, "Weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). If we ought to feel gratitude for a great gift, He commands, "Be thankful" (Colossians 3:15). If we should feel remorse for our sin, He commands, "Be miserable and mourn and weep" (James 4:9). If we should feel fear of sin, He commands, "Fear the one who after he has killed has the power to cast into hell" (Luke 12:5). . . The fact that our hearts are so distorted by sin that we don't feel what we ought to feel does not mean that God cannot command what is right and good and fitting for us to feel (Piper).

In verse 12, the object of our joy is the certainty of the promises of God. Matthew Henry put it like this: "The joy and peace of believers arise chiefly from their hopes. What is laid out upon them is but little, compared with what is laid up for them; therefore the

more hope they have, the more joy and peace they have . . . Christians should desire and labor after an abundance of hope.”

We cannot “create” joy, but we can put ourselves in a position where we can receive it. We may find great joy in sailing, but we will not find it if we don’t go where there is a boat, water, and wind. In the same way the believer is to focus on hope in God, the “position” where joy can be found (John Piper, Ro 12:11; January 9, 2005 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)). No matter how unstable, fragile, or difficult life may be, we must keep our eyes on the promises of God (we must have hope), exercise endurance in the midst of trials (not just endure the trial), and maintain closeness to God through prayer.

Thus Christians are to be neither pessimistic nor optimistic. Pessimism denies the victory of God. Optimism denies the reality of sin. Human nature will not be transformed by education or reformed by society. Economic empowerment won’t make people better. The world has no capacity to actually change humanity, but God does. Our calling is to have hope; all that we have in Christ is safe in Christ.

***12:13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.***

Lastly, transformation of life is seen as believers contribute to the needs of the saints and practice hospitality.

“Contribute” is the verb *koinoneo* (κοινωνέω) which is related to the noun *koinonia* (κοινωνία), or fellowship. Believers belong to each other in Christ and should share all they have.

The early church placed an extremely high value on hospitality. Literally, this reads, “pursue hospitality,” and the verb implies continuous action.

1 Peter 4:8–9 says, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint.” “Without complaint” means, be the kind of people who do it and like to do it! “In other words, the command to be hospitable is not just a command to do something. It is not just a command that can be legalistically fulfilled with a quota of guests. It is a command to be a certain kind of person, namely, the kind that doesn't resent having to be hospitable” (John Piper, Ro 12:13, August 25, 1985 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)). In the next verse (1 Pet. 4:10) Peter says, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” We have received God’s grace so we need to be good stewards of it.

So the command in Romans 12:13 is that hospitality is not just a once a year event at Thanksgiving or Christmas, but a constant attitude and practice. Our homes and apartments should stand constantly ready for strategic hospitality—a readiness to welcome people who don't ordinarily live there.

In sum, the gospel is not just to be embraced as a truth that is taught, but it is to be lived out in the Christian community as something that can be seen. When the unbelieving world looks at Christians, they should see a group of people devoted to each other, loving each other, honoring and helping each other, practicing hospitality, and demonstrating such joy and perseverance in trials that they cannot help but see that the gospel changes lives.