

Passionate Service!
Romans 12:11

Last time we were together we looked at verse 10 and saw the ministry one to another. We saw that we are to love another another with brotherly or family affection. The meaning of family affection is “philos” love or love as if someone was our own blood or kindred. It is the high calling of believers in the lives of believers. We love others in the household of faith the same way the Lord has loved us. And we outdo one another is showing honour, not seeking our own honour but honouring and serving and living for others. And when you look at these two commands so often we rush through and never see what God is commanding of us as we live lives that are worthy of the gospel. This kind of Christianity in the household of faith is foreign to what we see so often today. But it is through this dedicated and lasting love and service that we have with one another that the world will know the love of God in Christ Jesus.

So this morning we come to two more commands that are both related to one another. And for modern day churches this kind of calling, this kind of service as living sacrifices for the cause of Christ is so foreign. We seek not to serve but to be served. What can the church do for me or give me or provide for me in my Christian life? Once I have taken all that from that church the modern Christian is off to the next church to see what they are providing. The whole goal of living lives worthy of the gospel is redefined as a personal relationship between me and God. What the last year and a half have shown us is how shallow of love and commitment are, not only to one another but to Jesus Christ. And what Paul is discussing and commanding here is how we live as those who are Christ’s among the people of God.

Church many times is like a membership in an athletic club. There are times I go and am committed. But for some reason I might not go for several months. Maybe I am exercising outside or maybe it is just that life has different seasons, and this just happens to be a season where I am not exercising. No biggy! It is the same with the church. It is not that I have left God, but this is just what is right for me right now. And our culture of Christianity the self is at the centre. It is all about me. It is all about what I want and what I see I need. That is what makes these commands so foreign in one sense if we understand them because we do not see them in our own life and we do not see them in other believer’s lives also.

But if God has done all that he says that he has done for sinners like you and me, if he has accomplished all that he says he has in the book of Romans then these commands should not be burdensome or stifling or constraining. But our care and love for God should cause us to deeply and passionately not only care for others but truly serve one another. Think of it: when was the last time you really served or tried to be a benefit to someone in the church, just because you are overwhelmed with your relationship with God? But instead we are very leery and cautious about committing to anything. We want our Christianity and a church where there are very few commitments. If you want to see how far we have strayed, to be committed to coming out to a church service at a particular church once a week is looked upon as radical. And yet if that is all that you did how could you ever carry out these commands that are given to us in this passage that are an explanation of the heart and life that are turned to Christ?

So as we look at the commands that are in verse 11, let me ask you is there an intensity to your commitment to make much of Christ among the people of God? Are you looking for opportunities to serve others and serve others whole heartedly? Or would we rather leave it to someone else? You know the old adage: and the stats bear this as true from church to church - 20% of the people do the work for the other 80%. Imagine if all the church took the calling and commands of verse 11 seriously what the church would look like and what the testimony of Christ would look like? Are we seeking to do more for the Lord or are we content with others carrying the load? Let us be challenged by these two commands this morning.

1. We see there needs to be an intensity about everything we do for God. V.11a.

One of the things we forget is that if I do anything for the Lord - preach a sermon, clean the church, work in the sound booth, change a diaper in the nursery, greet people coming in, it is a privilege. It is a grace that is given me of the Lord to be involved in the greatest venture that will last forever in making and maturing disciples for the glory of God. There is no higher calling. Being involved in ministry in any way is better than making money, sex, food or any other delight that we could ever have in this life. Do you believe that? Or do you believe that what God is commanding here is taking away my valuable time to invest in things that are more worthy of my time? Do you actually believe that God is trying to destroy your life rather than making it one that is substantive and meaningful and giving you the opportunity to be involved in building something that is eternal in nature? Remember, God is good. And therefore all his commands are good.

Now I do I take this as one command. It just looks at it from the negative side and also the positive side. The negative side is seen in the first clause: “**Do not be slothful in zeal,**” and then the positive, “**be fervent in spirit.**” And it is incredible to look at the Scriptures and see how these two sides interact with one another. The first is that we are not to be slothful in zeal. We all know what it means to be slothful. It is to be lazy, to let things go, to just not do the things that need to be done. You know what it is like. It could be those chores that need to be done around the house. We wake up in the morning wanting to accomplish it, but I have all day, at noon - I still have the afternoon, at supper time - well there is always tomorrow. Well, this is connected with loving others and the work of the church of Christ. We can often talk a good talk about being zealous in all that needs to be done for the Lord, but it is the carrying that out that is the problem. The call here is to be intentional - to work, labour, and toil; don't be a spiritual sluggard. Does this describe you - your intentions seem to be good but the doing is lacking?

