

Life Together in a Divided Age

Romans 12:9-16

If you're new with us, we're starting a new series. I need to do two introductions. One for the series and then one for the passage under consideration, and then we'll dive into Romans 12. [Pray].

- How can we love each other during an emotionally charged election season?
- What are our ethical and civic responsibilities in this world?
- How can we live justly and make a kingdom impact in this world?
- How can we avoid political extremism, and give our ultimate allegiance to Christ?

These are some of the questions we will consider.

I have no interest in endorsing a candidate/party at the local nor federal level.

- My goal is not to agitate, nor go on a political rant, but to expound some key passages.
- Politics will be in the background and the Bible and glory of King Jesus will be in the foreground.
- “Guys, I’m not very poli-tickle.” More biblical than poli-tickle.
 - love one another, despite our differences (week 1)
 - Be a good citizen, love your enemy, give ultimate allegiance to Christ (week 2)
 - Pray for those in leadership (week 3)
 - Be devoted to biblical justice and mercy (week 4)

These are not new or novel ideas. There basic ideas about how we live out our dual identity: as citizens of Heaven and citizens of America.

- The Bible does speak to certain ethical and civic privileges and responsibilities that we should understand, but we should remember that it doesn't answer all of our questions; as it wasn't written in the context of a democracy.
- But it does have some basic things to say.
- And it has much to say about the fact that the sovereign Lord reigns over all!
- And it has much to say about the unity of the church.

We have diverse political perspectives and backgrounds represented in our church; that's true among the elders, and probably in your small group; but as Shane reminded us last week, we're not united around party allegiance, but to devotion to Christ.

- It's not the donkey or the elephant that unites us, it's the Lamb!
- It's the good news that Jesus is Lord that unites us.
- We are united when we pray, “Your Kingdom come, Lord.”
- And our love for one another and our witness to the watching world is more important to me than winning an argument about political positions.

Jesus took Matthew the Tax Collector (big government) and Simon the Zealot (don't tread on me) and made both of them disciples!

- He can do the same today, as long as we keep Jesus at the center.
 - I want our church to transcend political views, & celebrate the unity we have in Jesus.
- To do this, we need to

- think biblically (for that's the **plumb-line**)
- be willing to have our idols exposed, and put them to death.
- overlook minor offenses of others
- calm down and love and honor our brothers and sisters
- refuse to sow seeds of division with our words (whether online or in person);
- put our ultimate trust in the Lord (Ps 146);
- long for Christ's kingdom more than the triumph of certain candidates/parties.
 - Presidents come and go, but Jesus reigns forever, and he's never up for re-election.

Earthly politics are important, but they're not ultimate. Christ's kingdom is ultimate.

Pastor Kevin DeYoung puts it well:

I am interested in politics, always have been. I follow the ups and downs and ins and outs of the campaign season closely. I love my country and care about who wins and loses. Elections have consequences....

Yet I'm much more interested in the church—my church and the Church. Our fidelity to biblical truth, our personal holiness, our sincerity, our consistency, our ability to speak with grace and truth, our unwillingness to confuse the kingdom of this world with the kingdom of Christ, our realism in the midst of utopian promises, our hope in the midst of fear and loathing, our winsome witness to the gospel—to embody these realities week after week is more important than what happens [in the election].'

Well said.

Context of Romans 12:9ff

Romans 12:1 marks a new section in the letter to the Romans.

- Believers are exhorted to live in view of God's "**mercies**" (12:1);
- One of the primary ways Rom 12:1-2 will be lived out is by giving yourselves to God's **church** through the use of our **spiritual gifts** (12:3-8), and through **gospel-centered acts of love** (12:9-16).
 - Though it's not a hard fast division, verses 17-21 deal w relationship to unbelievers.

12:9–21 (as well as in 13:8–10) have all to do with "**the Christian love ethic**"

- **Internally** (among God's people) and externally (among neighbor and enemy)
- Within the community the issue: **Jew/Gentile, Weak/Strong Division**

Paul is dealing w conflict in Romans, between Jew/Gentile.

