

Series: The Reign of Grace: A Study Through Romans

Today's Message: Let Love be Sincere / Pastor Jeff Kennedy / Feb 5, 2023

Romans 12:9–13 Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. ¹¹ Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. ¹³ Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.

Whenever I have heard people say things like, “Oh, the worship is really good at that church.”

Or, “I really enjoy the worship at our church.”

Or, “I don’t go to that church anymore because I don’t like *their worship*.”

Something in me cringes when I hear statements like these. It’s because they are wrong on several levels: First, they are entirely oriented to the individual’s experience in a worship service. Now let me defend experience for a moment—to suggest that worship is mere robotic service is also not right. Worship does most definitely move the heart, stir the affections, and should stimulate us to greater faith and good deeds. No doubt. But only associating worship with the weekend song-service and how that makes me feel, or how it provides personal enjoyment for me is not the bullseye. Second, these statements misunderstand the biblical definition of worship is not primarily singing along with a great worship band. Now again, in defense of having a wonderful worship team—the OT envisioned Temple worship to be a loud, vocal singing of praises to God accompanied by a variety of musical instruments—this often involves shouting and celebration unto the Lord.

Paul here provides the most extensive definition of Christian worship in the entire Bible. While it encompasses a weekend worship service, while it certainly includes the songs we sing, the instruments we play, the technology we employ, and the act of vigorous and lively congregational singing of songs—it is by no means exclusive to those activities. In fact, Paul here does not mention the public worship service at all (now, he does mention the assembly in 1 Corinthians; and he does elsewhere mention the need for being filled with the Spirit by being filled with God’s Word through public singing in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5:19ff. We’re not having a sacred experience here, and then living largely secular lives from Monday to Saturday).

But here, he is focused on the totality of the believer’s worship life.

In the first verse (Rom 12:1)—he’s introduced the topic that will carry us through to the end of the book. Everything we do, as individuals and members of the gathered assembly—everything in the spectrum of the Christian life *IS WORSHIP!* And Paul tells us that our worship is either acceptable or unacceptable. He goes on to define and to tell us what acceptable worship to God looks like.

Our worship is the offering of our bodies in reasonable, thoughtful acts of service (Rom 12:1).

Our worship is acceptable when we surrender our thinking to God's authority in His Word, which has a transforming effect on the minds of believers (12:2).

Our worship is acceptable when we think rightly and soberly about ourselves—having an accurate estimation of ourselves in light of God's Word (12:3).

Our worship is acceptable to God when we discover, develop, and deploy our spiritual gifts for the building up and growth of Christ's Church—for the commonwealth of Christ (12:4–8).

And today he's going to tell us that our worship is acceptable and pleasing to God when it is expressed in loving attitudes and actions towards the family of God and outsiders (12:9–21).

Ancient moralists were fond of concluding their letters with lists of moral virtues contrasted with vices. Paul does much the same here. But Paul knows something those ancient Greco-Roman moralists don't—he knows that a person is an image-bearer of God, fallen into sin, hopelessly depraved in mind and heart, enslaved to sin's passions, dead in our transgressions—and guilty—liable to judgment and wrath due to our rebellion and disobedience. And he knows that the only hope of salvation for this fallen creature is the gracious act of Christ's death on a cross which pays our penalty for sin, his resurrection from the dead—which vindicates his claim to be Lord over all, and his glorious exaltation to the right hand of God's throne—which inaugurates his Kingdom reign over all things.

And Paul knows that short of the sinner being washed, justified, filled with God's empowering, enabling Spirit—that sinner is lost forever and cannot hope to live up to the moralizing demands of the stoics, or the Jews or any other group for that matter.

1. Acceptable worship is expressed in loving attitudes and actions to the family (Rom 12:9–16). “Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. ¹¹ Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. ¹³ Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”

Let’s first start with a definition of Christian love: The Greek language had several words for “love.”

agapao (*agapé*): “to have a warm regard for and interest in another; to cherish, have affection in the heart.” This word most often describes God’s love toward us.

phileō (*philé*): meaning, “to take a special interest in someone, to consider someone a friend usually expressed with the customary social kiss.” This word appears as a compound term...

philadelphia: “brotherly, sisterly love, mutual affection between family members.” This is the love that characterizes a close knit family.

eros: “romantic love, love with sexual intent; attractional physical love.” This word is not used in the NT.

