

Romans 12:9-21

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[0 : 00] Romans 12, page 948. And last week we began looking at chapter 12 of Romans.

! It's the beginning of the last great section of Romans. If you're not familiar with the book, the first section is in chapter 1, verse 18 to 320. And it talks about our need for salvation, our need for righteousness.

And then from chapter 3, verse 21 to the end of chapter 8, it's this glorious section which shows us how God has provided salvation. How God has provided righteousness.

And then chapters 9 to 11, you've got the tragedy of the rejection of God's salvation. The rejection of God's righteousness by the Jewish people.

Many of the Jewish people. And so this section, from right at the end of chapter 11 through to the end of the book, is the living out of salvation. It's the obeying of salvation.

[1 : 02] It is how do you live your life to the glory of God. And it's a wonderful chapter. There's a huge amount in it. In many ways, it's a simple chapter.

I don't think it's a difficult chapter to understand. And yet it's very relevant. It would be really valuable for you this week just to work through the chapter slowly, reading it, phrase by phrase, thinking about it.

Each statement. I suspect if you do that, there will be three or four things that will come to you with special relevance in your life. They won't be the same three or four things for us all. But that's God's word, isn't it?

It comes to us differently. And now we're taking a quicker look at this chapter 12. Now, as I said last week, there are five realities to living as a Christian.

It doesn't cover everything there is in these verses. But I hope it leads to kind of general and helpful teaching for us as a church. Last Sunday, we saw the first two. We saw that the Christian life is one of surrender.

[2 : 03] It is one of acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is boss. And so we give ourselves over to him. I'm not in charge anymore. And then it's a life of service in verses 1 to 8.

And so we've got three more to see in verses 9 to 21. Now, the third of the five, they all begin with S, is stimulation. It's not great, really, but stimulation. You'll get what it means. In these verses, the Apostle Paul is stressing the importance of love.

Of love and what it looks like biblically in a church like this. It's important for us because in our world today, there's either little love or love is mistaken.

It's often talked about in a soppy and a feeble way. But Paul shows us here that love in a Christian church is strengthening.

It's bracing. It's challenging. And so sometimes love in a church family like this is unwelcome at first. It's like a blast of cold air.

[3 : 10] It wakes us up sometimes. And then blesses us. And so what he's saying here is that there will be times that if we truly love someone, we will seek to help them with their faults and with their sins.

That's true of children, isn't it? Isn't it? We love them. We love our children. And most of the time, that's really happy. And most of the time, as parents, we seek to be gentle and positive.

But for every parent, for your parents, there were times when they had to speak to correct you. When you had to speak seriously with your children.

And it's something at first that will upset them. It certainly upsets us, doesn't it, as parents, having to do it. And yet that is not recognized very often today with the idea of love.

So legal courts sometimes talk, don't they, about showing love towards criminals. And what they normally mean is letting them off. And not applying justice to them. Parents sadly talk about loving

their children.

[4 : 21] And sometimes they mean spoiling their children. Ruining their children. Disregarding their children. And really not helping them. Spoiling them. And those ideas often infiltrate church life.

So the church becomes feeble. And soft. And unfresh. And kind of limp-wristed. And useless. And it's no true love at all. And so we learn from God, don't we? We learn from God because God loves the sinners whom he's chosen.

Isn't that wonderful? He forgives us our sin. As we feel our guilt as we read that confession. As we put our trust in Christ, God forgives us. He is given at great cost to save his people.

We've sung that this morning. All for love's sake. He became his poor. And he forgives us gloriously of all our sins. Of all their sins without exception.

[5 : 27] But while that is true, isn't it? Wonderfully true. There are times when God our Father has to deliver us from our sins. When he has to help us get free from our sins and overcome them.

And often God's way of doing that is quite harsh. And sometimes it's painful. And his discipline is painful.

It's painful because he loves us. And he treats us painfully because he loves us. And sometimes he brings us to tears because he loves us.

And our love is to be the same at times. Now look at verses 9 and 10. Can you see the brackets there? There's brackets, aren't there, in the way that it's written. So let love be genuine.

That's at the start of verse 9. And then if you look at the start of verse 10. Love one another with brotherly affection. What's in between? How are we to love genuinely? How are we to love one another with real affection?