- Jewish Christians were talking about Jesus soon after Pentecost.
- In AD 49, Claudius expelled the Jew from the city because they were constantly debating about one named "Chrestus" ("Christ"). [This is consistent with Acts 18:1-2]
- Eventually, the Jewish Christians returned to Rome when Claudius died in AD54.
- In between this time, the Roman church became a mainly a Gentile church, so when the Jews returned the church became fractured along ethnic lines.
 - The leadership was mainly Gentile.

- The meetings were not in synagogues but house churches.
- The Jewish believers would have found many cultural practices offensive.
- All of this gives rise to Paul's glorious multi-ethnic vision for the people of God.

All of this lies behind the entire letter.

- Jew/Gentile unity, could only be est in the Gospel (not in preferences and opinions), so Paul spends chapter after chapter explaining it before getting to chapter 12 where he will apply it in relationships. (14:17-19)

Romans 1-11 had some sections that were difficult to understand. (2 Pet 3)

- Romans 12:9-21 is not really that difficult to understand – it's difficult to live!
- That's because it's about relationships!
- How many of you know that Relationships are challenging?
 - Linus, “I love mankind; it's people I can't stand.”

This is why we need the regular renewal of our minds! (Rom 12:2)

- Renewed minds leads to attitudes, relationships, & practices -- that are not conformed to this world.

It is easy to do the opposite of these instructions and so be “conformed to the mindset of the world.”

- Romans 12 is calling us to something beautifully different.
- We need hearts that are saturated in grace to live these instructions out.

These instructions were difficult for the House Churches in Rome!

- It was a very hierarchical culture and an honor and shame culture -- which made these commands very counter-cultural.
- And the church was quite diverse with Jews and Gentiles trying to live in harmony with each other, with each having their own particular cultural preferences and practices.

They are difficult for us to live out too, for a variety of reasons: toxic political climate, divided age, cancel culture, a culture that assumes the worst...

The fact is, if these verses were lived out faithfully, it would radically change our world.

- It changed the first century Greco-Roman world - the church as a counter-culture, as a little outpost of the Kingdom of God.
- They said to the world, “You want to know what the kingdom is like -- here's a glimpse.” It's not perfect but it's a glimpse.
- In the kingdom, there's love, honor, harmony, zeal for the Lord.
- When we fail, we forgive one another and reconcile; that too is a display of the kingdom.

This passage is virtually impossible to outline (each verse is a sermon in itself), but I want to put these verses in five groups:

1. Love and Honor
2. Passion and Perseverance

3. Generosity and Hospitality
4. Rejoicing and Weeping
5. Harmony and Humility

This is how we are to live out our life together all the time, and they're important reminders for us in this cultural moment.

These attitudes and actions are motivated, empowered, and shaped by the gospel.

#1: Love and Honor (12:9-10)

A. "Let love be genuine" (9a)

Love without hypocrisy -- without play-acting.

- The adjective translated "genuine" (anupokritos) means "without deception or hypocrisy."
- Love must never be a disguise for ulterior agendas.
- Xian love is free from all pretense and hypocrisy.
- Christian love is **not** marked by **mere platitudes**.

In the original context, life was structured around **formal relationships** that included the expectation to act in accordance with one's role in society.

- One's heart did not always align with those actions.
- Love was ritualized, not sincere, not from the heart.
- So this command was (and still is!) counter-cultural.
- Don't be a fake. Be compassionate, be quick to forgive, apologize, and show mercy and grace.