So let me show you Romans 12 and which words Paul uses here:

Rom 12:9 “Let love (*agapé*) be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another (*philadelphia*) deeply as brothers and sisters.”

Love involves both our actions and our sentiments, our feelings and emotions. Often, feelings follow actions. The Christian is to take action—to express a love that is free from hypocrisy—sincere, and genuine. We are to cling or to attach ourselves, to anchor ourselves to that which is good—abhorring or despising that which is evil—and to love everyone regardless of their stance towards us. To love our friends, our enemies, and everyone in between. We understand that genuine Christian love embraces the good and detests that which is evil. In 1 Corinthians 13 he tells us that love “does not delight in evil.” Reformer John Calvin in his commentary put it this way, “but *evil* is to be taken for that malicious wickedness by which an injury is done to men; and *good* for that kindness, by which help is rendered to them; and there is here an antithesis usual in Scripture, when vices are first forbidden and then virtues enjoined.”¹

¹ John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 464.

Paul is going to highlight for us those attitudes and actions which demonstrate the genuineness of our warm regard, affection from the heart—and deep brotherly/sisterly love for one another.

- Devoted affection (12:10a) “Love one another deeply” his devotion stands in contrast to superficial and shallow allegiances.

Illustration: I used to “love” the Seahawks. Now I don’t. I like whoever is winning. That’s not devotion—that’s convenience. This aspect of love is loyalty. Loyalty to a church family. This expression of our love is reliably committed to other people in the family.

- Honor others (12:10b) “as brothers and sisters take the lead in honoring one another.” The Roman culture was obsessed with obtaining personal honor and glory. And in that world it was a zero-sum game. You obtain personal honor through the shame and defeat of your social or political rivals.

Illustration: When we watch the superbowl—this is a good example. There can be only one winner of the title. And that “win” is at the expense of someone else’s dreams of glory. It doesn’t matter that the losing team beat everyone else to get there. Won divisional titles. But second place doesn’t get the Vince Lombardi trophy. Second place doesn’t get the title, the bragging rights of winning the big game. And in Paul’s ancient world, acquiring personal honor and glory was most often at someone else’s expense. For you to be the winner they had to be shamed and shown to be the losers. But Paul says to the Roman believers “Instead of honoring yourself, go first in honoring other believers.” Play in such a way that others win.

- Enthusiasm and passion (12:11) “Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord.” By contrast our fleshly nature is, like a donkey, always lethargic, resistant to progress or effort in the way of holiness—and must be aggravated by the Spirit—spurred on toward love and good deeds in the body. The fruit of the Spirit is an enthusiasm for service to the body while the works of the flesh are laziness driven by the need to be served as a consumer.
- Joyful endurance (12:12) “Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer” Rejoicing in the hope of our salvation when Christ comes, patient despite our various afflictions, and persistent to seek God in prayer. Prayer keeps us anchored to our foundation—the bedrock of our hope. Prayer is the oxygen that sustains the flame of our hope to burn joyfully. How can a Christian know real joy in the midst of trying times? It’s because that believer is buoyed and sustained by the power of another realm. And if you’re here and not a Christian and this joyful endurance sounds foreign to you—we invite you to surrender your heart and life to Jesus today. And you also will know this peace that passes all understanding.

- Generous sharing and fellowship (12:13) “Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality”—Paul uses a familiar term here: *koinonia*, meaning “voluntary association.” The Christian set ablaze with God’s love is generous with their resources and time, sociable, and friendly. The Christian church is not to be nor feel like you walked into a freezer full of embalmed saints or Christian cadavers—but a warm glowing sociable family, alive and on fire in fellowship!
- Earnest participation (12:15) “rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep”—The church is not to a place of indifference where we all have our own agendas as we tolerate each other. We are called to be a community of sympathetic participation in those highs and lows, their joys and victories, their trials and triumphs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Every joy we experience is amplified when it is shared with the family. And every tragedy is made more bearable when all of us are carrying it together. This is what it means to be a family—it means to practice sanctified empathy. To identify and commiserate with the sufferings and triumphs of the family—those who live in the house.
- Humble unity (12:16) “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.” Why does he put these together? Here’s why harmony and humility go together. Every time there is a breakdown in the unity or harmony in relationships—the main culprit is stubborn pride. Someone in the deal is just not willing to admit fault, or admit finiteness—that we don’t know everything, or to admit that they may be in the wrong. The key is to associate with humble people. If you hang around arrogant, pugnacious, bullheaded people, that will rub off on you. It is human nature to “catch” or contract whatever the people closest to us are radiating.

