

There is a frequent, and sadly accurate, accusation against the church that there are too many hypocrites in the church. Hypocrisy is evident when people claim to be followers of Jesus but still want to live on their own terms.

The heading in most Bibles before Romans 12:9 reads, “**Marks of the True Christian.**”

What follows seems to be a list of attributes that we can easily gloss over.

In the first portion Romans 12, Paul writes about spiritual gifts that every member of the Body of Christ has been given. Those gifts are to be exercised to build up the church to effectively minister to their community. But exercising the gifts without love is merely a clanging cymbal (see 1 Cor 13:1).

Love

Paul uses two Greek words for love in this passage:

1: *Agape* (Romans 12:9), This is a sacrificial love, like the love displayed by Christ on the cross (see Romans 5:8).

2: *Phileo* (Romans 12:10), This is affection for one another, particularly within the family.

Think of *Agape* as the steady, immovable anchor that holds a marriage together through the fiercest storms, or the quiet grace that moves us to care for a broken stranger.

Phileo is the sweet, joyful warmth shared around a table of dear friends and beloved family. To build a truly flourishing life and community, we need both—the tender affection of *Philéo* and the enduring covenant commitment of *agape*.

In Romans 12:9-16, Paul focuses on the attitudes of those people in the church who are exercising their spiritual gifts. It is possible to use a spiritual gift in a way that is damaging and destructive to the Body of Christ. For example, teaching can be used to manipulate people, even generosity can be used for selfish motives. Without genuine love, spiritual gifts are not helpful to the Church.

Warren Wiersbe writes, “*Love is the circulatory system of the spiritual body, which enables all the members to function in a healthy, harmonious way.*”

Paul lists twelve attributes in these verses:

1. Verse 9, “*Let love be genuine.*” This is love, without hypocrisy or without motive.

2. Verse 9, “*Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*” Love is not a blind sentiment, if we see a brother or sister straying from their walk with the Lord, we don’t sit idly by, we confront them in love and help them to come back to a healthy relationship with God.

3. Verse 10, “*Love one another with brotherly affection.*” This is the *Phileo* love, affection within a family. Our warmth for one another in the church is what keeps us in unity.

4. Verse 10, “*Outdo one another in showing honor.*” We should be in competition with one another to show honor to one another.

5. Verse 11, “*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*” The word “fervent” means to be boiling over with zeal for the Lord. This is excitement and passion that keeps us fervent when the enemy tries to destroy our witness.

Paul encourages us to maintain our zeal, boiling over in serving the Lord even when things get hard. Remember, we cannot do this, but as we cry out to God the Holy Spirit gives us fervency and zeal.

6. Verse 12, “*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*” Here we have three in one, but the key is the hope we have, remember this is not a hope in some uncertain future, this hope is based on the certainty of the promises of God and the return of Christ.

7. Verse 13, “*Contribute to the needs of the saints.*” This is generosity, sharing what we have with one another. This was a mark of the early church (see Proverbs 19:17).

8. Verse 13, “*seek to show hospitality.*” Coupled with our love for one another, we need to have a love for strangers who are part of the greater Church (see Hebrews 13:2).

9. Verse 14, “*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*” The world watches how we respond when mocked and persecuted. As Christians we don’t have the right to curse those who persecute us. It is not easy, but we have the enabling power of the Holy Spirit when we pray for those who persecute us. And when we do pray for those who persecute us, a miracle takes place and Satan loses his power over our lives (see Luke 6:27-28).

10. Verse 15, “*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*” True love never stands apart when people are suffering. If we love one another, we sacrificially care for them and identify with their suffering. Our natural tendency is to avoid people who are suffering, because we feel awkward, but that is selfish motivation. Love motivates us to action.

11. Verse 16, "*Live in harmony with one another.*" This simply means, thinking the same things, being of one mind. No ulterior motives, living in agreement (see Philippians 2:2). When we keep the Gospel as the thing that unites us, we will live in harmony. When there is disharmony, it is because we have taken our eyes off Jesus as the head of the church. Usually this is because of pride, which leads to our final point.

12. Verse 16, "*Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.*" Don't be prideful! Prideful people are obsessed with their status in the church. Jesus was drawn to the lowly and rejected the influential people in society. Pride and love of position is always destructive.

These twelve points from these few verses remind us that being a part of the church is so much more than showing up on a Sunday and patting a few people on the back. It means doing life together, sharing burdens, blessing one another, and bringing glory to God through our relationships.

If people in the church, who claim to be filled with the Spirit of God cannot honor and love one another, how can we ever represent Christ to a lost world.

Let us love one another with the supernatural "agape" love of God.