

Romans 12:9-16

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[0 : 00] It is very good to see all of you here this morning and to hear you sing the praises of God. Truly our God is a great God. Let's pray together to Him. Father God, we praise you this morning for your greatness.

Which you have most displayed to us by the Gospel. The person and the work of Jesus Christ. You are the standard for living. You are the great example of holiness. And we have fallen so very short. But I thank you that in Christ, because of what He's done on our behalf, we can be seen as righteous in your eyes. What a glorious truth to revel in this morning.

To lie a soak in the fact that we were once your enemies but are now your friends. That all of your promises are yes in Christ. And we are found in Him.

Father, I pray that in this room, those who know Christ are having their affections turned towards Him as we sing and as I pray and as I preach and we listen to the preaching of Your Word.

[1 : 30] And I pray, Father, if anyone here does not know Christ, has not placed saving faith in Him, that this will be the last morning that that would be true of them.

That they will see that there is no forgiveness of sins apart from Christ. That their destination is destruction apart from Him. And that they will believe that He is the way and the truth and the life. And we pray all of this in His precious name. Amen. I ask you to take your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you this morning, and turn to the book of Romans, chapter 12. And continue our verse by verse exposition of the book. And we've come to some exhortation following 11 chapters of doctrine.

Chapters 1 through the end of 11. Paul unfolds for us the beautiful doctrine of the Gospel. Justification by faith alone, in Christ alone, forever.

[2 : 36] And he's turned now, at the beginning of chapter 12, to place those truths into practice. To answer the question, so what?

So now we know the truths of the Gospel. How does that change who we are and affect our very living? We started in chapter 12, verses 1 and 2.

Let's read that together. Paul says, And so we see that our reasonable service to God, in light of the truth that He has saved us by His Son, is to offer ourselves fully to Him as a living sacrifice.

To give who we are to His service. And as we're doing this, we are to transform by the renewing of our mind, so we can discern what is His will.

And I've said to you that I believe we can apply this truth generally to our living. How is it that we're meant to make decisions? Where are we going to go to school? What's our major going to be?

[4 : 06] Who are we going to marry? What job should we take and where should we live? But more specifically, Paul is referring to the rest of the book. He's calling us to know the truth of God.

He's calling us to listen to what it is He has to say to us in the rest of the letter to the Romans. What are the good and acceptable and perfect things he's talking about?

What we've been studying together. So he goes on to speak about the gifting that God has given to the church. The varying graces. And the way in which we work those together to advance the kingdom.

He does that through the end of eight. And then he turns more generally to talk about all Christians. How is it that we are meant to carry out this act of being a living sacrifice?

What does that look like? And I made the argument to you as we see this list of exhortations that the first one, let love be genuine, is the overarching exhortation.

[5 : 16] That the things that follow, the exhortations that follow, are an expounding upon that phrasing. Let love be genuine.

Matthew chapter 22, beginning in verse 36, a lawyer asked Jesus, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And Jesus responded to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

So, godliness can be summarized in one word if we are going to make it extra simple. Certainly a challenge to do so, but if we had to, we could summarize godliness by one word, and that word is love.

But not by our culture's standard of love. Not the way we would typically think of love as we watch the latest romantic comedy. Not love that's an emotion that makes you feel sappy.

[6 : 29] But an unconditional love, a merciful, a self-sacrificial love, a subservient love, that is not dependent on the circumstance. This is the love we're talking about.

Genuine love. Now, as we look through the end of chapter 12, and we see this list of exhortations, I've tried to break it into a logical fashion for us, and Chris did a great job last week of beginning in verse 10 and stopping in 13 to talk about what genuine love looks like to the saints.

It's kind of a neat package for us there. We get on beyond that, and 14 through the end gets a little more difficult to break down in that way.

So I'm going to kind of overlap and, yep, do some tricks with the text. So today, I want us to focus on verse 15 and 16, which would be genuine love to all people, generally, all people.

And then we'll take 14 and then 17 through the end of the chapter to talk about what love, genuine love looks like to our enemies. But before we focus our attention in on verses 15 and 16, let's read starting in verse 9 through the end of 16 together.

[7 : 57] It's verse 9, chapter 12. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation.

Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints. And seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

So, verse 15, the exhortation that begins where we'll be this morning, is to rejoice with those who rejoice.

[8 : 54] And to weep with those who weep. It's a call to share in the emotional response of the people around us. Now, that's an easy thing to do when you sympathize with somebody.