A major aspect of our acceptable worship is that it is expressed in loving attitudes and actions toward the family.

Paul then turns his attention to outsiders—non-family members. What then is to be our disposition toward those who do not name Christ as Lord, and may even take an aggressive or hostile stance toward the church?

2. Acceptable worship is expressed in loving attitudes and actions toward outsiders (Rom 12:14, 17–21). Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. ¹⁸ If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, *leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.* ²⁰ But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing, you will be heaping fiery coals on his head. ²¹ Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.

Paul is quick now to turn our attention to those outside the family—people who don't share our beliefs, our values, and may even be antagonistic toward us. We're to bless them and not curse them. Take the high road—and never demand vengeance at our own hands. We are to befriend the sinner and let the cross offend the sinner.

We are to show people the kindness they refuse to show us.

We are to offer them the mercy they could never extend to us in their sin.

We're to hate what is evil and love those who perpetrate evil against the church in the world.

Let me ask you—do you pray for the people you disagree with? How much time do we spend arguing with them verses praying for them?

Likewise, would you help someone who doesn't agree with you politically? Would you show them kindness and the self-giving, self-sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross?

Listen I know that it is a tremendous burden for those who are righteous by faith to bear and carry the weight of being scorned, rejected, and despised by our culture. The unrighteousness of our times is a burden that the righteous must bear. And so long as we are in the body we make it our aim to persuade others. So long as there is breath in our lungs we make it our goal to appeal to those who are lost “Be saved. Turn to Jesus. Believe, repent, be baptized and escape the coming wrath, and enter into the joy of our Master—our great God and Savior Jesus the Messiah!”

What happens when the church who is supposed to live in the tension between grace and truth, mercy and certainty—what happens when Churches become unmoored from the gospel according to the Scriptures, and the value system of that gospel recorded in Scripture?

In recent days it has come to light by a small group of leaders who attended a very intimate closed door leadership seminar with famous author and Pastor Andy Stanley who, in that training openly affirmed the LGBTQ folks. Turns out that Andy has, in the past, made a variety of affirming statements in his sermons also. I had mentioned earlier last year that a few years ago, Andy came out and disaffirmed the OT in a message titled “Unhitching Christianity from the OT.” When we become unmoored from the Bible—it’s doctrines and value system and we begin to say nutty things like we should “Unhitch Christianity from the Old Testament” then it should not surprise us when that same leader and that church no longer upholds the value system of the gospel but affirms the immorality of the world. He has 40,000 people in his church. 100’s of thousands of people watch his sermons (I used to be one of them) millions who read his books, and are directly influenced by his ministry. And he now thinks that we should just treat LGBTQ people as though they just have a handicap, like they have broken arm or something? And excuse it? Are we to allow people who reject the Word of God to volunteer on our ministry teams?

So long as we are in the body, we are to have a loving, gracious, merciful disposition to people who don’t think, believe, or behave the way we do. They don’t know the gospel, they don’t believe it, they live according to it—and may even hate us and antagonize us for believing and following it. But grace ceases to be grace when we dilute it with a watery substitute that preaches a gospel not grounded in the text, not founded on Christ’s cross and resurrection, and not confirmed in the transformation of the whole life, day-by-day, week after week, and year-after-year in discipleship—conforming to the image of the son.

Folks, there is no message of saving grace if there just is nothing to be saved from other than my own unhappiness or personal misery. Jesus saves us from judgment and vengeance—God’s wrath, which is coming upon all the unrighteousness of people.

What good is the gospel if it doesn’t give our enemies something to eat when they are hungry, or give them something to drink when they are thirsty, or show them the compassion and mercy of the gospel—while standing unmoved, fixed on this firm foundation. We are not moving!

Paul says, that we are to offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices, our minds to be transformed in the Word, not conformed to the world—thinking sensibly and soberly about ourselves so that we may offer our service through spiritual gifts to the body, and express God’s love in actions and attitudes both to the family and to the world.