

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Romans 12:9-18, 19-21**  
**“Love Has A *To Do List*”**

October 18, 2015  
(21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**ROMANS 12:9-21 "LOVE HAS A TO DO LIST"**

10 (vv.9-18) + 2 Maxims (vv.19-21)

**2') 12:9-18 THE PRACTICES OF LOVE AND GOODNESS.** How Use Gifts, 8:2 Concentric

<u>Commands/ Maxims</u>		<u>12:1-8 = Surrendered, Gifted Church</u>	
<b>a) v.9 Evil And The Good: (1 Indicative, 2 Imperatives).</b> Two Ways, Boundary: No and Yes			
9	M1	"Love ( <i>agape</i> ) is not hypocritical (without pretense);"	(Love God, Neighbor) 2 Cor. 6:6
1,2		hate what is <b>EVIL</b> , hold fast to what is <b>GOOD</b> ./	(Resist And Preserve) Amos 5:15
vv.9-13 No Verbs, Participial Phrases As Imperatives			
<b>b) vv.10-11 "One Another" Commands, No Sloth (4 Imperatives).</b> vv.10-13 (10C)			
10	M2	Love <i>one another</i> with brotherly affection ( <i>phil-adelphia</i> )	(Family Love, Safe Love)
		outdo <i>one another</i> in showing honor./	(Recognize The Worth Of All)
11	M3	NEVER flag in zeal;	(Enthusiasm In Faith) Acts 18:25
6		be aglow with the Spirit./	(Keep The Spirit's Flame Tended)
Love → love, the Spirit → the Lord, Pursuing → Pursue			
<b>c) v.12 Rejoice In Hope (4 Imperatives).</b> Already/ Not Yet			
12	M4	Serve the Lord;	(Focus On Jesus)
		Rejoice in your hope./	(Future Vision) 5:2-5, 8:20-24
		Be patient in tribulation;	(Present Trials) 5:3, 8:35
10		be constant in prayer./	(Best Resource) Eph. 6:18
<i>pursuing hospitality // those who pursue you</i>			
<b>d) v.13 Love The Saints (2 Imperatives).</b> Privation/ Shelter			
13	M5	Contribute to the needs of the saints;	(Open Purse) 15:26-27, 31
		practice hospitality ( <i>phil-oxenia</i> )./	(Open Home) 15:7, Heb. 13:2
vv.14-21 = Infinitives As Imperatives			
<b>d') v.14 Love Enemies (Mt. 5:44) (2 Imperatives).*</b> Outsiders?			
14	M6	Bless those who persecute you;	(Counter-Intuitive) Non-Retaliation
14		bless and do not curse them./	(Refuse To Be Controlled) 5:10
//1 Cor. 4:2			
<b>c') v.15 Rejoice And Weep. (Sir. 7:34) (2 Imperatives).</b> Empathic Range			
15	M7	Rejoice with those who rejoice;	(Good Times) Active Solidarity
16		weep with those who weep./	(Hard Times) Non-Stoic, Sir. 7:34
v.16 = Participial Infinite // vv.9-13			
<b>b') v.16 "One Another," Commands, No Conceit (Prov. 3:7) (4 Imperatives).</b>			
16	M8	Live ( <i>think</i> ) in harmony with <i>one another</i> ;	(Blend For Beauty) 12:3a (4x)
		Do not be ( <i>think</i> in a way that is) haughty (lofty)	(Do Not Look Down)
		but associate with the lowly./	(Cross-Class Friendships)
19		NEVER "be conceited ( <i>think</i> yourself wise)."	(Self-Aware, Not Self Consumed)
Lit, "Do not think yourself wise in your own estimation."			
<b>a') vv.17-18 Evil, What Is Noble (Mt. 5:38-42) (3 Imperatives).*</b> Non-Retaliation + Do Good			
17	M9	Repay no one <b>EVIL for EVIL</b> ,	(Not Respond In Kind) 1 Thess. 5:15
		"but take thought for what is <b>NOBLE</b> in the sight of <i>all</i> men."	(Aim High) Stage, Prov. 3:4(LXX)
18	M10	If possible, so far as depends on you, live peaceably with <i>all</i> .	(Realistic Peace-Making)
<b>1') 12:19-21 OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD, 4 Imperatives.</b> 4:2 Concentric			
M11 A New Paragraph Begins			
<b>a) v.19a Contrast: Avoid Vengeance/ Trust God (Lev. 19:18) (2 Imperatives).*</b> Expands v.14			
19	24, 25	<b>Beloved</b> , never avenge yourselves,/ <u>but</u> leave it to the wrath of God;	(What Love Does Not Do, Trusts)
<i>Wrath = Metaphor For Judgment (1:18, 2:5, 8; 3:5, 5:9, 9:22)</i>			
<b>b) v.19b Basis For v.19a: O.T. Quote: Deut. 32:35.</b>			
for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."			
Scriptural Intro. Formula			
v.20 = Play Offense, Not Just Defense			
<b>b') v.20 Basis For v.21: O.T. Quote: Prov. 25:21-22a LXX (2 Imperatives).</b>			
20	26, 27	No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink;	(Love Takes The Initiative)
		for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."	Shaming, Form Of Torture From Love
Not Passive In Face Of Evil, No Defense Against Love			
<b>a') v.21 Contrast: Resist Evil, Practice Aggressive Good (2 Imperatives).</b> 1QS 10:17			
21	28, 29	Do not be overcome by <b>EVIL</b> , / <u>but</u> overcome evil with <b>GOOD</b>	(Don't Be Defeated, Overcomers!)
How Those With A New Mind Are Transformed Against The Pressures Of <i>This Present Evil Age</i>			