Which simply means when you've also been in their shoes. Right? When you've experienced the same circumstance that's causing their joy or their sorrow, it's fairly easy to connect.

You've been there. You understand exactly what's going on in their life. An example of that would be the loss of a loved one. If you've ever lost a loved one, you know the pain of losing somebody that's dear to you.

And you can readily sympathize. But empathy is a little more difficult than that. Empathizing with somebody is the act of trying to understand where they are.

Not having experienced what they're going through, but recognizing that what they're experiencing is real to them. The emotion that they're going through exists in their life.

[9 : 59] And rejoicing with them. And weeping with them in those moments. I struggle with empathy. I'm a fairly rational human being.

And I'm going to address this in just a moment. But I have a hard time because I want to logic my way out of everything. And so if I haven't personally felt the pain that somebody's going through, I want to quickly give them the formula for not feeling that way any longer, so we can wipe our hands and move on.

But God changes who we are so that we can empathize with those around us. And it's that idea of empathy that I want to primarily speak about today.

Here are some reasons, observations. This is certainly not exhaustive, but some reasons why we struggle with empathy. Number one, we are too self-centered to rejoice or weep with others.

We are so wrapped up in what we have going on in our little universe, that we just simply don't care about what's going on in other people's lives.

[11 : 14] We are too self-centered often to really share in the joy and the pain of other people's lives. Secondly, we feel often above the emotional life of ordinary people.

We think ourselves so great that we aren't willing to get down on the same level as those who are hurting.

We think that we're above feeling deep pain. Thirdly, we are hypercritical.

And our main reaction when we see emotion is to analyze it and to point out its distortions or excesses or poor motivation or shallow roots in the truth.

We want to quickly dismiss the way people are feeling because we just don't think they should feel that way. Fourthly, we are resentful or envious of someone when they're joyful because we don't have that same joy.

[12 : 31] We feel in some way that we've been passed over. When something good is happening in someone else's life, we fail to rejoice with them because we want good things to happen to us. We want what they're experiencing and it's not happening for us.

And so therefore, we're not willing to share with them in the good things that are happening in their life. Fifthly, this is what I was referring to about myself.

We have personalities that do not readily lend themselves to sharing in the emotions of others. It's just a challenge for some people to do so.

I think in some way, all of us can find ourselves in one of these. Again, it's not exhaustive, but just the same.

If we fail to empathize with the people around us, in some way, one of these reasons is probably what's going on. Now, certainly we can give some grace to those who don't readily show empathy due to their personality.

[13 : 39] However, it's not an excuse. I cannot use my personality as an excuse to not empathize, to not show genuine love to people around me who are hurting.

This is where I lean heavily on the good grace of God to make me different than I naturally am. To break my heart for people.

To cause me when I initially react to go rational on people, to want to formulize them out of their emotion, to have my heart break. And to sit with somebody and weep with them.

And to rejoice when the good things are happening in their life. But the first four have a very similar root. And I want to focus on that root.

And the root of that is the sin of pride. It's the sin of pride. Such a deceptive sin.

[14 : 40] When we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. The opposite of which is humility. But we must be really careful in our understanding of humility.

There's a humanistic humility that exists in the world around us. And it's that self-effacing humility that's like, Oh no, no, no. It's not really that great.

This talent I have, there's better people at it than I am. Which typically is actually aimed at how we want others to perceive us. So we slough off the good things that are happening, the things that we're accomplishing.

Because really we want people to look at us and go, He is so humble. Admire us for the praise we put off someplace else. It's a humanistic humility.

It's improper. Proper humility finds its root in faith. Catch that.

[15 : 42] Proper humility finds its root in faith. In knowing that we have no value apart from Christ. In Christ, great value.

Infinite value. But apart from Christ, no value. Sin has utterly distorted who we were created to be. In our fallen state, we are depraved.

Are you familiar with that term? It's a metalogical term. Which literally means worthless. When the impurities, when metals being refined, the impurities float to the top.

It gets skimmed off. Right? It's the stuff that's not good for making anything. Right? And the smith takes that and tosses it aside. That's the idea of who we are apart from Christ.

But in Christ, we have infinite value. He is the great restorer of our fallen state. At our very core, we were once enemies of God.

[16 : 46] But now we've recognized this truth and we've placed our faith in Him. That He will restore us to our right standing. The place in which God intended us to be.

His own. His people. It changes our core. And it causes us to love God and to walk in His ways. That is proper humility.

It's faith. The godly Christian life has kind of its own sort of pride. If you'll let me play with our English words a little bit.

