

Romans 12:9-21

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[0 : 00] So last week in our journey through Romans, we began looking at chapter 12 and it is a wonderful chapter, it is the start of the last great chapter in the book of Romans.

That first section from chapter 1 verse 18 to chapter 3 verse 20, we see the lack of righteousness. We see that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Everyone needs a saviour. And then we see from chapter 3 verse 21 to the end of chapter 8, we're shown God's provision of righteousness. God's salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then chapters 9 to 11, we see the rejection of righteousness by the Jewish people. And this last section from chapter 11 to the end of the book is really the living out of righteousness.

The living of salvation. The obeying of salvation. The living lives as people that are in Christ through the glory of God. And it's a wonderful chapter and there's a huge amount in it, isn't there?

[1 : 05] And yet in many ways it's a very simple chapter. Aren't you relieved of that when you come to Romans chapter 12? It's an easy chapter to understand. And yet it's very, very relevant for you and I.

And so I'm not going to work through, as valuable as it would be to go through phrase by phrase, but I think you should. I think that if you read through Romans chapter 12, phrase by phrase, and pray after every sentence, by the end of the chapter, you will have three or four truths that will be especially relevant to you.

Now as I said last week, I've chosen five realities of Christian faith in these verses. I don't think they cover everything in the chapter, but I think they're quite a good summary. And they all begin with S. The first two we saw last week are surrender. That we are to be living sacrifices.

And the second thing we learned was that service is to be characteristic of the Christian. We are to serve others and use our gifts for the good of others. We are to follow the way of the Lord Jesus Christ who came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

The third S is stimulation. Alright? Stimulation. And so in these verses from verses 9 already to 13, Paul is stressing the importance of love.

[2 : 30] And I think that's vitally important. It's vitally important because we live in a world that stresses love all the time, doesn't it? It places huge emphasis on love.

But actually, it's generally mistaken as to what love is. And so love can very easily become feeble and soppy and a feeling. And Paul shows you here in Romans chapter 12 that true love is strengthening.

It is bracing. It is challenging. And actually, true love is often unwelcome at first. It's like a blast of cold air that wakes you up.

See what he's saying here? If we truly love one another, there will be times, won't there, where we will help people with their faults and with their sins.

If you're a parent, even if you're not a parent, you will know parents. And that is true of how we treat our children. We love our children most of the time and it's very happy, isn't it?

[3 : 35] And very gentle and very positive. But there are times, aren't there, for every parent, when a parent has to speak and correct and talk seriously with their children and sternly.

And we will have to say things, maybe do things, that will at first upset them. And it will certainly upset us. But we have to do it. And yet, that is not recognised today in the idea of love.

So sometimes you hear legal courts talking about showing love to criminals. And what I mean by that is basically letting them off and not applying any justice to them. Parents sometimes talk about loving their children and sometimes, tragically, that means spoiling their children and ruining their children.

Disregarding their children and really not helping them in the long term. And I think that often infiltrates the church. Where love becomes weak.

And feeble. And soft. And useless. And no true love at all. We learn from God, don't we?

[4 : 44] The Bible teaches us that God loves the sinners whom he has chosen. He forgives them. He has given at a great cost to save them.

And he forgives all their sins. He forgives all his people's sins with our exception. But while that is all true, there are times, aren't there, when God our Father has to deliver us from our sins.

When God our Father has to help us to get free and overcome our sins. And I don't know about you, but that is often quite painful, isn't it? God's chastening and God's discipline because he loves us can often appear harsh.

But why has he brought those things into our lives? He has brought those things into our lives because he loves us. And he sometimes brings us to tears because he loves us.

And sometimes he brings us to desperation because he loves us. And he certainly brings us to an end of ourselves because he loves us. And our love is to be the same. Now can you just notice with me in the passage, look at the brackets in verses 9 and 10.

[5 : 57] Let love be genuine. Love one another with brotherly affection. There are the brackets, can you see? They're the two pieces of bread. What's the meat in the sandwich? What's in between?

How are you to love in a genuine way? How are you to love one another with a brotherly affection? Paul says hate. Hate what is evil.

Hate it. That is part of love. That is part of Christian love. Part of Christian love is hating certain things.