## LOVE HAS A *TO DO* LIST

*“Be aglow with the Spirit. Serve the Lord.”*

R O M A N S 1 2 : 11b - 12a

The energy and focus of Christian living.

**W**ith dazzling new technology come troublesome new forms of vice and self-deception. Technology changes into faster, better, more, but we do not change. This the world we currently inhabit this side of God’s new world. For example, smut– which used to be limited to sleazy stories in seedy parts of town– is now a click away and entrapping more and more men– and now women– into treating others as throw-aways. We use the images of people made in God’s image for entertainment, and in the process all are diminished, the purveyors and the consumers. The great gift of a gendered body is privately degraded with public consequences. And that is because life is a whole; I am finally one person. We artificially separate the public and the private realms for the sake of law and politics, but who we are and are becoming effects everything. We cannot escape ourselves, at least not for long. For good or ill, I wake up with Phil every morning– same guy, same issues, just a day older– and at the end of the day I’m a bit different depending on the vices I starved and the virtues I fed. Did I resist the evil and cling to the good? Did I follow Jesus?

A second– and perhaps less noticeable vice– is the illusion of social media. You see, by *liking* an issue on Facebook I enjoy the illusion I’ve actually done something. But affiliation is not action, just another fashion statement. A click is not a commitment. Love takes sustained action to bear fruit, and *liking* is a passing preference that changes nothing. Amid the glut of images and information, I pause to ask, “What am I doing with my faith in Christ that makes a difference?” I look at my checkbook; I look at my calendar; I look at my actions; I examine my heart, “Am I growing in love which leads to action?” Love has a *to-do list*, not just an accumulation of digital likes. Are we becoming more observers than participants in our own lives? More spectators than players? I think so.

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**Romans 12:9-18, 19-21** ..... 4

This week I ran across a 2014 study by Dr. Kurt Gray from UNC Chapel Hill who analyzed the *Save Darfur* Facebook page. The long civil war in southern Sudan with concentrations of Christians in the south and Muslim in the north is complex and horrific, even with a new country in the south. More than 1.17 million Facebook members indicated they were concerned and wanted to offer support. Impressive.