Kind of have its own sort of pride. It's not a pride that boasts in ourselves. But rather boasts in who we are. In Christ. So the Christian version of pride is humility.

Right? Proper humility is really the Christian version of pride. Right? To say, I am nothing apart from Christ. But in Christ, I have infinite value.

[17:45] Right? This is exactly what Paul meant in Galatians 6.14. When he says, But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is exactly what he's trying to say. That is the picture of humility. I cannot boast in me, but I certainly can boast in Jesus Christ. And I am found in Him.

Right? So this proper humility is necessary for us to love genuinely. And the exhortation is that we break when people break.

And we rejoice with them when they rejoice. That we don't think so highly of ourselves that it manifests in these varying ways. And we become unrelatable.

The arrogance that exists amongst American Christians is staggering. We are the most judgmental people.

[18:51] Right? People hate that about us. Let them hate Christ, but don't let them hate your judgmental, arrogant attitude. So, if this is so key to properly loving people for rejoicing with those who rejoice, for weeping with those who weep, right?

Am I just pulling this randomly? I just thought I'd take this course with this. If it's so key, why does Paul not say that here? Why does he not quickly connect the idea?

And in fact, he really kind of does in verse 16. But prior to that, recall that he spent 11 chapters doing that.

If you asked Paul that question, he'd go, Were you not listening to me? He spent 11 chapters showing us who we are apart from Christ.

And now who we are in Him. The first 11 chapters is very abasing to man and very exalting to Christ. By the time we get to the end of chapter 11, flip there, I'm going to read it to you.

[20:01] This is where Paul is moved. This praise of God. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways.

For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

To Him be glory forever. Amen. He exalts God high above man. The first 11 chapters. Now we break it down.

We break it down into smaller sections so that we can consume it more readily. So that we can wrap our minds around all of the implications of this. I think we've been, since we finished the end of chapter 11, I think it's been 6 or 7 weeks for us to get to where we are now.

It takes us time to consume this and to understand it. It's translated into our English language, but it was written in an original language. And we have to know that and study it and tear it apart and really take a hard look at it.

[21:02] But we can't forget there's context behind it all. At the end of 11, Paul says loudly, Be humble. Your value and worth is tied up in Christ.

I fear that I have often, in an attempt to get you to be humble, have neglected to show you your value in Christ.

I've said to you, recognize who you are apart from Christ. Don't think too highly of yourself than you ought to. And fail to turn and say, but you are of infinite value in Christ.

And Paul does that for us very carefully in those first 11 chapters. And so we're to work that out practically. Be transformed.

By the renewing of your mind. Do you know this to be true? Do you know who you were apart from Christ? And who you now are in Him? That's going to have implication in your life.

[22:09] Your life will necessarily look differently. If you believe those things to be true, it's going to work out in your life. And he's showing us what that will look like.

Praise God he didn't leave it just to work out however we thought best. But he said, as it's working out, I'm going to give you the prescription. It's going to look like this. So continue to check and adjust and make sure that you truly believe the glorious truths of the gospel.

Do you rejoice with those who rejoice? And do you weep with those who weep? Verse 16.

We're going to neglect the phrase, live in harmony with one another. And I'm going to address it next week. So please know I'm intentionally skipping over it. And I will try to tie it all together next week by a miraculous work of God.

All right. The next two exhortations, though, let's look at these. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

[23 : 18] So he speaks of pride. Again, he comes back in to talk about pride one more time as if the first 11 chapters wasn't enough. He comes back around to talk about pride's effect both on certain tasks and people, the lowly, as well as pride's effect on self, on how we think of ourselves.

So he begins by saying, do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. To expand this and maybe put my own version on it.

What is Paul saying to us? Don't think changing a diaper is beneath you. Don't think running an errand or typing a report or sweeping the floor or doing tasks that our culture may call menial or simple.

Don't think that you're above such things or that you're above the people that do such things. Right? Right? The lowly includes not just the tasks, but the people themselves.

Right? The very people that we ought to be spending our days with. Recently, I had the opportunity to represent Set Free, which is the ministry my dad started and helps run here.

[24 : 38] And they were at the Dahlonaga prayer breakfast. And they sang. And I got to come and just bring a little bit of a word to those people. And had not intended to say this at all, but I did it anyway.

Which sometimes gets me in a lot of trouble. And sometimes it's the perfect thing that needed to be said. And what I said to these people, and I say to you now, is that Jesus will not return until he finally comes to conquer and reign.