Now look at the positive side of this: “**be fervent in spirit.**” The word “fervent” here literally means to be boiling. It means something bubbling up in us. That is what it means when combine with the spirit. There is joy and intensity when it comes to our love and passion for Jesus Christ. So look how these two sides of the same command fit together. It is not that God is saying based on Jesus Christ it is all about the work you I do and perform. Doesn't matter what you feel as long as your are labouring for me and sacrificing for me. It is not the idea, “Well, I don't want to love you and serve you, but I have to because God said.” I am just obeying God. No, our inner life and passions are involved. These truths of God's love for us in Christ are meant not only to

be known but as they are known we feel them. There are emotions involved in realizing how wonderfully and fully we have been loved through the sacrifice of Christ. It is not enough just to have the right actions but our hearts must be right and fervent to what to honour and glorify our Lord and Saviour.

This also is not just saying that I need a fervent spirit, as if our actions do not matter. You have heard the old saying - some people are doers and some people pray. I am a prayer. What they are essentially saying is that I will pray with all my heart but I will not do. I will not work or labour. God wants us to feel deeply and work intensely. There is an excellent example of how these two commands come together in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul talks and discusses the coming resurrection. And if you read and understand your hearts are overwhelmed with these truths. We shall not all sleep but we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye. We will be given bodies that are eternal and incorruptible and will not fade away. Death will not have the last word. So now listen to how he ends off that chapter in 1 Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”** Based on these truths we rejoice deeply and fervently. We bubble over but we are zealous in obeying and following and serving our greater God. The knowledge of his gospel and our great hope transforms our zeal. The message comes first, and love for God. This is what is missing so often today.

We see the same thing over in the book of Philippians. In chapter two we have the self-emptying of Christ, and his humiliation on our behalf, and then God exalts him and gives him a name above every name, and we should be overwhelmed by the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. And right after that is the command in Philippians 2:12, **“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** “Therefore,” based on these truths - work out, labour with fervency and zeal and intensity your salvation. Put effort into every aspect of it. The exact opposite of this is do some work but certainly not do it passionately and wholehearted as unto the Lord. Revelation 3:15-16 speaks of the church at Laodicea, **“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”** They had works but they were not hot or cold and therefore they were repulsive to our Lord and Saviour. Both actions and attitudes are necessary.

Now, here is the question: what if I do not want to serve God. I know it is not right. I do not want to come out to church. I just feel so discouraged and dry because of whatever is going on in my life. If action and attitude are involved in our service and obedience to Christ then maybe I should not teach that Sunday school class that I committed to or maybe I should say not come out to church. After all I do not want to be a hypocrite? I do not want to act as if I am something I am not. What should I do? And here is the answer obey God when you don't feel like it and don't want to obey him. Obey him. You do not add sin upon sin. You do not add the sin of not wanting to serve him and glorify him with the sin of not doing what I know he has commanded. But isn't that playing the hypocrite? And the answer is no. The hypocrite is fine with his hypocrisy as long as no one finds out. If you know that your feelings do not match your

actions, you know something is wrong. Admit your heart struggle to God, then do the right thing. This is spiritual warfare, and it is amazing how often when we keep doing the right thing how often those right emotions return. Start to look at your life and what you are putting in. Constant cycle of news, media and entertainment will drain you. But honest: how much intake of God in his word is really coming into my life and how much of this other stuff that makes me dry, angry and depressed. Christianity is a battle, not with other people but with our own foolish hearts. Listen to this command, and realize there are no alternatives. This is not a suggestion: **“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit.”** May God help us obey him in all things.