[6 : 27] Paul says, hate what's evil. That's part of love. Part of Christian love is to hate what's evil. That's the duty of ministers and elders in a church.

There are times we dread. There are times, in a sense, which we dislike having to deal with evil in people's lives. But because we love them, because we care for them, that's why church discipline happens.

And that is true also of every Christian. There are times when we have to do that. We're not doing it every day. We don't do it all the time. But there are times when it is our duty.

And sometimes people are offended when we speak to them like that, aren't they? And sometimes you and I have been offended when people have spoken to us. But what is the greater risk?

Is it more dangerous for people to be angry with us for a short time? Or for God to be angry with them forever? Sometimes instead of dealing with people, we gossip about them.

[7 : 41] And that is cruel. And that is cowardly. The fact is, we are keepers of our children and our friends and our brothers and our sisters. It's a blessing to have them.

And yet from time to time, especially with people who have been close to us in our own families, those whom we've loved for a long time, sometimes we have to point out sin, don't we?

And sometimes we have to correct them. And sometimes we have to goad them away from sin.

And that is love. That is stimulating. And Paul says it's not to push them away, to push them out.

It's to push them towards God. So go to verse 9. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. That's what you have to encourage them to do.

Or verse 11. Do not be slothful. Don't be lazy in zeal. But fervent in spirit and serve the Lord. So we are to encourage one another in the things of God.

[8 : 40] We are to support one another in our Christian lives. So there's times we'll say to each other, what you're thinking about and consumed with and getting upset over does not matter.

It doesn't matter. Look at it in reality. And you might be offended at that. You might want to say, no, it's really, really important. But there will be times as Christian brothers and sisters when we'll have to say that to each other.

We'll encourage each other in the things of God. We're to support each other in our Christian lives. And if others don't help us in this, we go wrong. We get discouraged.

Our hearts can fail and we give up. And we're not the Christians that we long to be. But if our brother or our sister comes alongside us and encourages us and supports us and thanks us for what we're doing and who we are, that blesses us.

So 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.

[9 : 55] 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.

But in so many churches, year after year passes and nobody encourages someone else.

They've been coming for years and years but no encouragement. Can you see the myth of being able to live the Christian life on your own?

The myth of being able to live the Christian life outside of the people that God has given to care for you. We all know the illustration, isn't it, of a fireplace. And you take the white coal or you take the red hot coal out of the fire.

And what happens? Very soon it goes cold, isn't it? Very soon the fire is put out. And so one of the benefits of meeting together is we help one another, we stimulate one another, we encourage one another, we speak the truth we don't want to hear to each other.

[11 : 06] Stimulation. The fourth thing is sharing. Can you see that? Sharing. Fellowship is a very important word in the New Testament. And the word means having things in common.

It's a characteristic of the New Testament that they had everything in common. So let me read to you from Acts 4 and verse 32 where it says this about the new church.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own.

But they had everything in common. There's a characteristic of the New Testament that they shared everything. They had things in common.

That's startling. No one had anything that belonged to him and said, well that's my own. But they had everything in common to share it. That was the smaller group.

[12 : 11] And now you can come here to Romans. I think Romans is written to a group of churches in Rome. It's a much bigger city. And Paul can say in verse 13, can you see that in Romans 12?

Contribute to the needs of the saints. And seek to show hospitality. The saints there are Christians. That's me and you. You are a saint if you've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so he says contribute to the needs of the saints. Share with your brothers and sisters when they need it. That applies to our money, doesn't it? We are to share and to give our money to the poor.

To other Christians. Our deacons are to support other Christians. There's organizations like the Barnabas Fund. Open Doors. Missionaries working in other countries.

We are to support them. In our own denomination, there are little churches. And some church plants. And some small churches. And we as a slightly larger church are wanting to encourage them.

[13 : 13] And support them financially. Congregations finding it hard to meet all their needs. And to do their ministry. And we as a congregation are able to give to them.

And we're able to help them. And we need a generous spirit. That God gives to a church. And to our deacons. And we've done this.

It's a wonderful thing. And so even in small uncritical ways. If you've got money, you can give it to people who are in need. And that deepens love.

