



MINISTER
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22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Romans 12:9-21

What are We Full of?

Intro: Our NT passage is from Romans. Romans has been called Paul's manifesto, or his last will and testament as it attempts to summarize his teachings and his life's efforts in ministry. Paul is one who likes lists, lots of lists, and our reading is no exception. Let us listen for God's word as it comes to us in Romans.

There is a well worn adage that says "going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than opening a car's hood makes you an auto mechanic". (I know the hard truth about that mechanic part. I open my hood a lot.) When it comes to Christianity, it is good to ask "what distinguishes a Christian in crowd?" What does our calling to follow Christ lead us to be and do that is different than if we never believed in Christ? What are the consequences, good and bad, in our lives if we really strive to live everyday as people in a community of faith?

What does a Christian look like? Paul intends to provide a picture through our scripture. It sound kind of like he is

writing an Autoban field guide for spotting Christians. Notice that he doesn't describe physical or "outer" characteristics as though you could ID a Christian by looking through binoculars. Paul's words describe "inner" characteristics to draw distinctions. He offers a series of specific characteristics to look for, defining a Christian life in motion and in relationship. The list making up Paul's "marks of the true Christian" is almost exhausting in the effort to be complete

In this short passage he names 24 things a Christian should do or not do. We are to be filled with love, serve others, rejoice, and persevere. We should not lag in zeal, be haughty, or repay anyone evil

for evil. Christians are to contribute to the saints, offer hospitality, weep with others, and bless others. That is not the whole list. Perhaps some of these didn't sound so hard, but did some perhaps make us cringe?

All in all, these characteristics are not the things that come naturally for us. They are not innate behaviors ingrained in our genes. They reflect changes in our lives and departures from our usual way of living as we seek act in faith. The things he names as marks of a Christian are that are not necessarily easy for us. Remember how he says don't be conformed to the world. Faith in God is not a set of ideas tucked away in the attics of our minds. It is by our actions that we will be known to others as somehow being different. But it is not our actions that will somehow "save us" or make us loved any more by God. It is by our actions that we are known.

The Christian faith is a way to live life. It is by our actions that we will be known to others as somehow being different. What is within us will influence how we act and how we are in the world. This religion, our Christian faith is different from others. There has been a lot of effort to try to bring all religions together under one roof and say, gee it really doesn't matter it's all the same anyway. It's the same God. We all just need to live a good life and be a good person. That's all that really matters. There is great merit in respect

and tolerance of the wide variety of religious expression. But to same its all the same is to miss the richness and the truth of the significant differences of believers around the world. There is not just one phylum "Religious" It is not up to us to judge, or be haughty. I believe God is worshipped in many different and wonderful ways. We need to claim our beliefs and live them, because it is who we are.

In Romans, Paul is writing to the wider church encouraging all who follow Jesus. He is challenging them to not to worry so much about trying to be good with God by following the law, and he confronts the thinking that suggests that we can be right with God if we just follow all the rules or offer certain sacrifices. Paul urges us instead to focus on how we can be changed from within and then begin to make a difference in the world around us. While Paul didn't write it exactly this way, he would agree with the sentiment, "if you want to change the world, start with yourself and see what happens! Paul assures us that we are right with God right now, and embracing that frees us to live as different people who do not conform to the ways of the world.

As Christians we do want to be known for what we believe who we are on the inside, and known for how we are in this world. Behinds Paul's description is an ethic of agape love. Love that starts with God and flows from God to every living

thing, even those who could be seen as enemies of God. Living our faith is how we comprehend God with us and around us. Our focus is not so much the after life, it is living life now in such a way that we experience and we reflect glimpses of God's eternity.

This passage is part of a longer section of Paul's that has been likened to Jesus' sermon on the mount. Just as Jesus encapsulated what Christians ought to do into the dual commandment to "Love the Lord your God," and to "love your neighbor as yourself", Paul's long litany of Christian characteristics is perhaps fully contained in verses 9-10. Verse 9 outlines the attitude - displaying genuine love, hating evil, loving good - while verse 10 calls us to action - to "outdo one another in showing honor." Competing not in an aggressive way as we are taught in our society, but striving to do our best in giving to others and sharing God's love. That is it in a nutshell.

It is out of the abundance of the heart that a person acts and speaks, whatever fills the heart fuels the life. A question for us, is what are we full of? How are we known to others? Are we living our faith in ways that others see it and recognize it? Paul's description is before us, do we see ourselves in it? What can we do to become more like the description he sets forth?

Changed lives is what living faith is all about. Paul gives us a challenging,

disciplined, curious statement about how we ought to live. It humbles us, it calls us to live with compassion and energy. But most of it calls to be live as people who are filled with love. Amen.