

Romans 12.9-21

"A River of Love"

INTERNATIONAL Church > in a FRACTURED WORLD > Polarized by War
DIFFERENCES will exist long after names Bush & Hussein are FORGOTTEN

NO EXAGGERATION or ROMANTIC NOTION > We are Hope of World
JAMES BOICE > read 1st sermon on Romans last September "Christianity has been the most powerful, transforming force in human history – and the book of Romans is the most, basic, most comprehensive statement of true Christianity"

Chs. 1-11 Learned God's Gospel > NO GREATER NEWS for World

Ch. 12 > Ethical Demands of God's Great Salvation
Demand > TOTAL > v. 1 "offer your bodies as living sacrifices" WORLD WAITS

OPERATIVE WORD > how to relate to Believers and Enemies > AGAPE
God's Radical, Sacrificial, Undeserved Love > Love so Unusual New Word Coined

NOT First Time we've Seen the Word in Romans > 5.8 "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

8.35,39 "Who shall separate us from the love of X?... NOTHING "in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

5.5 "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit"
NOW We're asked to POUR THAT VERY Love OUT OF our HEARTS to Others
1. Who? 2. What? 3. How? 4. Why?

1. Who Do You Love?

Commands in Romans 12 // Ethical Teaching of Jesus esp. Sermon on Mount JESUS: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22.36-40

LAW OF LOVE > Love for God and Man are INSEPERABLE

Chapter 12 > Four Basic Christian Relationships
Vs. 1,2 > God / vs. 3-8 > Ourselves / vs. 9-16 Believers / vs. 17-21 Our Enemies

Vs. 3-8 SPIRITUAL GIFTS / 9-16 Attitude > HOW to Use Our Gifts
 Its POSSIBLE TO USE SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN AN UNSPIRITUAL WAY

WIERSBEE “Love is the circulatory system of the body, which enables all the members to function in a healthy, harmonious way.”

EACH Believer has DIFFERENT GIFTS / ALL Believers are commanded to Love

HENRY DRUMMOND “Take any of the commandments. ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’ If a man love God, you will not have to tell him that. Love is the fulfilling of the law. ‘Do not take the name of the Lord in vain.’ Would he ever dream of taking his name in vain if he loved him...Love would fulfill all the laws regarding God. Also, if he loved man, you would never think of telling him to honor his father and mother. He could not do anything else. It would be preposterous to tell him not to kill. You could only insult him if you told him not to steal – how could he steal from those he loved...In this way...Love...is the rule for fulfilling all rules, the new commandment for keeping all the old commandments.”

v. 10 “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”

“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, ESPECIALLY to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6.10

Christ’s Bond of Love > Greater than Race, Nationality, Wealth, Age, Education

PHILIP YANCEY “People...were constantly befuddled by (Jesus) choice of companions. He became known as a friend of tax collectors...the foreign exploiters...Though he denounced the religious system of his day, he treated a leader like Nicodemus with respect, and though he spoke against the dangers of money and of violence, he showed love and compassion toward a rich young ruler and a Roman centurion. In short, Jesus honored the dignity of people, whether he agreed with them or not. Anyone, even a half-breed with five husbands or a dying thief on the cross, was welcome in his kingdom. He would not found his kingdom on the basis of race or class or other such divisions. The person was more important than the category or their label.”

2. What is Love?

DANGER of Sentimentalism > “Love more than MUSHY EMOTION that embraces all, forgives all, forgets all, and requires nothing.” JAMES BOICE

a. Love is Not Deceitful > v. 9 “Love must be sincere.”

Latin words ‘SIN CERA’ > stamped on fine quality pottery of the ancient world
“without wax” > No Deceitful person covered up cracks & imperfections w/ wax

Call to be SINCERE PEOPLE > Not Hiding Anything > Walking in the Light

Literally - “Without Hypocrisy” > Hypocrite is the PLAY ACTOR
Love must be HONEST > NOT Hypocritical > But HUMBLE

STOTT “The Church must not turn itself into a stage. For love is not theater; it belongs to the real world. Indeed love and hypocrisy exclude one another.”