Then there's our homes. And our time. Isn't there? Look at verse 13. Contribute to the needs of the saints. And seek to show hospitality. See, look around.

Look around you. Look around. Take a moment. Look around. There will be people in this room. That you don't know very well. You've not been in their home. They've not been in your home.

[14 : 11] Have them in your home. Spend a Sunday afternoon. Or an evening together. There will be people here who are older. People that are new. People with whom you think.

I've not got very much in common with them. It's easy, isn't it? For a church to group itself. Into cliques. And into groups. So we've got to think.

After the service. We've got to look around. And we've got to think. Well, who can I talk to? I've not spoken to before. I know that's a bit frightening. Who can I speak to? Who is new? Or who can I speak to?

Who needs encouragement? Don't always gravitate. To the same people. Our hearts need to be open.

Do you know all the people in this congregation? We're to make an effort to show hospitality. And it will mean a lot. It will keep us together as a church family.

[15:10] And many of you do that. Let me encourage you in that. I'm delighted to say. It's a real encouragement. Seek to show hospitality. It's an enormous witness in our city. This is how we live.

How we share life together. How we love each other. Then there's ourselves, isn't there?

Ourselves. It's the deepest and most valuable aspect of serving. Look at verse 15.

It's probably the one we're most hesitant about. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Do you rejoice in your brothers and sisters in the church who are experiencing God's blessing and happiness?

Yes. I think actually, I think I would argue that is harder to do than the last part of the verse.

Because envy is so prevalent, isn't it? Why haven't I been blessed in that way? Why are they getting that and I am not getting that? And to fight jealousy.

[16:18] But they have some of the things that you don't have. And you may never have that. But you rejoice for them. That is hard, isn't it? And God gives different people different things and different qualities.

And he makes some people have a large amount of things. And he makes some people have a small amount of things. But Paul says, Isn't the church of Jesus Christ no envying, no jealousy, no fighting?

Rejoice with them that rejoice. And that is a heart battle, isn't it? That God may have kept things back from you, you feel, and others have been given them.

And it's a real heart battle to rejoice. And then to weep with those who weep. Every given Sunday, any given Sunday, there are people who are in this congregation who are sad. Who are going through difficult experiences.

People who are being tested and being tried. And occasionally, if you go up to them, put your arm on their shoulder in a COVID-friendly manner.

[17:26] And say, I am praying for you. And I am thinking of you. And God will love you.

And God will help you in what you're going through. It means that occasionally, isn't it? Not every day, not every time you see them. But we ourselves should be open about some of the blessings and some of the burdens that we carry.

To not give the impression that we are perfect. And we are completely happy. And we've got everything sorted. And we've got every answer to every question. Because we're not.

And you're not. Even if you're pretending you are. It's very good to say to a friend or two in church at times about some grief. To share with people some difficulty.

Or hardship. Or struggle. And when you do that, what will they do? They will go home and they will pray for you. And they will love you and support you. Or they'll rejoice with you in your joy.

[18:31] Sharing stimulation. And then fifthly, lastly, sacrifice. Because what Romans 12 describes is costly. It can only be diagrammed in one way.

And that is the shape of the cross. It is the sacrifice of yourself. Look at verse 3. For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

But to think with sober judgment. Each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought.

We live in a culture, don't we? We live in a city where so many people think of themselves far too highly. In verse 10. Love one another with brief brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Each of us are to be people who will honor. Who will honor and not criticize. Who won't run down.

[19:46] Who won't boast. Who won't big themselves up. Will honor others. Verse 16. Do not be haughty. Don't be conceited.

Never boasting. Don't raise yourself up. Don't be proud of yourself. Don't be demanding that everyone else bow down before you and do things your way.

And so my ego must be crucified daily. And that's the basic difference between somebody who is a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and somebody who is not.

We get it in the gospels, don't we? Deny yourself. And it's very painful at times. But it is enormously valuable.

And it is only as you deny yourself that you find yourself. It's only as you deny yourself you get yourself. It's only as you deny yourself you rejoice yourself.

[20:46] The sacrifice of self. The sacrifice of rights. Look at verse 14. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.

We could think about that for a couple of days. Can we bless those who persecute you? Bless them. 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. Verse 17 to 21. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Anyone evil for evil.

