

Romans 12:9-21: Real Love in an Evil World

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Romans / Romans 12:9–21

Introduction

- Recently seen on a church sign, “What is hell like? Come hear our preacher.” Probably not what they meant.
- We all know what it’s like to have our words come out the wrong way. To say one thing but mean another...
- What do you mean when you say, “I love you...” Of all people, followers of Jesus should know what we mean when we say, “I love you...”
- We know what love is! It’s willing self-sacrifice for the good of someone else - even when it costs you.
- Love is not always convenient or easy. Real love is often a struggle.
- Some of you can think of someone that you’re struggling to love right now. You’ve been hurt, and it’s hard not to be bitter. It’s hard to forgive. It’s hard to want the best for that person that has offended you.
- The reality: Only God can grow you into a person of love. We need His help! From [Romans 12:9-21](#), I want to give you three ways to ask God to help you to live a life of love towards others.

Strive for genuine love towards other believers (vs. 9-13).

- vs. 3-8 - Paul challenging us to be committed to the local church because we understand that Christ has made us one. We are members of one another.
- If members of one another, then we must love one another. The way we love one another says much about who we are in Christ. [John 13:35](#): “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
- Our Gospel witness is strengthened by the way we love each other in this faith family. A church that genuinely loves is attractive.
- vs. 9 - Love without hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is to put on a mask, to play a part, to be someone you’re not. It’s easy to put on a mask in our relationships with one another. It’s easy to walk into a gathering of believers and be friendly, or to say, “I’m praying for you,” or to say, “I love the people in this church” while at the same time harboring a critical, judgmental spirit towards people in this church.
- You say, “I love you,” while thinking, “Why can’t you get your act together.” You say, “I love you,” while thinking, “You’ll never change.”
- What keeps us from love is evil, and what’s evil is having a heart of pride and self-centeredness - thinking too highly of self ([Romans 12:3](#)). What’s evil is letting that self-centeredness take over so that you oppose God’s will and oppose others. What is good is God and wanting God’s goodness to be poured out in the lives of others.
- What is good: loving one another deeply, honoring one another.
- Three questions:

- **1. How often do you fake it?** Here's the real question: Would people feel loved if they heard what you said about them when they aren't around or if they knew what you thought about them?
- **2. How often do you get lazy?** vs. 11 - Do not lack diligence in zeal, be fervent in the Spirit. You don't get to take a day off from loving others. I get it - we all need to rest - but we don't get to stop loving people. "God help me to love even when my own life is challenging.
- Aren't you glad that God doesn't take a day off from loving you? Love requires work - even on those days when you feel like you don't have much to give, you ask God to help you be fervent in the Spirit because you realize that loving others is how you serve the Lord.
- You know you're getting lazy in the way you love when you avoid life-giving conversations. Genuine love doesn't avoid conflict or run away from hard situations. Genuine love does the work of seeking reconciliation, helping others to walk well with Jesus, speaking into difficult circumstances.
- **3. How often do you retreat?** Rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, be persistent in prayer.
- Life is full of affliction. Relational fatigue is real. Life fatigue is real. When conflict arises, do you retreat? When you're tired, do you disengage? When you're hurt, do you isolate yourself?
- There are often times when we feel like we don't have the capacity to give anymore of ourselves, but being patient, and continuing to love even when life is full of affliction is often healing and joy inducing. Something significant about obey God even when it's hard.
- Paul tells us to pursue hospitality - even in the ups and downs of life - we make room for others even if it costs us.
- Here's the question: If everyone in this church loved the way you love, what kind of church would this be?

Strive for grace-filled love towards those outside the church.

- Paul calls us to not only love those in the local church but to also love those who oppose God - who walk in rebellion against Him. That's hard. Love people that don't hold the same values or same mission as we do?
- BUT... that's what makes us distinct as Christians - that we love our enemies. We love those who walk in opposition to God because ultimately we want those in opposition to God to KNOW God.
- Therefore, vs. 14, bless those who persecute you. Paul writing to believers who would eventually experience intense persecution for their faith.
- For us - bless others when they call us intolerant, or when they mock us for our biblical convictions, or when we lose opportunities because of our moral convictions.
- vs. 15 - Rejoice and weep with those who rejoice and weep - Paul calling us to active participation in the lives of others. Real investment in the lives of others builds credibility. NOT telling us to soften our convictions or be silent about the truth, but he is calling us to invest in the lives of people outside the church so they might know the love of God by the way we love them.
- vs. 16 - Live at harmony - Don't always go looking for a fight. Look for common ground. Don't let your ego get in the way, associate with the humble. In this context, Paul likely talking about the lowly - those who are outcast and forgotten in society.
- vs. 16 - Don't be wise in your own eyes - Don't think you know it all - that will lead you to be critical of others. vs. 17. Don't do what the world does - repay evil for evil - instead honor others.

