

“Be Sympathetic towards One Another”
(Romans 12:15)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Paul has told us about the good we are to do for each other.
 - a. We are to love those near and contribute to one another's needs.
 - b. But also those far who are in need.
 - c. And when those who are far come near, we are to open our homes to them.
2. He has also told us something about how we are to treat our enemies.
 - a. When someone hates/mistreats/abuses/hurts us, we are not to return the same.
 - b. Rather, we are to return good for evil, love for hate, blessing for cursing.
 - c. We must remember that persecution is a part of the Christian's life.
 - d. The godlier you are, the more you will be hated; the more like Christ, the more despised.
 - e. But when we are hated, we are not to hate back.
 - (i) With regard to ourselves, we are to bless.
 - (ii) With regard to God, we are to desire mercy, but if unrepentant, justice.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, Paul turns back to our relationship with each other.
 - a. He reminds us again that we are a family, a community, a body.
 - b. This means we are to be concerned for each other, to enter into each other's joys and sorrows.
 - c. When one member of our body feels good, it makes the whole feel better: *e.g.*, back rub, foot message.
 - d. But when one member hurts, it makes the whole uncomfortable: *e.g.*, burn your hand, smash your finger (Sarah's finger).
 - e. Love makes the same true of a family:
 - (i) Which husband or wife can say that you don't feel happier when your spouse is happy, or sad when sad, or hurt when hurt?
 - (ii) What parent can say he is happy when his children are sad, or who isn't concerned when their children are sick?
 - (iii) Children, how do you feel when your parents aren't feeling well? Or when happy?
 - (iv) Love makes us sympathetic, enter into their emotions.
 - f. The same is true of community, or used to be true.
 - (i) People used to need their neighbors, rely on them; this built close relationships: *e.g.*, Little House on the Prairie.
 - (ii) When they were happy, it made everyone else happy; when sad, sad; when sick or dying, it made them grieve.
 - (iii) Their need for each other created care and concern.

2. This is what is to be true of our relationship with each other.
 - a. We are one body – the body of Christ, members of each other; we need each other.
 - b. We are a family – the family of God, God is our Father, Christ our brother, our husband.
 - c. And we are a community – of the redeemed, the members of God’s kingdom.
 - d. Therefore, we are to love, to care, to be concerned for each other.
 - e. Paul tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

II. Sermon.

A. We are to be sympathetic towards one another. What does this mean?

1. To be sympathetic means to enter into another’s feelings.
 - a. It actually comes from two Greek words:
 - (i) *pathos*: suffering, passion.
 - (ii) *sun*: with.
 - (iii) It literally means to suffer together with.
 - b. It can mean either to share another’s suffering, or to share their emotions.
 - (i) Sadness, pain, suffering, disappointments.
 - (ii) Happiness, joy, rejoicing.
2. But, of course, the idea behind it, biblically, is not simply feeling what someone else feels, but letting that feeling move you to some action.
 - a. James reminds us that just sympathizing with someone’s need – “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled” – without meeting that need, shows that there is no true love (James 2:15-16).
 - b. Jesus will rebuke those on the day of judgment who were aware of the needs of their brethren, but did nothing about it:
 - (i) Either because they didn’t show sympathy/mercy.
 - (ii) Or sympathizing, did nothing about it.
 - c. On the other hand, He will bless those who felt compassion and did something about it: “Then the King will say to those on His right, Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me” (Matt. 25:35-40).
 - d. The Lord wants us to enter into each other’s lives: to love, to care, to be concerned, enough to move us to action.

B. How is this to work itself out in our lives?

1. Paul says first, “Rejoice with those who rejoice.”
 - a. This is definitely the easier of the two.
 - (i) To rejoice means to be glad or delighted (Friberg).
 - (ii) It’s what you do when something good or exciting happens to you: engagements, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, deliverance from some evil,

doing well at something – recital, term paper, exam, project at work;
especially salvation.

(iii) When the Lord blesses our brothers and sisters, we are to rejoice with them.

b. Some biblical examples:

(i) Elizabeth was barren, but gave birth. When she did “her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her” (Luke 1:58).

(ii) The shepherd who found his one lost sheep, and the woman who found her one lost coin, called their friends and neighbors together to rejoice with them (Luke 15:4-9).

(iii) In the same way, the angels in heaven rejoice over even one sinner who repents (vv. 7, 10).

(iv) When Barnabas went to Antioch and saw that the Lord had saved many, “he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

(v) Paul told the Corinthians, “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

(vi) This naturally happens in our body, our families, in our communities.

(vii) It will also happen in the church, when there is love.

(viii) This is actually a command to love each other this much.

2. But he says secondly, “Weep with those who weep.”

a. This is the more difficult of the two – not to understand, but to do.

(i) It’s just the opposite of the first.

(ii) The Greek word means to weep, cry, shed tears; to wail or lament over, weep for someone (Friberg), such as Rachel who wept for her children because they were all dead (Matt. 2:18).

(iii) It means to enter into the sufferings of one another with compassion and care.

b. Again, some biblical examples:

(i) When Nehemiah heard of the condition of Jerusalem and her people, he wrote, “I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (Neh. 1:4).

(a) We don’t seem to have this same sense of community.

(b) As a society, we are very individualistic. But that wasn’t the case with Israel, nor should it be with us.

(ii) When Job was suffering, his friends came to him, not simply to mourn with him, but to comfort him.

(a) “Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him” (Job 2:11).

- (b) They ended up being poor comforters, but at least they were concerned enough to do something.
- (iii) David expressed his concern for those around him who were suffering, but remorse for their turning on him in return, “But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer kept returning to my bosom. I went about as though it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother. But at my stumbling they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; the smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me, they slandered me without ceasing. Like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth” (Psalm 35:13-16).
- (iv) Regardless of how we are treated, we must still feel and show concern.
- (v) Jeremiah wept for the slain among his people, and desired the wicked to leave, “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! O that I had in the desert a wayfarers' lodging place; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For all of them are adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men” (Jer. 9:1-2).
- (vi) We are not to sympathize with the wicked, but the oppressed.
- (vii) Jesus entered into the suffering of Mary and the Jewish mourners at the death of Lazarus, “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her, *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled, and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They *said* to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. And so the Jews were saying, ‘Behold how He loved him!’” (John 11:33-36)!
- (viii) And Paul said, “Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern” (2 Cor. 11:29).
- c. This is the attitude the Lord wants us to have.
 - (i) We are not to be indifferent to the struggles, sufferings, trials, cares, or concerns of one another.
 - (ii) Paul writes, “Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).
 - (iii) What law is that? “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39).
 - (iv) Love does nothing wrong to a neighbor; it does what is right.
 - (v) Love cares for another as though you are caring for yourself.
 - (vi) Do you want others to enter into your happiness and rejoice with you? Do the same.
 - (vii) Do you want others to enter into your sorrow and bring comfort? Then comfort them.
 - (viii) Our Lord calls us to have fellowship with one another's joys and sorrows; to be one body, one family, one holy community.
 - (ix) May He give us the grace to do so. Amen.