Evil. No one. Don't do it. We talk to the children in Sunday school, isn't it? And so children of a certain age.

Brothers and sisters. This is a great verse for you, isn't it? Alright? Do not repay evil for evil. No matter how evil it is.

[21 : 45] We feel it would be right. Or again in those verses. Look at verse 19. It's not a verse. It's not just for children. Never avenge yourself. Do not take revenge.

Don't say, they hurt me so I can hurt them. Or again in those verses. If your enemy is hungry, feed him. Feed him.

He's quoting from Proverbs 25. You see, in the world that we live in, people treat us unfairly. Don't they? And we feel we need to retaliate. And we even believe there are times when I've got a right to retaliate.

They were horrible. They were nasty to me. I didn't do anything to them to cause them anger. I didn't do them any harm. Look at what they've done to me. So it's right that I do something back to them. And Paul says, sacrifice.

Throw it away. Be free from the desire to get even with them. And what's the answer? What's the answer? It says you leave the matter to God.

[22 : 51] And God will deal with it. And we know that one day God will see that everyone gets the punishment they deserve. And God will make all things right in his perfect judgment.

And we won't do it. But he does it. And something screams at us, in us, when we read this passage. We say, this is not easy, Paul.

But he says, without this sacrifice, you will never know what Christian love is. So John 13, verse 34, Jesus says, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

And I would say, especially in this context of this passage, in Romans 12, that's particularly applicable to Christians. Christians. If you've been in church for any length of time, you will have experienced Christians who have said stupid things to you.

And you will have experienced Christians who have called Christians who have called Christians.

And you will have experienced Christians that will harm you and treat you badly.

[23 : 57] this passage has got a relevance for non-christians but it's particularly speaking to us as a church family don't hate a christian don't attack a christian even if they've done wrong against you even if they've hurt you you leave it with god the last verse of this chapter makes the same point do for others what god has done for you verse 21 do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good i've been in this church 18 years and as i look back i'm really glad and i'm really grateful for the little evil that's been done that those 18 years have been marked with you as a congregation by love and kindness and patience and a naturalness that's what church should be but if a fellow christian harms you you leave it with the lord in all likelihood you've probably harmed them without realizing it and you leave it with him so these are paul's five advice but before we end i just want to go back to the first verse of the chapter can you see the first verse of the chapter just look with me if you've fallen asleep or you've drifted off look at verse one i appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters by the mercies of god in other words these words are written to people who know god they are written to people who've been converted they've experienced mercy from god and there are people in every church who actually have not been converted they're on the outside looking in and it's certainly possible that you may be here this morning and you're not yet a real christian and if you are in that position your first responsibility is to believe in jesus christ for yourself and god offers you saving mercy will you receive it and some of you here this morning might have thought this message is just a little bit uncomfortable and you've been badly treated perhaps even some christians have not acted very well against you and you feel that god is asking you a lot here and he is but the apostle paul says to you this he says look look back at the cross and think what happened there what did jesus do look back at your life and think of all that god has done for you think of the times when god has forgiven you can you not forgive other people a few things is he asking too much and then that phrase isn't it it's an amazing thing in verse 12 in verse 1 can you just see it with me he says present your body as a living sacrifice and here's the really helpful thing he says holy

and acceptable i don't like the word acceptable there it should be pleasing so paul says this present your bodies give yourself to god as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to him and he says that to every one of us it's true that everything you do as a christian will be holy and pleasing to god we're not trying to please someone who is impossible to please we are assured through jesus christ when we are acting when we are doing it in christ and doing it through christ by christ it is he that makes our actions pleasing to god and perfect to god and the things that you and i do we do our best but often it's a bit of a mess isn't it and there's often things that we've tried to do we've not done them very well we've tried to speak to somebody to encourage them

we've made a real pig's ear of it or we've gone to try and correct somebody and we've tried to do it humbly and it's all kind of gone wrong paul says this he says it's holy and acceptable to god because christ is taking it and giving it to the father and that's wonderful isn't it that everything we do by faith no matter how imperfect it is no matter how inadequate it is in a sense none of us have ever done anything perfect but because it is through jesus christ it is holy and pleasing to god and so when we live through jesus christ he says to us well done good and faithful servant what an encouragement let's pray