JOHN MURRAY “If love is the sum of virtue, then hypocrisy is the epitome of vice; what a contradiction to bring these together!”

v. 16 “Do not be conceited.”

CALVIN “It is difficult to express how ingenious almost all men are in counterfeiting love which they do not really possess. They deceive not only others, but also themselves, while they persuade themselves that they have a true love for those whom they not only treat with neglect, but also in fact reject.”

EAST AFRICAN REVIVAL > No hiding or separation from GOD or MAN
“Believers should live in a house with no walls and no roof”

b. Love is Discriminating v. 9 “Hate what is evil” > surprise to see hate & love

REAL LOVE DOES NOT LOVE EVERYTHING > Love Hates Evil
God is Love > AND God is Perfect, Righteous Hatred

“O Lord...The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong”
CONTRARY to Evangelical Slogan > God hates the Sin and the Sinner > Ps 5.5

“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” Proverbs 6.16/19

God spoke thru Prophet Amos: “This is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says: "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.” 5.21

Love Hates what God Hates > Pride, Violence, Lying, Evil Schemes, Hypocrisy

Love what God loves> Truth, Humility, Righteousness, People who need Salvation

c. Love is Determined v. 9 “cling to what is good” // Glue: Bonded to the Good

TRUE LOVE > has Stick-to-it-ness > EPOXY of Determined Devotion
Two Participles > True Love is ‘HATING’ and ‘CLINGING’

v. 11 “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor”

CALL to Faithfulness in Times of DISCOURAGEMENT & OPPOSITION
LIT. “In regard to what you ought to be doing, don’t be lazy”

Be RELIGIOUS ENTHUSIASTS > Root your Zeal in Reality and Truth

v. 11 “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, *serving the Lord*”
Lit. “Be AGLOW with the Spirit” > picture of a boiling, bubbling pot

We’re ZEALOUS about MANY THINGS > faithfully check our emails
watch over our investments / watch our weight, our diet / weed our gardens

KJV “Not slothful in business” > GOD’S BUSINESS DEMANDS OUR BEST

BOICE “Christ’s church will remain a place for worship and work long after we are gone and our business and homes have passed into other hands.”

ROBERT CANDLISH “If you would fight for Christ, you must fight deliberately with a cool head as well as a warm heart; with fixed and resolute determination, upon principle rather than impulse.”

d. Love is Delight v. 12 “Be joyful in hope” > JOY of the Lord is our Strength

WE LOVE BECAUSE GOD FIRST LOVED US: “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome” 1 John 5.3

Where do we look for HOPE? > Rome had powerful armies, advanced law & administration, modern civilization > BUT MORAL DECADENCE

Paul did not Praise the Roman Empire > Without Hope, without God in the world
WHERE IS OUR HOPE, WHERE IS OUR JOY? Fading earthly empires?

DO WE LOOK TO SCIENCE? Space Exploration?

Late Astronomer CARL SAGAN “the cosmos is all that ever was or ever will be”

World is HOPELESS & JOYLESS> WE HAVE THE JOY OF SOLID HOPE

5.1 “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

Solid Hope GUARDS OUR MIND > Drives away our Doubts

1 Thessalonians 5.8,9 PUT ON “the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus X.

To be LOVED BY GOD AND LOVE OTHERS FOR GOD > Our Great Delight

HOW CAN WE KNOW WHEN THIS HOPE REALLY LIVES IN US?

v. 14 “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

Christians like a TEA BAG > work best in HOT WATER

Vs. 17-21 > Focus on OUTSIDERS > Enemies of God and His People

V. 14 > Commands to INSIDERS > Sometimes Persecution comes from Within

- NOTHING HURTS WORSE THAN BEING BLINDSIDED BY A JUDAS!

- JOB'S FRIENDS WERE HIS WORST ENEMIES! v. 12 “patient in affliction”

JONAS HANAWAY – Englishman who INVENTED the UMBRELLA

Received as a WELCOME covering from England's Rain and Showers?

NO! Hanaway was pelted with Dirt and Stones > We do not want your Umbrella!

