

Marks of a Healthy Christian Pt. 1

Romans 12:9-16 (11/17/13)

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Most of you are familiar with the book Nine Marks of a Healthy Church. Some of you have studied the nine marks in detail in your small group. Our small group is currently taking a brief look at them. They are what the author Mark Dever considers the most important aspects of a church – expository preaching, evangelism, church discipline, and more.

This morning we come to a passage that I'm going to call Marks of a Healthy Christian. Over the next three weeks we'll look at Romans 12:9-16. The text gives us twenty very brief directives for living as a healthy believer, but I'm going to group the twenty into seven groups. Let's call them seven marks for a healthy Christian – **healthy love, healthy relationships, healthy service, healthy endurance, healthy giving, healthy compassion, and healthy humility**. As we read the passage you'll notice these are very practical. Let me give you a fair warning – you might want to wear your steel toe sneakers for the next few weeks.

God justifies us by faith alone in Romans 1-11. In Romans 12-16 He teaches us who have been justified by faith alone how to live in this world. You start by presenting your body to God as a living sacrifice; you renew your mind with His Word so you discern what God wants you to do. Eric taught us about our place and gifts in the body of Christ over the past several weeks. You have a spiritual gift and are responsible to serve others in the body.

Now God says, as you serve, you need to be growing in love for one another. You can have the greatest of gifts, you can preach like the golden-mouthed Chrysostom or have enough faith to move Mt. Everest, but if you don't have love, you're one big empty zero or worse. We see that in 1 Corinthians 13. Praise God, we aren't saved by producing these marks, but if you truly know Christ, you will be drawn to these marks, you will want these marks growing in your life, and you will quickly realize how far short you come in growing these. If any marks in the Bible describe what it means to be like Christ, these do. They will expose your self-serving heart.

But let me encourage you: God doesn't expect you to be perfect. Only His Son fulfilled these perfectly. But He does expect you to be growing and changing and applying these things into your life. You're going to need the Spirit of Christ and prayer to grow in becoming truly loving person, but let's face it, it doesn't come naturally. We are naturally in love with our selves! Why do we take offense so easily? Self. Why do we get jealous of others who shine brighter than we? Self. Why do we get irritated so easily and say harsh and cruel things to the people closest to us? Self! Christ died to deliver us from ourselves and transform us into true lovers.

HEALTHY LOVE – “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good (v. 9).”

Why does Paul begin with love? Because God created us to love Him and others first and foremost. Jesus told us clearly, the greatest commandment is love. But no sooner did sin break into Adam and Eve's hearts than love suffered. They ran from God rather than to Him in love. And Adam blamed God for giving him the woman, “The woman You gave me, she gave me this fruit.” It's not my fault, it's hers; it's Yours, God. Sin turned love inside out. Instead of serving God and others, now we are in love with one person – us! Me, me, me, mine, mine, mine. It's all about pleasing me! So what kind of love is God calling us to?

Healthy love is sincere or genuine. Let your love be without hypocrisy. Hypocrisy speaks of acting, of wearing a mask, of making believe. Have you ever met a Christian actor, one who is putting on a show, trying to impress others with their words, but there's very little true love there? I suggest we all look in a mirror, because way too much of our love is hypocritical. 1 John 3:18 says don't just love in word or with our tongues, but in deed in and truth.

We have the perfect model for love. God loved us and gave us His Son to meet our greatest need. Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. Love that is without hypocrisy is caring about other people, denying yourself for them, actually getting up and meeting their needs. When you're sitting in your chair watching TV and your wife is in the bedroom trying to get the whole tribe ready for bed, or giving them a bath, or trying to clean up the kitchen so she can make a meeting, and you croon out from your Lazy Boy, "Honey, do you know how much I love you?" you might want to duck, because there will may be some dishes flying your way.

Listen, genuine love is self-denying and willing to get up and actually help other people without blowing a trumpet to let everyone know how incredibly loving you are!

Healthy love hates what God hates. "Abhor what is evil." Boy, is this needed. We don't love God and others if we don't hate what God hates, and the word is stronger than we can imagine. We are to utterly detest all evil with a feeling of horror! This past week the judge in Boston looked at that Boston murdering mobster Whitey Bulger and told him, "The scope, the callousness, the depravity of your crimes are almost unfathomable.... Heinous." But God hates all evil!

Psalms 97:10 Hate evil, you who love the Lord!

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil! Then God adds, Pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth I hate.

One of our biggest problems is that we don't hate evil enough. We just can't say we love God while at the same time we are playing footsie with evil. We sin because we like it. We like how it makes us feel or look or we think it will satisfy us. Of course, evil always hurts us.

God hates evil and He's going to damn it forever, so we better abhor it. Ask God to help you hate evil in all of its forms, and especially in your own heart first. The world may accuse us of hate crimes, but we abhor all the self-destructing evils of our culture – pornography, homosexuality, rampant immorality in the entertainment industry, child pornography and abuse of young children right in the home. Why? All these evils not only offend God, but they hurt and destroy people. Healthy love hates what God hates.