The research team— however— only had resources to examine the first 100,000 members. To their surprise, they found 99.8 percent of those who *liked* the Facebook page never donated money to the cause; 72 percent never recruited anyone in their social media circles. Dr. Gray comments: "They raised almost nothing compared with what a similar campaign would have raised offline. The reason is that you got to look great without having to pay." Ouch! Gray compares it to junk food: "It's engineered to make us like it, but it's ultimately empty." He then concludes:

“...when it came to recruiting for *Save Darfur*, the world’s most popular social network hardly mattered. Although it enabled more than a million to register discontent, it largely failed to transform these initial acts into a deep and sustained commitment to the work.”<sup>1</sup>

Love, according to the Apostle Paul, has a costly *to-do* list, not a list of *likes*.

Today we move to the fourth mark of what it means to be a faithful member of a local United Methodist Church as found in the last membership promise: “As members of Main Street UMC, will you faithfully participate in our ministries by 1) your prayers, 2) your presence, 3) your gifts, 4) *your service*, and 5) your witness?” To which the brave soul answers, “**I will.**”<sup>2</sup>

Will you pray for the church that it be faithful and grow? Will you show up on Sundays for Sunday School and worship? Will you offer your spiritual and financial gifts? Will you show a servant’s heart and actions, or will you come with a consumer mindset and wait for others to serve you? Will you speak well of Jesus Christ and his people in your witness? Today is No. 4— *service*— and one of the classic passages

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<sup>1</sup> Edited from Matt McCue, "Are You a Righteous Dude?" *Men's Health* (Dec. 2014); Kevin Lewish, Kurt Gray, and Jens Meierhenrich, "The Structure of Online Activism," *Sociological Science* (2-18-14).

<sup>2</sup> *The U.M. Hymnal*: 38.

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that teaches service is the second half of Romans 12. And while we tend to hear the word *you* in the Bible as a singular meaning *me* because of our assumption of individualism, here the emphasis is not the *individual you* so much a *corporate you*, for which we Southerners have special terms: *you-all* or *all-y'all* or even *you-uns*, and in some places the plural of all plurals: *all-you-un-zes*, and I'm not quite sure of the spelling! Where's Jeff Foxworthy when you need him?

### TURNING TO THE TEXT

#### A Quick Review, Romans 12:1-8.

In the first eight verses of chapter 12 Paul lays out the unfolding stages of being a Christ follower.<sup>3</sup> Because of God's mercies which come to us most fully in Jesus, we offer the whole self back to God as a *living sacrifice* with nothing held back.<sup>4</sup> And if this is not first, nothing much works as designed. We surrender all that we are just as we are, and in that new relationship as God's restored son or daughter we begin to see the world differently because we have new eyes. Same space, new world.

We then set up principled resistance against the way the world is currently organized. We say No to being squeezed into its mold. We see and think differently because the living link with God has been restored. Our cognitive capacities are being cleansed and retooled.<sup>5</sup>

We also find ourselves plugged back into the One who is truth and who's given us The Book as a record of his dealings. God's actions in history reveal God's being-who God is, and in the large story of Scripture we learn the ways of the One we're dealing with. Our mind is transformed, and together with others on the same path we find God both willing and able to reveal his good and acceptable and perfect will.<sup>6</sup> The Book gives the big picture; we then work out the local applications, the fine tuning, in the community. Life takes on a sense of drama and adventure as we become agents of a new administration behind enemy lines. Stuff starts to happen it

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<sup>3</sup> 12:1-8. See last week's manuscript for October 11, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> 12:1.

<sup>5</sup> 12:2a-b.

<sup>6</sup> 12:2c.

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takes God to explain! Christians are the future; we are those who are now rightly realigned with God through the person of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. One day every knee will bow to Jesus Christ; our privilege is to do it ahead of time.<sup>7</sup> To follow Jesus is to be rightly aligned with the kingdom of God.