SOMETIMES WE BRING ON PROBLEMS by our Words and Actions

BE CAREFUL > “Offense of the Cross” > NOT an Offensive Christian

JESUS SAID - "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first....If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." John 15.18,20

NO REVENGE? > need LOVE, JOY, HOPE > Human tendency is REVENGE

HOPE = FAITH > God really is SOVEREIGN even in details of OUR LIFE

AGAPE LOVE > v. 14 “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”
 MORE THAN JUST NOT RETALIATING > Actively working for their Good

First Christian Martyr – Stephen > Great Example > Prayed for his murderers
 AUGUSTINE: “The Church owes the Apostle Paul to the prayer of Stephen”

15.13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

1. Who do you Love? God and People > esp. those in Christ’s Family of Faith
2. What is Love? Not Deceptive, Discriminating, Determined, Delight in X’s Joy

3. How Do you Love?

Paul’s Focus here is on FUNCTION of AGAPE LOVE > Love in Action

a. Harmony

v. 16 “Live in harmony with one another” / Lit. Think the SAME THOUGHTS
 DO NOT MAKE SPARKS OR CAUSE TURMOIL

Christians should be EASY TO GET ALONG WITH
 BOICE “We are to love & win people, not root them out and beat them senseless”

v. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

1st time in Romans > PEACE between People > We HAVE Peace with God
 CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS in the Way of Peace

REALISM > Be Realistic > Not ALWAYS POSSIBLE to make Peace

- Behavior of Some EXCLUDES THE POSSIBILITY of Peace
- Some PRINCIPLES must NOT be Compromised for the Sake of Peace

“the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving”
 James 3.17

PRINCIPLES of Purity, Truth, Righteousness Must NOT be SACRIFICED

September 1938 – P.M. Neville Chamberlain met cheering crowds in London
 Just returned from peace negotiations in Munich with Adolph Hitler
 Chamberlain announced “Peace in our Time” > Sincere Hope
WANTED TO AVOID THE BLOOD BATH OF WAR ACROSS EUROPE
 So he allowed Hitler to Invade and Occupy Czechoslovakia
PROBLEM – Hitler was not Peace-loving DID NOT STOP until WAS STOPPED

BE REALISTIC about the DEPTH of EVIL that dwells in Man

NO RETALIATION > No Personal Revenge > 4 strong Negative Commands

v. 14 “do not curse” / v. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

v. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

v. 21 Do not be overcome by evil,

THERE IS A PLACE FOR PUNISHMENT OF EVILDOERS > Romans 13

“Follower of Jesus ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN to hit back in word or deed”
CONTRADICTS volcano of revenge and anger that rages within offended soul.

JOHN MURRAY “The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands. It is faith to commit ourselves to God, to cast our care on him...to recognize that God is judge.”

ACTIVELY PURSUE PEACE > v. 18 “live at peace with everyone”

DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO DO EVIL TO US

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” Matthew 5.9

v. 20 “Heap burning coals on his head” > aha! I CAN TAKE REVENGE
 Ancient Symbol > Quotation from Proverbs > Various Interpretations

1. God holds the FINAL COALS of Judgment Fire > He will PUNISH THEM
2. Your Active Goodness will PAINFULLY SHAME peace-hating ENEMIES

Both Interpretations can PROMOTE SPIRIT OF REVENGE and Retaliation?

BELIEVER IS CALLED TO PROMOTE RIGHTEOUS PEACE-MAKING
 Ancient Egyptian Ritual > Penitent > burning coals on head to display Repentance
 “dynamic symbol of change of mind takes place as a result of a deed of love”

HERE, AS IN ALL THINGS, OUR EXAMPLE IS JESUS -
 “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” 1 Pt 2.23

HE DID NOT RETALIATE / HE TRUSTED IN GOD’S FINAL JUDGMENT
 This is HOW Christ WON US > to Himself > by His Death and Resurrection

b. Humility > Active Peacemaking in face of opposition not natural instinct

First need to make our Peace with God > through the Lord Jesus Christ
 Then, need to be filled with the Peace of God > active presence of the Holy Spirit

BOTH Require HUMBLE DEPENDENCE v. 12 “faithful in prayer”

We NEGLECT prayer – GROW TIRED, MINDS WANDER > We NEED IT!
 We may GET TIRED of BREATHING > but you Better Not Stop!