Healthy love loves what God loves. "Cling to what is good." Cling is used of marriage – a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave or cling to his wife. It has the idea of being glued to it. Be glued to what God says is good. God wants us to put our arms around the good and not let go. Love it. Not just do it, but from your heart, love it. Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil, and you and I as His representatives here on earth ought to keep a sharp lookout for how we can go around doing good, helping, blessing, encouraging, bringing sunshine and cheer into the lives of others.

Proverbs 31:12 describes that godly, sweet wife like this: She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. Gals, are you doing that man good and not evil? Stay glued to the good. John Wesley wrote: "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can."

Healthy love isn't putting on an act, it hates evil, and it is totally committed to doing good to as many people as you can!

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor (v. 10)."

Healthy relationships are loyal and committed to one another.

This little phrase literally says "In brotherly love to one another have strong family affection." The first word is that Greek word "philadelphia", and we could talk a long time about that – cheese steaks, Eagles, Phillies; or mobsters, murders, and house of horrors. But seriously, Christianity was the only group outside of a biological family to use this word. We are brothers and sister in Christ and just like brothers

and sisters, we are for each other, we want to see each other succeed and flourish. The second word speaks of a warm, natural affection, like a mother's strong love and affection for her little ones.

One of the most impactful truths I've learned from Paul Tripp's book *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* is this: My relationships don't belong to me. I don't own them, from my spouse, children, grandchildren, to close friends, brothers and sisters in the body, and even the lost people God has brought into my world. They are all gifts from God to help me grow and represent Christ. Loyal and committed to one another, and the amazing thing is in a world all divided up in every conceivable way, Christ brings all kinds of people into His church for us to learn to love and care for!

Healthy relationships are not only loyal to one another, but they honor others above self. ESV is good here: "Outdo one another in showing honor." This is just the opposite of what we crave. We want other people to show us honor and respect and take great offense when we don't get it. But what God is calling you and me to here is to take the lead in honoring others instead of ourselves. Proverbs 27:2 says "Let another praise you, and not your own lips." We just lust for recognition and will do all kinds of things to get it. But God says, deny yourself and honor others. And take the lead in it.

We said the godly wife does her husband good, but in 1 Peter 3:7 God says, "Husbands, grant your wives honor." Speak highly of her and treat her with utmost respect. Do your kids say, "Wow, Dad really shows honor to Mom. He thanks her and helps her and opens doors for her and never sits out in the car on Sunday mornings beeping the horn while Mom's in the house trying to get us 12 kids ready for church!

How are your toes by now? Any bruises? If you ever think you are good enough to get to heaven by your good deeds, you haven't grasped these qualities. Under the conviction of his own sin, Paul cried out, "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!" How obnoxious of the Pharisee to stand there spouting, "God, I'm glad I'm not like that publican over there, blah, blah, blah." That publican saw the truth of his sinful heart and just cried for forgiveness. Let's go to the cross and remind ourselves that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, and then come back and keep pursuing these beautiful marks of a healthy relationship with God. One more this morning...

HEALTHY SERVICE "Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (v. 11)."

This set of three is all about being fired up for Christ. I would love to light a fire in my own heart and fan the flames for Christ in the hearts of you young guys, you college people, moms, dads, singles, grandpa and grandmas. John Calvin's seal was a hand holding a heart with the words, "My heart I offer to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely." Those angelic beings in Isaiah 6 who are calling out holy, holy, holy is the Lord are called Seraphim, which means burning ones. God calls us to bright vigor and passion in serving Him.



Healthy service is diligent. You are ready to go. You aren't a lazy sluggard, holding back, dodging opportunities to serve, whining about all you have to do. A. T. Robertson, the Greek scholar, describes that first word "lagging" as "slow and pokey." You are up and at 'em, like Jesus rose early and went out to pray. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."

Healthy service is fervent. This is one of my favorite Greek words – tzeo. It means to bubble up or boil over. Spirits boiling over for Christ. What did Jesus say about those lukewarm Laocideans in Revelation 3? They basically nauseate Him. Does your spirit ever feel like cold soup or flat Coke? This is something to pray about. Lord, fire me up. Get me burning for you! John Wesley said, "Catch on fire and others will come to watch you burn." Paul told Timothy, "Kindle afresh God's gift in you (2 Timothy 1:6)." Get it blazing again. Don't just talk about how zealous you used to be. Pray God would fire up our spirits now.

Healthy service is focused on one Person – Jesus Christ! Literally, for the Lord serving as a slave! Not for ourselves, right? We are here to serve One Person, Jesus Christ. We love our Master, He has taken us to His door way, He has put that awl through our ear lobe, we belong to Him, and we find no higher satisfaction or joy than in living out the rest of our lives in his beautiful, delightful, wonderful service (see Deuteronomy 15:17).

Healthy love, healthy relationships, and healthy service. All flowing from the reality that we already belong to Christ. Do you honestly belong to Christ through faith alone? If not you need to turn from your own way and put your trust for forgiveness and eternal life in Christ alone who paid the penalty for sinners on that cross.