So let me speak to you as a minister. There are times, there are times when every Christian minister dreads. There are times in a sense where we dislike, where we have to deal with, look at verse 9, what is evil in people's lives.

And you have to speak to them about it. And you have to speak to them because you love them. And because we care. And that is why we're doing it.

[7 : 02] Now that should be true of every Christian. There are times when we have to do that. We're not doing it all the time. Every day. But there are times, and it's our duty. Sometimes people are offended, aren't they?

When we speak to them like that. Sometimes you and I have been offended. When people have said, actually, the way that you're behaving is wrong. And it is sinful.

But what is the greater risk? Is it more dangerous for people to be angry with us just for a short time? Or for God to be angry with them forever? Sometimes, tragically, instead of dealing with people, we gossip about them.

And that is cruel. And that is cowardly. The fact is, we are keepers of our children. And we are keepers of our friends and our brothers and our sisters.

And it's a blessing to have them. And yet, from time to time, especially with people who are close to us in our family, with those whom we've loved for a very long time, we have to gently but seriously point out sin.

[8 : 09] And sometimes we have to correct them. And sometimes we have to goad them away from sin. That is love. That is stimulating. And Paul said, it's not just to push them away.

It's to push them towards God. So look at verse 9. Let love be genuine. Abhor. Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. That's what we're to encourage people to do.

Hold fast to what is good. Or verse 11. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Which means, as a church, we are to encourage each other in the things of God.

That we are to support each other in our Christian lives. And if others don't play their role in doing that, we easily go wrong. We can get discouraged. Our hearts can fail.

We can give up. We can become slothful. And not be the Christians that we want to be. But if, in church life, there are brothers and sisters that come to us and encourage us and support us and thank us for what we're doing and who we are, it blesses us.

[9 : 13] And yet often we fail to do that. If other Christians don't help us in this way, we don't do as well. We'll be tempted to do wrong.

So occasionally we are to correct one another because we love one another. And often we are to support and encourage one another. Because we love each other. And yet I think we live in a city, don't we, where there are great big churches.

And that is a real blessing. But I do want to say some of those really big churches do not live out Romans 12. Because they just can't.

There just isn't the opportunity to have those relationships where people are speaking truth and encouragement in their lives, into each other's lives.

People go there for years and people smile at each other. But there's no mutual encouragement and admonishment. I think one of the benefits of being in church life, of truly being in church life, is that you have this kind of cross-fertilization and stimulating and encouraging of one another.

[10:25] Secondly, the fourth element is sharing. Fellowship is a word that is often used in the New Testament. It used to be, when I grew up, people would say, we have fellowship over tea and coffee and you think of kind of pink wafers and lemon puffs and digestive biscuits.

That is not fellowship. What is fellowship? Fellowship means having things in common. And so a characteristic in the New Testament is that they shared everything. They had things in common. Let me read to you from Acts 4, verse 32. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

It's a really startling verse. It doesn't mean that they all pooled their financial resources together. It doesn't mean that at all. But what people had, people said, no one said, oh, that belongs to me, that is my own, but they had everything in common.

They shared it. Now that was the smaller group in Acts 4. But when you come to this more developed church in Rome, Paul can say, verse 13, contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality to them.

[11:47] Bless those who persecute you and do not curse them. He is saying, isn't he, contribute to the needs of the saints.

Share with your brothers and sisters when they need it. Now the first application of this is obviously to our money. And we are to share what we have and to give money to poor, desolate Christians. Do you see that verse 13? It's not wrong just to give to the poor generally, but the principle in the New Testament is that you contribute first of all to the needs of the saints.

And so we think of organisations like Barnabas Fund and Open Doors. We think of missionaries working amongst churches in some of those very, very difficult countries and we are to support them.

And we are to support the work of the congregation of which we are a part. And so in our congregations there will be people that have great needs. Some will not be legitimate.

[12:54] And it's the job of deacons, isn't it, to work out what is legitimate and what is not legitimate. But there will be very legitimate needs and we are to give generously. And we are able to help.

It's in the church which I serve. I'm very thankful for the generous spirit which God has given to that church. And I'm grateful for the deacons and how they look after the church staff and how they care for the church people.