2. Our singleminded focus is serving the Lord. V.11.

Our love for others, showing honour to others, and our fervency in serving is not misdirected but it is all about serving the Lord. That is what we are doing. Yes, we are involved in the lives of others but ultimately it is about the Lord. It is about him. He is Lord and I am not. Again, we know this but the way we act and behave is the exact opposite so often. We know that he is master and owner and ruler and our king, but we act as if we are kings and God has given us his presence among believers in the church to serve us. And there are those who think it is all about receiving. It is all about getting. And they never consider this aspect of serving the Lord. Their idea of serving the Lord is coming out to church is serving, but I come out to get. Their idea of serving is saying a prayer before a meal or whatever but it is very personal and private. It is about me and God and it has no outworking among the people of God.

So look at what Paul says here, **“serve the Lord.”** Just three words, but three words that should consume our lives and give direction to our actions and attitudes. The language in our English actually blunts the command. This is something we might see on a plaque maybe in a kitchen. It becomes a nice quaint saying among those who are believers. But this is a strong command. The one that we serve is “the Lord.” And this is a title of deity and one that is used of Jesus Christ. It speaks of his Lordship, that he is our authority and our Lord. He is not just an addition to our lives. The word was very common among slaves to their owner. They would profess that their master was lord and that he had ownership and authority over them. We have taken that title of Jesus and not realized that he is our owner, king and master. We see something of the grandeur and significance and meaning of this title in Philippians 2:9-11 that we alluded to earlier, **“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** The name give that all bow to is Lord. He is our head, authority and all, therefore his word is all. Whatever the master says we have no choice but obey. These truths were deeply ingrained in the people in which people that Paul was writing.

Therefore the call is to serve the Lord. Listen to what Murray Harris writes about this, **“When believers sing or recite the confession, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ we are affirming his absolute supremacy, not only over the physical and moral universe, and not only over human history, not only over all human beings, whether living or dead, not only over the church, but also over our own lives as his willing slaves.**

The simple but crucial point is that the two words ‘Lord’ and ‘slave,’ kyrios and doulos, are correlatives.” The slave is completely subservient to the master. He finds his identity in his master and lives to do whatever his will. Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, **“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”** Are we living like we are our own? Are we living like I decide what is right for me? Is there anything that says “servant of the Lord” over your life? Again it is all encompassing. Colossians 3:17 says, **“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”**

So how is this worked out in our lives? How do we serve the Lord. Well we have to realize what it isn't. And let me name a couple of things it is not that I hope will give clarity. One is that we serve the Lord and not people. That is what the command says. And it almost seems like I am saying the opposite of what I have said in the last couple weeks, but the command says that we are serve the Lord with a single-minded determination and passion. And certainly as we serve the Lord we do serve people. This sermon is to the service of the Lord but at the same time it is serving people. But the primary motivation is is the Lord. That is why we passionate get involved in the messiness of one another's lives. That is why we give up our time and assets and take on the burdens of others - it is because he is Lord and Master. We are not primarily serving others or we would be simply man-pleasers, simply to be seen by them and live for them. But as we serve the Lord we are able to love people and serve people in the highest way because what they need is the Lord. You see it is not just about being nice or just serving just for the sake of serving. It is not just about being passionate about a certain cause that will benefit others. It is about serving the Lord, and being passionate about his glory. We are zealous therefore all that we do.

The second thing here is that serving Christ is not about getting. So many individuals give up on others and Jesus' church when they do not get the desired goal, response or end. It might be after all that they have done they are not respected or appreciated. Maybe someone who you poured your heart into, after you had done so much for them ends up leaving the church for another church or deserting you or whatever. What do we do? Do we say, I will never invest my life and heart in others? We serve the Lord. It is about him. We do it passionately and labour hard for his glory. He is Lord. Or maybe the ministry that you want is not open to you but there are others, but it is just not exciting and fulfilling as we want. What do we do? We do whatever is open and we do it passionate and earnestly as unto the Lord. It is not about getting or some sort of self fulfilment or whatever. It is about God. Think of it: we get to serve the One who came and lived that absolutely righteous life and died that death in my place that I might live with him eternally. Can you think of any greater life that we could ever live; any higher privilege that he could give us in the here and now?

Here is the question: what are doing in the here and now? How do we view the church? This last little time in human history has really revealed something about our hearts. When things are taken away we get so angry and frustrated. Why? Because even in the midst of that my life has been about getting and not giving. Is it all about me or is it all about my Lord? Am I a servant, or one who constantly needs to be

served? Read these commands, and realize this should be the normal Christian life, then seek to live out our blessed salvation in Christ.