- Paul is giving us a lot because this is hard in an evil world! Our natural inclination is to become hard hearted towards those who don't live like we think they should live. We need the Spirit's help!
- Based on Paul's challenge, five commitments I need to make. I need God's help to live these commitments:
- **1. I will not live to get even.** That's my natural inclination but that in no way helps further the Gospel and in no way shows the love of Jesus.
- **2. I will not dehumanize.** He's just a liberal. He's no narrow-minded. Those boomers ruin everything. Gen Z is clueless. We're quick to categorize people and use stereotypes instead of seeing people as made in the image of God and in need of a Savior.
- **3. I will not "be done" with people.** How many times have you said to yourself, "I'm done with..." I'm not wasting my breath on them anymore. Conversations with that person are pointless. Love perseveres.
- **4. I will pray.** Praying for others helps me to love them, and it's perhaps the most effective way I can show love to someone. It costs me nothing to pray for someone.
- **5. I will do good when opportunities arise.** You overcome evil with good - by finding practical ways to bless. That's hard! That's giving a word of encouragement when you want to fuss. I will listen patiently instead of being so quick to state my case, etc.
- Bottom line, we love those who oppose God because we once opposed God, and God demonstrated His love to us. That changed us!

Trust that God will ultimately overcome all evil.

- vs. 18 - Paul doesn't ignore the reality that we live in an extremely broken world. He encourages us to live at harmony with others, but it's not always possible. He wants us to seek peace, but peace is hard.

- If possible - as far as it depends on you. Don't seek to be an enemy. Seek to be a peacemaker.
- It's not possible to live at peace when peace requires compromising the truth, or when the other person refuses peace. You can't force someone to live in a right relationship with God or with you. It's not possible to live at peace when there is ongoing harm or abuse. Paul NOT telling us to put up with abuse. Peace without safety is NOT peace.
- You can't make every relationship right, but you can pursue peace and you can live at peace knowing that you've done all that God has asked of you.
- However, we struggle to live at peace because of our sinful nature. When we're hurt, we want to fight back. We want to get even. We want the person who hurt us to hurt like we did.
- vs. 19 - Don't avenge yourselves... Your responsibility is to love others and pursue peace. You leave vengeance to God. God knows far better than you how to deal with sinful, rebellious people.
- Leave room for God's wrath. Or, step off the judge's seat. It's too big for you anyways. You don't need to think to yourself, "I'll make this right." Or, "I'll deal with this." God knows how He is going to deal with every human heart, everyone who opposes Him, and everyone who has done you wrong. And, He knows much better than you do. He's a far better judge that you are.
- Paul quotes [Proverbs 25:21-22](#). You keep blessing, and when you do, you will be reaping fiery coals on the head of the one who has done you wrong. In other words, doing the right thing to the person who has wronged you will ultimately reveal his guilt. God might even use your good to bring about conviction in the heart of the one who has wronged you, and God might use that conviction to draw that person to Himself. God might use your goodness to wake that person up.

- vs. 21 - Therefore, don't let evil conquer you, conquer evil by doing good.
- This is HARD. But, you need to remember:
- **God does not need your help in managing justice.** Does not mean that we over look sin or call it out. Often, that's the most loving thing we can do. BUT... it is never your job to pronounce the final verdict over someone's life. (E.g., You're beyond God's grace, so I'm done with you.)
- God will overcome all evil - you don't have to worry about that.
- **God does desire you to act like His Son.** Jesus, full of grace and truth, who came for the lowly, the outcast, the unlovable, the sinner and extended love and kindness by going to the cross.
 - It means patience.
 - It means grace.
 - It means forgiving.
 - It means speaking the truth in love.
 - It means desiring the best for people.
 - It means swallowing my pride.
 - It means giving my time for someone when I want to keep my time for myself.
 - It means you completely need God's help to love with the love of Jesus.
- There was a time when you were the enemy. You were the one who opposed God. You were the One who rebelled but God overcame your evil with good. He sent His Son who died for you, to pay the penalty for your sin, only to rise from the dead three days later so you could be gloriously saved.

- This morning, if you are here and you have never placed your faith in Jesus, repent of your sins and turn to Him by faith.