



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## Real Marks of Real Christianity

July 26, 2020

Romans 12:11-13

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*<sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

*(Pastor prays)*

Has there ever been a more perfect candy bar concoction than a Reese's peanut butter cup? I love them in singles, 2 packs, quad packs and miniature in the golden tin foil. I like them frozen, in white chocolate and, at Easter, I'm thankful for the resurrection of Jesus and Reese's peanut butter eggs.

But while I was on vacation, I encountered a pretender to the Reese's Cup throne...A usurper to all that is good and right with a Reese's Cup, namely a Reese's Cup thin. We don't eat Reese's cups because we want to be thin! Packaged in the winsome orange and black wrapper, with the appropriate logo, it looked the same, was shaped the same, but when I bit into it, it was an utter disappointment because what I wanted to be inside wasn't there. What makes a Reese's a Reese's is the joy of what's inside. In the same way, just like there are Reese's thins in the world, there are also Christian "thins" in the world. They are packaged the same way, presented with the same advertisement, but lacking the necessary ingredients on the inside to make them real Christians.

Now the Apostle Paul knew this would be a problem so in his letter to the Romans, after he spent 11 chapters putting us on solid ground as to what a Christian believes— about how our Holy God is the creator of the whole universe and everything in it, He created man in His own perfect image; but when man sinned, it created a chasm between God and man and

condemned man to death because the penalty for sin is death. Jesus Christ, the son of God, was born of a virgin and lived a perfect life. He willingly gave His life on the cross to cover our sins and provide redemption for man.

The Bible says in Romans 10:9, *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* Paul then turns his attention to how we can know what real Christianity looks like. And in this passage he lists 20 ethical indications of a Christian. You would do well just to go through and list them all out, turn them into questions and ask yourself if you really are a Christian. In fact, nowhere else in all of Paul's writings is there a more concise collection of statements of what a Christian is supposed to look like and live like.

Now last week we took verses 9 through 10; this week we are going to really pick up speed and cover verses 11 and 12. You see three statements in verse 11, three in verse 12 and two in verse 13. And all of them will press us to live our lives for Christ in a world that needs the Gospel. Because ...

### **Real Christianity Will Always Show Itself**

What's it look like?

#### **It's marked by genuine devotion.**

Let's look at the first triad in verse 11. Let's read it again and then break it down. <sup>11</sup>*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.* This verse is filled with Christian diligence, earnestness and maturity! <sup>11</sup>*Do not be slothful in zeal.* Let's take the two primary words. Zeal. It translates a word that combines haste and diligence. Holy zeal and radical dedication – a true believer. You might be able to translate it into enthusiasm, caring about something deeply.

And the other word, “slothful,” is just lazy. Put them together and the sentence could say, don't be lazy about caring. Caring about the things of the Lord. Your soul, your friends, worship, holiness, victory over sin, growing in grace - all of those are genuine devotion. There is no room for laziness in the Lord's work. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 9:10, *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.* And in Proverbs 18:9 it says, *Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.*

Paul picks up the idea in Ephesians 5:15-16, *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* And it may be that you need to repent of spiritual laziness and apathy and ask God to renew in you a first and intense love for Christ.

Let's not stop there, Paul goes on in verse 11. *Be fervent in spirit.* Fervent. Not a word we use much. It means to boil and to burn. John MacArthur says, like a steam engine, you must have sufficient heat to produce the energy necessary to get the work done! Here would be the opposite of indifference or not caring or the opposite of a lack of commitment. It is lukewarm, reminding us that there is no such thing as a non-practicing Christian! This is the word that Luke used in Acts 18 to describe the great preacher Apollos, saying he was fervent in spirit.

Paul ends this strong verse on real devotion with a wonderful umbrella statement. *Serve the Lord.* This means we do things that are consistent with God's word and we do things that result in God's glory.

I'm reading a book right now on the Crusades. "Crusade" means "to take up the cross." There are seven of them, but it is a misunderstanding of serving the Lord. Paul is talking here about the absolute submission of your life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. MacArthur again reminds us of something that's really important, that— if taken seriously— could have a genuine centering effect in your life.