Because the Holy Spirit now indwells each follower, we find ourselves with new capacities known as *spiritual gifts*, and the challenge is to express them in love and make room for all the gifts God gives others for our work together.<sup>8</sup> Spiritual gifts are power tools for kingdom work. And in the interactions the Spirit arranges as a curriculum of life, we find that we need each other more than we thought, like a body needs a heart and lungs and eyes and ears and all the organs that make us a unified being of diverse functions.<sup>9</sup>

I can't follow Jesus alone; what good is a hand with no blood supply? In fact, as soon as we say Yes to him, we are grafted—without voice or vote—into a world wide organic reality, the body of Christ,<sup>10</sup> the people through whom Jesus now expresses himself, so the *Him* and the *We* precede the *I* and the *Me*.

Yes, the church has organizational forms to function in the world, but our more basic reality is not the institutional but an organic, living linkage with the risen Jesus and all his followers. As he himself once said, “I am the vine, you are the branches,” then this reminder, “He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is who bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>11</sup> There is a constant flow of life between the branch and vine, and on it we depend for anything that happens. He provides life; we express it, and severed from him we die and wither away.

So having made an appeal to each believer to surrender all they are to our

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:9-11.

<sup>8</sup> 12:6-8. On spiritual gifts and their function in a church, see John Wimber, *The Way In is the Way On: John Wimber's teachings and writing on life in Christ* (Atlanta, GA: Ampelon, 2006), Chapter 11, “Gracelets,” 213-236.

<sup>9</sup> 12:4-5.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. 12:12-13.

<sup>11</sup> John 15:5.

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merciful God, and having laid out the changes we can expect and the new social and spiritual reality we inhabit, Paul asks a question, What does this new thing look like in the midst of an old world? His answer is the two paragraphs before us today. It looks like the people who follow Jesus, who serve under his orders. And if you ask, they will give you an account of how they came to know him and were changed.

A new social reality was being planted in cities across the Empire, and the new reality was small clusters of people who believed that the one God of the Jews had personally shown up some years before in backwoods Palestine in Jesus of Nazareth, whom they claim was unjustly crucified but then bodily raised by the same God who first sent him. And for him they deliberately used two loaded titles: *Messiah*—meaning the long-expected king of the Jews, thus Jesus *Christ*, and *Lord*—which is a term applied to Caesar and also to God in our Old Testament. To claim that the risen Jesus is not only the rightful ruler of the Jews but of the whole inhabited world and that his kingdom is just around the corner, makes many nervous. How could a crucified Jew gain such committed followers with a new vision for whole world? It needs an explanation. They say the answer is his resurrection from the dead.

They didn't yet have their own dedicated public buildings, so they meet in the more spacious homes of some of their members. These people are different, a bit odd, and when you observe them up close, you get the impression someone unseen is ruling over them and making life happen among them. They are *in* our world, not *of* it; they live beside us and share our trades, but they stand out because of what they do and don't do, and that causes problems. To be around them is see what love looks like when it invades a neighborhood.<sup>12</sup> They are happy to be together and love us as well when we let them. And when we mock and hurt them, they never return the favor.<sup>13</sup> Are they weak, or is this a new kind of strength? Is it really possible to overcome evil with good?<sup>14</sup> They think so. But how do you find such a potent good?

**The New Reality, Romans 12:9-21.**<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 12:9a.

<sup>13</sup> 12:14, 17-18, 19-21.

<sup>14</sup> 12:21.

<sup>15</sup> On the rhetorical sophistication of 12:9-18, 20-21 as a blend of Jewish Scripture, echoes of Jesus' teaching, echoes within Romans and with common Christian

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“This love— Jesus style love— is not hypocritical but genuine,” says Paul at the start in verse 9, not like a stage actor wearing several masks. It’s not a show put on for appearances. It’s the real thing, authentic and sincere. It guards all that is good and resists evil with holy fierceness.<sup>16</sup> It is morally-centered and morally-driven love, a tough and principled form of love, not modern sentimentality and hyper-tolerance. One of the Christian leaders who had an influence on my reconversion was Josh McDowell, and the following words are his:

“Tolerance says, ‘You must approve of what I do.’ Love responds, ‘I must do something harder: I will love you, even when your behavior offends me.’