Okay? So I firmly believe that. But let's just pretend for a moment that he decided to step off the throne and come down to hang out. He would probably stop by and see us.

He'd make an appearance in our buildings on our Sunday mornings. He'd probably step in and say, Hey guys, how's it going? But you know where I think Jesus would hang out?

I think he'd hang out under the bridges where all the Set Free guys go to share the gospel with homeless people. I think that Jesus would get in the van with the Set Free guys.

[25 : 39] And he'd be the one that would lead them in the prayer that the van would make it to their location to do that. And I don't know about you, but I want to be where Jesus is.

Where he is working these things out. I want to associate with the lowly because I believe that's where Jesus would spend all of his time.

The phrase here, associate with, is an interesting phrase. It's actually only used three times in the New Testament. And it would have been kind of a shocking phrase.

It was not a phrase that was used and understood in this particular culture. Because it means literally to be carried along by or to be carried along with.

It was the idea that there was something else moving the action. Are you with me? So it's not just that we choose to associate with the lowly, which we certainly do, but that we're actually drawn to do so.

[26 : 49] That would have been the idea there. Is that equally shocking to you? I hope not as you sit in this church. But to many people, many Christians, this idea would be very shocking.

Wait a minute. Certainly Paul didn't mean to use those very words. Moved by the Spirit, he did. He meant to make us go, okay, wait, what?

We're not only supposed to hang out with the lowly, do the lowly things, but we're actually meant to be carried along by, we're meant to be drawn to, we're meant to be affected, moved, sustained.

And what Paul is saying is that if you are in Christ, you will associate with the lowly. That you will be moved to do so.

As Christians, we are new creations, and we're being changed from the inside out. Previously, I said if we believe the gospel, if we can actually say of those first 11 chapters, I fully affirm the truths contained therein.

[28 : 04] It's going to change the way we live. It will necessarily. If it doesn't, you've stopped believing the gospel.

That does not mean that you lose your salvation. I do not believe that if you've placed saving faith in Christ, you will ever lose your salvation. It's a great doctrine called the perseverance of the saints.

What God has affected, what God has chosen, He's placed in His hand, and nothing and no one, including yourself, can ever undo what He has done.

Let me be clear about that. But day to day, we forget the truths of the gospel. We stop believing it. That's why I'm encouraging you.

Preach the gospel to yourself. Read your scriptures. You can't get very far without becoming very aware of who you are apart from Christ, and now who you are in Him. Preach the gospel to one another.

[29 : 11] Do it constantly. If we're to die to ourselves daily, we must be humbled daily. We must renew our faith.

Repent and believe as a process. Turn from sin. Turn to Christ. Over and over and over again. And that's the picture that He's painting for us.

As you're a new creation, you're going to look this way. The practical implication is when you don't look that way, cycle back through. Repent and believe.

Place your haughtiness aside. Do not be haughty. Recognize that your value and your worth, the infinite worth that you have, is found in Christ, and you will be compelled to live rightly, to associate with the lowly.

This type of humility that moves us to action is the opposite of pride, or the opposite of haughtiness, as said here in verse 16.

[30 : 17] It also exhorts us to not be wise in our own sight. Not be wise in your own sight. Certainly, the way we think affects the way we live.

Chapter 12, verse 2. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. If you think yourself wise, if you think yourself brilliant, the way you think will affect the way you live.

The great example of Christ, as Paul spells out for us in Philippians chapter 2, verses 5-8, he writes, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Catch that language? Have this mind among yourselves. Repent. Believe. Repent. Believe. Repent. Believe. Because it's yours in Christ.

He has made you new. Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Christ himself didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form.

[31 : 33] He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death, on a cross. There is the picture. The great empathy that Christ showed to us.

Right? Could Christ sympathize with our sinful fallen state? Absolutely not. He was perfect. He was holy. But he perfectly empathized.

He's the great example of weeping with those who weep. Those who are broken over their sin. You remember he cried for the state of Israel.

He's the perfect picture of this. And certainly, he's rejoicing now as we rejoice in our great salvation. So, as we have understood that Paul is expanding for us, what genuine love looks like.

And I hope you're tracking me on that. Okay? I hope you're tracking me that this is the umbrella exhortation. Let your love be genuine. Right? We can see that genuine love is rooted in faith.

[32 : 40] And it's rooted in faith in Jesus Christ. His person and His work. And it is therefore a humble love that empathizes with the sorrows and joys of others and willingly participates in and with the lowly.

Let's pray together. Amen.