Luke 18 > “Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” > WIDOW WHO PERSISTED FOR JUSTICE

HUMBLE BEFORE GOD > HUMBLE BEFORE MAN
 v. 16 “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.”

“Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” 1 Cor 1.26-29

c. Hospitality > Peace with God, leads to Peace with Man

v. 13 “Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

GENEROSITY should be shown to Needy / Hospitality to Visitors
 Open Home shows Open Heart / Open Heart leads to Open Home

NEED BOTH > Love for the Family of God AND for the Stranger & ENEMY

v. 20 "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

JESUS: `Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Mt 25.34

THOSE WHO IGNORED HIM > Sent away to Eternal Punishment (Matt 25.46)

d. Honor v. 10 "Honor one another above yourselves."

Humble Attitude and a Willingness to Share > Key to Healthy Life in Body

CHARLES HODGE "Don't wait around for people to recognize your contributions and praise you. Instead, be alert to what they are contributing and honor them."

Churches DESTROYED by Jealousy, Resentfulness, Selfish Ambition, Conceit

Great Pauline Hymn > Philippians 2 > Mind of Servant > Mind of Jesus Christ

OTHERS JOYS AND SORROWS ARE SIGNIFICANT TO US

v. 15 "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

Sympathy > Love enters deeply into their experiences
We may not FEEL THEIR PAIN but we can HELP THEM BEAR IT

4. Why Do you Love?

a. We follow Christ > v. 11 "serving the Lord" WHO Love his Enemies

AGAPE COMES FROM GOD ALONE / we dare not forget or stray from Him

REMINDER PUTS ALL IN FOCUS > Serve God in the Sight of Men

v. 17 "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody."

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." Colossians 3.23,24

b. Christ wants the World > and everyone in the world

KINGDOM BATTLE PLANS > Revolutionary Goals > Christ's Dominion

v. 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

v. 2 PLAN OF TRANSFORMATION > begins with Individual and God

Following the WORLD'S Method > Cursing, Revenge, Retaliation
WE are OVERCOME by Evil > Sucked into its Sway > Surrender to Darkness

College > Voice of Calvary > Mendenhall, Mississippi > led by Rev. John Perkins
Black American > exemplary ministry to poor > Active Love of Christ
Perkins endured Baptism of Fire > February 7, 1970 by 8 white MS Policemen
Perkins committed no Crime, Broke no Laws > Jail to help imprisoned Students
John beaten most of that night > kicked, stomped on > fork shoved up his nose

HORRIBLE NIGHT of Vicious, Violent, Racist Evil

"Yet it did something good for Perkins. Up to this point he had only preached to black people in Mississippi. The doors of all the white churches were closed to him. But this horror gave him a new hope and vision. He wrote: 'I remember their faces – so twisted with hate. It was like looking at white-faced demons. For the first time I saw what hate had done to those people. These policemen were poor. They saw themselves as failures. The only way they knew how to find a sense of worth was by beating on us. Their racism made them feel like *somebody*. When I saw that, I just could not hate back. I could only pity them. I said to God that night; 'God if you get me out of this jail alive' – and I really didn't think I would, maybe I was trying to bargain with him – 'I really want to preach a gospel that will heal these people, too.'"'

NOT TO TOLERATE EVIL, COMPROMISE WITH IT, HIDE FROM IT OVERCOME IT!

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16.33

NOT JUST EXCEPTIONAL INCIDENT in faraway Mississippi

These are the MARCHING ORDERS > Dynamic Character > X's Global Church

IT WAS SAID OF EARLY CHRISTIANS "Behold how they love one another"

Historian Will Durant> not a Christian but could not help but see Christ & servants
"There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians,
scorned and oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fierce
tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos,
fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the
strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and
Christ had won."