Tolerance says, ‘You must agree with me. Love responds, ‘I must do something harder: I will tell you the truth, because I am convinced 'the truth will set you free.'

Tolerance says, ‘You must allow me to have my way.’ Love responds, ‘I must do something harder: I will plead with you to follow the right way, because I believe you are worth the risk....’

Tolerance costs nothing; love costs everything.”<sup>17</sup>

So what would it mean to live among such people who blend honest love and clear moral awareness into a single reality? Well, it’s like being adopted into a new clan and being treated like a long lost brother or sister who needs to relearn the ways and means of the family. And in a world where shaming others to increase ones honor was a universal cultural sport, here they outdo one another in honoring all.<sup>18</sup>

Status games are out. Sins and errors are dealt with, but no one is shamed or humiliated. And what spiritual energy is found among them! It’s like they swallowed

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teaching in service of new life in tension with the culture, see Charles Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002); Frank Matera, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 290-293; Leander Keck, *Romans* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2005), 302-311; Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 374-384. The method I use is *narrative exegesis*, which is to tell the story as a sympathetic outsider.

<sup>16</sup> 12:9b.

<sup>17</sup> Edited, [www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/tolerance.html](http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/tolerance.html).

<sup>18</sup> 12:10b.

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an artesian spring. They are not embarrassed about an enthusiasm for their risen Lord that bubbles up with the abundant life he gives. Like a candle in a dark room, they seem almost to be aglow with the light and flame of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

In this community there are leaders, but only one boss, and all are his servants.<sup>20</sup> Whether as a parent or worker, male or female, Jew or Greed, old or young, high or low born, they have one simple goal all their days, “To serve the Lord.” Their hope is set on the coming kingdom, and with that vision they find Jesus gives them the patience needed to endure their struggles without despair. And prayer for them is not just a Sunday thing or a temple thing; it’s their ongoing conversation about all of life with their strong friend who’s just beyond sight and sitting on the throne of the universe.<sup>21</sup> For them to gain an audience with their God is an easy thing.

They speak to God as if he were a beloved and respected Father who delighted to hear it all, even daring to use the familiar form *Abba*, to Jesus as an older brother, and to the mysterious Spirit as if his energies were immediate and effective. I’ve seen how they help one another in any way that makes life better, including opening kitchen and sleeping quarters to any of their scattered tribe who happened to be on they way through Rome as missionaries or travelers.<sup>22</sup> Of many nations and tongues, they are yet one people, and each of them a Jesus follower.

This is their life, or at least what it looks like to a curious outsider. And when they read from a letter recently arrived from one Paul— a leather worker and traveling teacher I am told, it described them perfectly, but how could he do that if he’d never been here to observe them? Could it be there are similar outposts in other cities? What’s happening here? Is this some kind of conspiracy against our way of life and all our gods? Are we being colonized by a new philosophy! Is this a invasion?

But perhaps the most intriguing thing about these people is how they respond to social pressure. Not all our fellow citizens are happy to have them here in growing numbers. They are spoken ill of as traitors to the old gods who guard the Empire

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<sup>19</sup> 12:11.

<sup>20</sup> 12:12a.

<sup>21</sup> 12:12b-c.

<sup>22</sup> 12:13.

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**Romans 12:9-18, 19-21** ..... **10**

because they no longer attend the festivals and sacrifice. They pray for the Emperor but do not regard him a divine, an honor they reserve for God alone.<sup>23</sup> But when cursed, they do not curse back but respond in gentleness.<sup>24</sup> How strange is that?