And for you this afternoon if you've got money you can give it to people who are in need. Brothers and sisters who are in need.

That deepens the love. Then there is, verse 13 is that contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. And so think about your church family.

There may be people who you don't know. And you've never had them in your home. Well, have them in your home. Get them on for lunch on a Sunday. Or get them on for an evening.

[13:54] Maybe say, I can't cook. Give them beans on toast. Hospitality is not the best for the guests. It is what I have you can have. So you're having egg and chips.

Just lay another place. Put some more chips in the oven. And make them another egg. Hospitality is not best for the guests. Maybe there are people who are older than us.

People who are new to the church and new to the country. Maybe there are people, I hope there are people in your church and you think, I've got absolutely nothing in common for them. With them. Get them round for lunch. It's easy, isn't it, for churches to group themselves into cliques and groups.

And the New Testament says those barriers are broken down. And the way that they are broken down is open up your home. So we've got to think, isn't it, this Sunday, after the service, we've got to look around and say, who can I talk to who is new?

Who needs encouragement? It's very easy, isn't it, to gravitate to the same people to talk about the Six Nations and the rugby the day before. Maybe not for you.

[15:00] But our hearts need to be open. All of this implies, isn't it, that you know people in your church family. That you know people in your church family.

Have you given yourselves to them? We are to make an effort to seek to show hospitality. And it will mean a lot. It will keep us together as a loving church family. And many, many of you are doing that. And I'm delighted that. Seek to show hospitality. I think, in London, one of the great ways that we can be impressive, as a church, if I can put it like that, to people outside, is that as they come in, and they see that our homes are open.

Because homes in London aren't open, aren't they? This is how we do. This is how we live. We're constantly in and out of each other's homes. And then there's ourselves.

Look at verse 15. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. That's how the Christian family lives together.

[16:05] It celebrates together. And it grieves together. To rejoice in your brothers and sisters in the church who are experiencing God's blessing and happiness. Do you tell them that?

The danger is it's so easy to be jealous, isn't it? To be envious. But some people in our church family, they have things that I don't have. And I may never have.

The Bible says rejoice. You rejoice for them. And God gives different things and different qualities of things. And he makes some people have a large amount of things. And some people have a small amount of things.

But he says in the church family, there's to be no jealousy. No envying, no fighting. And so we rejoice with those who rejoice. And we weep with those who weep.

And sometimes it's as hard to rejoice. As it is to weep. I don't know many of your churches, but there are people in every church who are sad. And they are going through difficult experiences.

[17:07] And they are being tested. And they are being tried. And if you come up to them and give them a pat on the shoulder. And all you need to say to them is, we're praying for you.

You might not even need to say anything more. We're thinking of you. God will love you. And God will help you. And it means, doesn't it, that occasionally, not every day, not every week, but we should be open about some of our own blessings and some of our own burdens.

to our brothers and sisters in church. We must not give the impression that we are perfect. We must not give the impression that we are completely happy all the time, isn't it?

It seems to me, lots of churches, churches sing one type of song. And if you're feeling miserable or discouraged and depressed, the last thing you want to do is sing, bless the Lord, oh my soul, or a thousand reasons, or any kind of the Matt Redmond magic numbers.

Isn't it? We must be real. Life is not like that. We are not always completely happy. It's very good to say to a friend or two in church, sometimes, in fact, I'm having a rough time.

[18:29] About some grief. To share how awful your work is. Some hardship. And what you will find is if they are true brothers and sisters, they will go home and they will love you and they will pray for you and they will support you.

Sharing stimulation. And then lastly, sacrifice. True love is not an easy option, is it? And it is costly. And true love is in the shape of a cross.

And it is sacrifice of yourself. Look at verse 3. For by the grace given to me, I say to every one of you among you, to not think of themselves more highly than he ought to think.

Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. And many, many people think of themselves far too highly. Look at verse 10. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honour. Each of us are to be the people who will honour. The picture there in verse 10 is of people jostling with each other to give honour.

[19:41] Who will honour and not criticise. Who won't run down. Who will not boast. Who will not big themselves up.

Will honour others. Verse 16. Do not be haughty. Don't be proud. Don't be conceited. Never boasting. Don't raise yourself.

