

## EMPOWERED FOR LOVE AND JOY

March 21, 2021

David A. Renwick

National Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC

Roman 12:9-21

1. There's a **vertical dimension** of salvation  
-- restoring our relationship to God . .
2. There's **the horizontal work of Jesus**  
→ The cross goes both ways . . up/down **and** side-to-side  
Jesus wants us to restore our relationships *with one another* as well!!

**In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans this is Paul's focus** . . God longs for every single one of us to become **Agents of Reconciliation & Bridge-Builders** creating human relationships and communities that reflect God's passion for Peace & Love . . .

Romans 12:9-21 -- **30 imperatives/commands in a row!!!**

1. <sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine;
2. hate what is evil,
3. hold fast to what is good;
4. <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection;
5. outdo one another in showing honor.
6. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal,
7. be ardent in spirit,
8. serve the Lord.
9. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope,
10. be patient in suffering,
11. persevere in prayer.
12. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints;
13. extend hospitality to strangers.
14. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you;
15. bless and do not curse them.
16. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice,
17. weep with those who weep.
18. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another;
19. do not be haughty,
20. but associate with the lowly;
21. do not claim to be wiser than you are.
22. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil,
23. but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
24. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
25. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves,
26. but leave room for the wrath of God;

for it is written, 'Just Judgment (not *Vengeance*) is mine, I will sort it out (repay), says the Lord.'

27. <sup>20</sup> No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them;
28. if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; *for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.*'
29. <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil,
30. but overcome evil with good.

Some of the details . .

1. **Paul CALLS US not just to love, but** "To **HATE WHAT IS EVIL**"
  - a. The discussion about "hate" goes all the way back to the playbook of *ancient Greek Stoicism*. The sign of a mature human being was their ability
    - *To drop all strong feelings* about anything -- in favor of **APATHY**
    - and look down upon *the emotional* with contempt. . .
  - b. Many organizations involved *in the work of Justice* know that *anger and even hatred can be powerful motivators*

Dr. Howard Thurman spoke of it as powerful – but not sufficient, & *potentially dangerous, and self-destructive*)  
**Jesus and The Oppressed**

-- a hatred *of poverty, of famine, of war*  
-- a hatred *of disease . . of slavery and discrimination based on race*

There are things that we should **rightly hate**
    - **Do we hate them enough? Or are we "stoics" and not Christian at all!!**

### c. Regarding "hate" in Romans 12 . . we need to notice

NOTE: this is where so many of those *who claim to be (evangelical) Christians* these days are profoundly un-biblical and un-Christ-like (*in fact more like anti-Christ*s) in their *violence and hatred*

**What Paul advocates in Romans 12 Is a hatred NOT of PEOPLE . . but of EVIL ITSELF . .**

In terms of people -- in our passage Paul has only one word: LOVE . . (*love outnumbers hate 29 to 1*)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr:

"Center your mission & your activity on the evil system  
-- and NOT on the individual who may be caught up in that system

- set out to defeat segregation -- and not the segregationist.
- to defeat the evil system of communism --not the communist.

There must be an active love for the individuals who may be caught up in an evil unjust system even while we continue to work passionately and unrelentingly to do away with the system itself.

Central Methodist Church, Detroit, MI. March 7, 1961

In Romans 12, Paul dramatically separates the sin – and the sinner . .

## 2. The 7 Different groups of people called To LOVE . .

Listed from easy to hard!!

1. Not only **the Saints** (*fellow Christians; nice people*),
2. And **those who rejoice** (= *happy = easy-to-get-along-with*)

But . . and this is a little harder

3. **those who weep** – *those who are sad, need a loving touch*
4. those who are **lowly** (*seem insignificant to others; not popular; not in the in-crowd; on the fringe*)

And then – and this gets even harder = #5 to love

5. those who are **strangers**:  
– we all know that the word “**xenophobia**” means “fear of stranger”; this comes from the Greek . .

The word for *hospitality* in Greek in v. 13 is “*philo-xenia*”

-- **philoxenia** is love of strangers! – people who are different;  
= *don't belong – to our family, or tribe, or race*;

*We're not just put up with them – but to LOVE them!!*

And then we enter the realm of the really difficulty.

What follows in Paul *comes straight from Jesus' teaching* in the Sermon the Mount – in Matt.5-7

6. Take care of **our enemies** – *hungry & thirsty*
7. Those **who persecute** us . . .

### **‘Hate EVIL’ (says Paul) – but ‘LOVE PEOPLE’ . .**

*Never seek to retaliate . . or pay them back -- even when they hurt you – or you think they are hurting you!!*

<sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you → bless and do not curse them.

<sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil

<sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil → but overcome evil with good.

<sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves → but leave room for the wrath of God;  
→ **IOW Let God's justice take care of it**

This is not only the *teaching* of Jesus,

**But the model** that Jesus sets for us overcoming *our* evil with *his* goodness

### 1 Peter 2:22-23

<sup>22</sup>“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

<sup>23</sup>When he was abused, he did not return abuse;  
when he suffered, he did not threaten;

but *he entrusted himself* to the one who judges justly.

This is not easy . .

## **3. RESOURCES** in the Romans 12 we've been commanded to pursue . .

### **1. PRAY**

v. 13 . . “**persevere in prayer**” -- Not a suggestion but a command . .

v. 16 “do not claim to be wiser than you are” & “do not be haughty”

When you speak to God – tell God about your weaknesses

- Tell God that *this loving business* is hard . . that *judging* others, *criticizing* others, being *cynical* about others, gaining *self-esteem* by thinking *we're superior* comes easily to us –
- In fact . . . **we cannot do it in our own strength**

### **2. FOCUS**

v. 11 **Serve The Lord**

. . Make sure that it is *God's opinion* that is driving you

-- not pressure from your peers or political party or group, or colleagues or TV news -- or yourself -- but the LORD

**Is the Lord your God?** . . .

- The God who is passionate for reconciliation at all costs?
- The God & Father of our Lord Jesus--who lived and died for you?

A lady once asked a friend what “serving the Lord” really meant . .

And the friend showed her a blank piece of paper. .

and then said . . “sign it at the bottom and let God fill it as he wills”

### **3. HOPE**

v. 12 **Rejoice In Hope**

In order to love fully *the persecutor, the enemy, the stranger . . the lowly, the weeping, the rejoicing & the Saints*

- If you take the risk to love – and stretch in ways that you've never done; If you lose your friends to do so; If it costs you resources to do so -- as it did w/ the Good Samaritan; or if your love is rebuffed and rejected . .

**You have to believe** that God is in charge of all the consequences; of all your future . . and that all will be well God's “just judgment” (v. 19) will sort it out!!

- **Not just** wishful thinking **but** a solid sense that w/ God
  - Good Friday always leads to Easter
  - And we can depend on it!!