When someone does them evil, say stealing their goods, or insulting their wives and daughters, or even striking them on the cheek as a dare, they refuse to respond in kind. Some say they are weak, but behind their backs many of us see them as more noble than their tormentors, with much greater self-control.<sup>25</sup> And if you ask them why, they will tell you— quoting from the Jewish book by memory— that vengeance and the settling of old scores is not their business, only God’s.<sup>26</sup> They seek to live peaceably with all, but all will not live peaceably with them.<sup>27</sup>

Beyond all this, their high moral standards and chaste ways shame us all. They have only one wife, treat her with dignity, and do not carouse at the baths and brothels like the masses of men.<sup>28</sup> And more than once, when I’ve had good fortune come my way, it was not my friends who shared my joy but one of these who claim to follow Jesus.<sup>29</sup> My success was not the cause of envy with them but gladness. I see it as fate, as a right alignment with the stars and their powers; they see it as a sign of their God’s kindness even to those who do not believe in him. All that is innocent and good, they affirm. All that is against the will of their God and hurtful for people— whether believers or not— they utterly reject and will not participate in. As their

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 2:17.

<sup>24</sup> 12:14.

<sup>25</sup> 12:17-18, Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>26</sup> 12:19b-20.

<sup>27</sup> 12:18.

<sup>28</sup> For an insight into the pervasive immorality of Paul’s day and the climate in which he made his appeal to Christians in Rome, see “Sex in the Ancient World: Pompeii Documentary,” *History Channel*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uHuFYyO4go](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uHuFYyO4go). What would it mean to name and follow Jesus in such a hyper-sexualized culture?

<sup>29</sup> 12:15a.

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teacher said in his letter, “Spurn what is evil and cling tightly to the good.”<sup>30</sup>

My heart was broken when my first child was born dead, but it was these followers of the Nazarene who raised money for her burial and comforted my wife with their visits. I fear my darling is on the verge of becoming one of them. It could be their belief that our child is in safe keeping with their God and his Son who was himself once a Jewish baby of a human mother, one Miriam. What range they have to laugh with the joyful and shed tears with the grieving.<sup>31</sup> They actually think every person is made in God image and deserves such attention. Like salt, they add taste and zest to life. When I walk by their apartments at night and see a candle flickering, I think, “These strange people are the light of our world.”<sup>32</sup>

But do not be mistaken. They are not all of one opinion on everything and tolerate much debate among themselves; it’s just that they blend together so well, like an orchestra of many instruments.<sup>33</sup> Among them, as not among us, the better classes share friendships with slaves and laborers.<sup>34</sup> In public they honor our social conventions, but when they gather on the evening of the first day of the week for a common meal and prayer, all distinctions fade. When the writer of the long letter comes to town, I want to meet him and ask about how he met this Jesus after being a persecutor of his followers. What kind of hero was this Jesus to create such loyal followers and to spread them across the world like seeds blown by the wind?

### CONCLUSION

A Greenwood police officer recently pulled a member of this church and asked for license and registration. "What's wrong, officer," the driver asked. "I didn't go through any red lights, and I certainly wasn't speeding."

"No, you weren't," said the officer. "I first followed you because I saw you waving a fist as you swerved around the lady driving in the left lane. You then made

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<sup>30</sup> 12:9.

<sup>31</sup> 12:15.

<sup>32</sup> 12:11b.

<sup>33</sup> 12:16a.

<sup>34</sup> 12:18-19a.

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**Romans 12:9-18, 19-21 ..... 12**

hand gestures as you shouted at the driver of the Hummer who cut you off. You pounded the steering wheel when the traffic came to a stop near the bridge.”

“Is that a crime, Sir? Did I violate the law?”

“No. But when I saw the ‘Jesus loves you and so do I’ bumper sticker, I figured the car had to be stolen.”<sup>35</sup>

Love has a *to-do* list. How are we doing? Paul was right. Service is first about who we are as a people, only then about what we do. It’s about how we live, and how we live differently.

Are you a servant, first of the Lord, and then of people? As you once promised, “As members of Main Street UMC, will you faithfully participate in our ministries by 1) your prayers, 2) your presence, 3) your gifts, 4) *your service*, and 5) your witness?” To which the brave soul answers, “**I will.**”

Service is the call and privilege of all who follow Jesus. It’s how we earn the respect of others in order to tell them of the One who first changed us and made us a new people. Our presence makes a difference wherever we are; the question is, What kind of difference does it make?

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<sup>35</sup> Edited as creative fiction from PreachingToday.com search under Romans 12:9-21.

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