In Romans 12, Paul uses three different words to describe a Christian's service to the Lord. *Latreia.* This is service of worship, coming before God in reverential awe by His mercy and grace found at the cross. *Diakonos.* This is practical service, helping, food pantry, driving someone to the doctor or cutting someone's grass. In verse 11 Paul uses another word for service. It is *Douleuo.* This is the service of a bond slave whose very reason for existence is to please his King above all else. Paul considered himself a *doulos*, servant of Jesus. In Romans 1:1, Paul describes himself as a *doulos* of Jesus. <sup>1</sup>*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.* In Philippians 1:1, *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.* And finally in Titus 1:1, *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness.*

As an experiment— from here on out—every time you say, type or text your name, you ought to whisper to yourself, “a servant of Jesus.” Real Christianity will always show itself and is marked by genuine devotion.

**It's marked by lasting endurance.**

You can feel that when you read verse 12. Let's read it and take a look at it. <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.* The “hope” is future-based and presently felt. It's based on the future; it carries you through the present. Paul's admonition is that genuine Christians are to be filled with joy, not dread, because of the hope that awaits us.

Are you struggling with joy? Tom Shriner says joy evaporates when hope vanishes and hope vanishes when we put our eyes on the wrong things. I don't have hope for America or politics or that people are going to quit being hateful or that the pandemic will end next month or that my retirement fund is gonna bounce back. My hope is in the crucified, resurrected and returning Jesus. My hope is in a sovereign, merciful, good, forgiving and restoring God who loves His people and Christ and will sustain them no matter what comes.

How do you endure what you're going through right now? Take joy in that. In Jesus. In grace, God's love, His people, Him using you, and common grace. Most of the people hearing this letter for the first time had very little to rejoice about. The church in Rome would very soon after this letter be under persecution, and they had very little to actually look forward to.

But two things would resonate in their hearts and put steel in their souls. Philippians 4:4 says, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* And Colossians 1:27 says, *To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* How do we have endurance? Rejoice in hope.

Let's look at the next phrase. *Be patient in tribulation.* Paul told us what this looks like back in Romans 5: 3-5 and now seems like a good time to rattle our memories on what he said. <sup>3</sup> *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* <sup>4</sup> *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,* <sup>5</sup> *and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* That's how we can be patient in tribulation.

There are two things about this phrase in verse 12 that I want you to see. Tribulation is an affliction. It is deep, serious, painful trouble. It's shock at a diagnosis or betrayal or death. It's an emotional sucker punch. So what do we do with tribulation? And Paul says, "be patient." It feels passive. It feels like putting up with someone. It's like a friend that is late all the time. This word is not a passive word but an active word. It's the idea of steadfast, faithful endurance. It is being reliable and dependable. It means to remain instead of running away. It means to stand your ground instead of caving in. It means to hold out instead of giving up. It means grace instead of guilt because of what Christ has done.

And you might say that's fine to preach, but hard to live. How do I do it? Paul gives you the answer in that third phrase. *Be constant in prayer.* God uses the affliction for good, and that good is that it drives us to Him. Be constant in prayer.

Connie and I were walking yesterday morning, and she's reading Nehemiah and she mentioned how although he's telling the story, you have him uttering a prayer to God.

Pain is the road to closeness with God and it's paved with prayer. Notice that Paul says to be devoted to prayer because it doesn't happen naturally. If you are going to be a man or woman of prayer, you must consciously set your mind and heart to do so! It's why it's a discipline and effort to give yourself and your troubles over to a good and gracious God who loves us in Jesus.

I want that for you. I want you to have a faith that's real, a faith that shows itself, a Christianity that's marked by genuine devotion and by lasting endurance all because of the grace given to us at the cross of Jesus.

I want you to know that the Bible teaches us that God is good and holy and created everything, including mankind, all of us in this room. You were created in the image of God. That image of God within you and me has been disfigured by our own sin to the degree that we are separated from God. Jesus Christ, who was fully man and is fully God, lived perfectly, earning righteousness that you and I can't. Then Jesus took the wrath of God in the place of sinners. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus died on the cross for us. Then God raised Him from the dead. He ascended into heaven; and He sits at the right hand of God and rules the entire universe.

We can never work our way to Heaven but the work of righteousness has been done in Christ. The work of salvation has been done in Christ, so what is left for you is to believe. To believe means turning from sin, knowing that it is wrong, and turning to Christ, believing that Jesus saves.

*(Pastor prays)*