

Text: Romans 12:9-13

Theme: Handprints of God's Church in Action

September 3, 2017

When your child or grandchild proudly displays their handprints that they made in school or you see handprints, footprints, or fingerprints in some other location, what do those prints tell you? Each is unique; it belongs to a specific person, and it's a means of identification. With some testing, one could even determine to which family those prints belong. In our text, Paul offers handprints, identification markers that show us God's Church in action.

I. God's Church is a Church in action. A. Our actions provide evidence of our place in His Church. 1. One handprint of God's Church is that His people are genuine. No doubt, you've seen the labels, "No artificial coloring or preservatives added." "No artificial sweeteners" "All natural; no preservatives." What do those labels intend to tell us about our food? It's the real thing. It's not created with artificial ingredients, right? In God's Church, we need to be the real thing. If we wear a mask, if we act like we care, but don't really care, we create a false picture of the Church. As His handprints, we endeavor to be the real thing with no artificial ingredients added.

2. As Paul continues his list, he encourages us to hold on to what is good. How many of you have ever reached into a basket of apples and grabbed a mushy apple? Now that we've got the imagery in place, Paul encourages us to hold on to what is good, to the truth, to the doctrines and teachings that God presents in His Word. Today, there are so many itching ears who are anxious to listen to whatever makes them feel good. But Paul says, "Let nothing and no one steal what matters most." As God's Church, we change where we can change to connect to our ever-changing world, but, at the same time, we stand firm, we refuse to budge on matters of faith.

3. Another handprint Paul offers is that we love one another. Now that sounds like a no-brainer, doesn't it? As we strive to be God's Church in this place, Christian love is our first priority. You and I, we are different. We have different ideas on how things should be, could be done. You may think this and he may think that. It doesn't make one right and one wrong. It simply means that we have different means of arriving at the same solution. As the Church, God says, "Respect differences; value the opinions of others as you value your opinion. Always be prepared to compromise whenever and wherever compromise is possible."

4. Paul's next handprint says, "Outdo one another in showing honor." If you chose a single word to summarize Paul's statement and it began with the letter "r," what would that word be? It's lacking among students, among children, adults, and among people of all ages. It's called "respect." God's Church needs an abundance of respect to be His Church in action. Respect for God and His name, for His property, for His Word, and respect among His people are just a few places that respect needs to be evident. Paul's first word tells us all we need to know about honor and respect, "Outdo one another." When that's our motto, respect will be what we offer.

5. As we add to our handprints, we add serving the Lord. We can find excuses, convince ourselves and maybe a few others that it's someone else's job, but serving is what God's Church does. How you serve, whether that service is noticed or unnoticed, in the spotlight or behind the scenes, doesn't matter. God's instruction is to serve the Lord with gladness. When we make time to serve, we declare to our

God that we have time for Him and appreciation for His incredible work within us. As we serve, gladness is what's in our heart or else we're merely going through the motions. Serving with gladness, it's what we do because we know who we are.

6. Within Paul's list of handprints, we find the handprint of patience. We know all about patience, don't we? If someone would only pay us, we could write a book on how to be patient! But that's the problem with patience. We know all about it, but are reluctant to put it into practice because that takes effort. Paul says, "patient in tribulation" because he knows that those are our most likely moments to be impatient. When we are able to practice patience in our toughest moments, we will find ourselves gladly practicing patience in all those other moments. If everyone were patient for an entire week, we'd be amazed at how different life would be.

7. Our handprints also include fervency in prayer. How many of you believe prayer has power, that things can change because of prayer, that some things occur only because we prayed? We all believe in the power of prayer. Our challenge is to believe our prayer will change things. So often we think, "It works for her, but it doesn't work that way for me." Ever had those thoughts? Of course we have. So what's the solution? We pray like we mean it; we pray and pray and pray convinced God can do what we ask, believing God will do what we ask. Then, we expectantly wait for His response. Prayer makes a difference when we believe prayer makes a difference.

8. Live in harmony - that's a handprint of God's Church in action. Years ago, I recall my family camping outside of a town named, "Harmony, Minnesota." It was rainy and the camping wasn't all that great, but the name of that town still provides a reminder of what this world needs. If everyone within the city of Medford lived in harmony with everyone else for an entire year, what long term changes would occur? Harmony says, "We may have different ideas, different thoughts about how things should be done. Even so, I will work together because the bigger picture, the population in heaven, is of more value than my personal preferences."

9. As we consider one last handprint, we focus on showing hospitality. How many churches have a hospitality committee? How many churches need a hospitality committee? We, collectively, all of us together are the church in this place and as God's church, showing Christian care is what we do. It's what you do and what I do. We may do it in different ways because God provides different opportunities, but whatever the opportunity, caring is what we do as His Church. It's not an add-on activity, something reserved for a select group. It's simply who we are on the inside and when caring is who we are, caring is what we do.

10. Handprints, footprints, fingerprints. They are all identifiers. Since we are God's church in this place, may God enable us to show this community that we are not only God's Church, but His Church in action. Amen.