Don't be proud of yourself. Don't be demanding that everyone else will bow down before you and do things your way or the higher way. And that's particularly appropriate to ministers. And our ego must be crucified daily.

It really is, isn't it? In many ways the basic difference between somebody who is in Christ and somebody who is outside of Christ. Somebody who is a Christian and somebody who is not a Christian. We get it in the Gospels again and again.

Deny yourself. Deny yourself. It's the mark of the Christian. And it's painful at times but it's enormously valuable. And it's only as you do that it's only as you deny yourself that you find yourself.

[20 : 45] And you get yourself. It's as you deny yourself you rejoice yourself. Sacrifice of self. Secondly, sacrifice of rights. Verse 14. Bless those who persecute you and do not bless and do not curse them.

Bless those who persecute you. Do not curse them. They are your enemies. They are people who scorn you.

People who make fun of you. People who hate you. Bless them. Pray for blessing. Verses 17 to 21. Do not repay anyone.

Evil for evil. Anyone. Evil for evil. No one. Don't do it. No matter what they do. No matter how evil it is we don't do evil to them.

We want to. We feel it would be right to. Or again in those verses. Verse 19. Do not take revenge. Don't say they hurt me so I can hurt them.

[21 : 45] Or again in verse 20. If your enemy is hungry feed them. He's quoting from Proverbs chapter 25. You see. In a fallen world people treat us unfairly and we naturally want to retaliate.

And we even believe that sometimes we've got a right to do that. They were horrible and they were nasty to me. I didn't do them any harm. So it's right for me to do something back to them.

Paul says throw it away. Be free from the desire to get even with them. Leave the matter with God and God will deal with it. And God will see won't you that everyone gets the punishment they deserve.

And God one day God one day will make all things right in perfect judgment but we don't do it. Something in us screams protest. And it's not easy says Paul.

But without this sacrifice we don't know what Christ's Christian love is. In John 13 verse 34 he says Christ says just as I have loved you you also are to love one another. And I think this is particularly applicable to hurting Christians.

[22 : 53] It's particularly applicable to hurting Christians. Never hate a Christian. Never attack another Christian.

Even if they've done wrong against you and they may well have done wrong against you even if they've hurt you you leave it with God. And the last verse of the chapter makes exactly the same point. Do for others what God has done for us.

Verse 21 Do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good. I've been in the church 14 years where I serve and I'm very glad and grateful to God that there is very little evil that's been done.

And the love and the kindness and the patience and the naturalness. But you don't have to live in a church long for a fellow Christian to harm you.

You just have to be in fellowship actually probably about 6 months. But you leave it with the Lord. So these are the Paul five advices here. And I just want to make a couple of quick points in the two minutes I've got left.

[24 : 03] Come back with me to chapter 1. He says Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to present your body as a living sacrifice. It's possible you are here today and you don't know of God's mercy.

And your first responsibility is to believe in Christ for yourself. God offers you saving mercy. And maybe you're here this lunchtime and you're a little bit uncomfortable.

You've been badly treated by some Christians. They've not acted very well against you. And you feel God is asking too much here. But Paul says look back to the cross. He says look back to the mercies of God.

What did Jesus do? Look over your life and think of all that God has done for you. how he has forgiven you. How much has God forgiven you? And so can't you forgive the wrong that others have done to you?

Is he asking too much? And then that phrase isn't it in verse 1 holy and acceptable or literally holy and pleasing to God. Present your bodies. And he says that all of your life as a Christian will be holy

and pleasing to God.

[25 : 12] you're not trying to please someone who's impossible to please. That if you do things in Christ and you are doing it through Christ and by Christ he makes your actions pleasing and perfect to God.

The things we do is that my son and daughter they are 3 and 6 7 possibly and they draw a picture and it's awful and they give it to me and I don't say listen that's a terrible piece of art you've gone outside the lines there I say it's wonderful because all that they do is pleasing to me and all that you do as somebody who is in Christ is pleasing to God.

Everything you do by faith no matter how imperfect how inadequate it is in fact none of us have ever done anything perfect but it's because it is through Christ it is holy and acceptable to God and when we live through Christ in the way that Romans 12 tells us Christ says to us well done good and faithful servant let's pray