Note the emphasis on love

- 13:10; 14:15-19 (note context, v. 1 - quarreling over opinions re diets and days); 15:1-3

B. "Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (9b)

- Love doesn't allow evil to persist in the name of "love."
- Love actually hates certain things. It's **holy** love.
- Two strong words
 - **Abhor** – hate it exceedingly, not just dislike evil.
 - **Cling** – like in a marriage
- Love is not genuine when it **leads** a person to do something evil, **allows** a person to do evil, or when it **avoids addressing evil**.
- Today: "**If you really love, then you won't make any distinctions – you should be able to do whatever you want.**" "Love is love" they say. Doesn't matter who or what you love, it's okay.
 - That idea comes from a low view of the holiness of God.
- Love knows the difference between right and wrong.
- You can't parent without this kind of love; you don't allow your child to do anything in the name of love.
 - Did you let your 5yr old drive to church today because she wanted to drive?
- "Love does not rejoice at wrong doing" (1 Cor 13:6)

God is holy and there is such a thing as **good** and **evil**.

- “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isa 5:20).
- The church must hate what God hates, and love what God loves.
- We’re to be known for doing good: v. 21, 13:3.

C. “Love one another with brotherly affection” (10a)

Let there be **tenderness, warmth and affection**.

- Two family words:
 - “**Philostorgoi**” (loving dearly)
 - “**Philadelphia**” (affection”) – brotherly/sisterly love

This was **a radical command in the Roman context**.

- **Levels of affection varied** between spouses, servants, etc.
- The church provided a **new kind of family**.
- This would have been a massive encouragement to those **without families**, such as migrant workers, servants, certain races and classes, and those rejected by their families when they became Christians.

D. “Outdo one another in showing honor.” (10b)

Another **radical command** in the first century, hierarchical world.

- **Oakes:** “If, at church I hold a door open for someone, it is not revolutionary, whoever it may be. In the first-century house church, if a slave held a door open for their master, no one would notice. If a master held a door open for a slave, this would be very radical.... giving each person honor individually ... in first-century terms is **outrageous**.”
- We live in a culture of dishonor; when we honor another, we too are going against the grain of society.
- Romans 12:17, 13:7

1 Peter 2:17 — “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

Give Each Relationship Its Due!

Social: “**Honor everyone**” because everyone is made in the image of God!

- Show respect to people who may disagree with you over politics.

Ecclesial: “**Love the Brotherhood**”

- There is a special relationship we have with the family of God.

Spiritual/Devotional: “**Fear God**” – Only He is to be revered and worshiped.

- “Render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God what is God’s.”
- The coin bears Caesar’s image, give it to him. You bear God’s image, give your life to him.

Political: “**Honor the Emperor**”

- You don’t have to agree with a leader’s politics in order to honor them in a way that honors God.
- Respect the office, even when you disagree with leaders.
- Paul preached the gospel to Felix and Agrippa, but he respected them as leaders.

#2: Passion and Perseverance (12:11-12)

A. “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (11)

Notice the passion in this verse!

Christian love is **not cold or indifferent!**

- “Don’t be slothful in zeal” (11a) – see **12:8**. Lead w/ enthusiasm.
 - Prov 13:4
- “Be Fervent in Spirit” (11b) – or “the Spirit”
 - This is better translated “set on fire by the Spirit” or “aglow with the Spirit”
 - The verb is picturing something **boiling or on fire**.
 - It’s reminiscent of Pentecost, where the Spirit came w “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3),
 - It’s like Acts 18:25 where we read of Apollos being “fervent in the Spirit”
- “Serve the Lord” -- the object of our zeal.
 - Wrongly directed zeal is dangerous!
 - **Rightly ordered zeal glorifies God and blesses people.**

Roman context: certain **classes** of people were exhorted to work hard.

What makes this command counter-cultural is that it’s **targeted at everyone**, even the wealthier households are called to be zealous for Christ.

God is gracious in giving us such a command: He knows our frame.

- He knows our passions can cool. So he exhorts us.
- The exhortation is to everyone -- Be set on fire for Christ!

B. “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” (12)

- **Perseverance** unites these three phrases.
- Life is hard, but we have hope and joy in Christ; we can find strength through prayer.
- There’s not a day in the Christian’s life in which we don’t need to hear this verse.
- **It actually hangs over our bed at home.**
- It’s a summary of **Romans 8:18-30; 5:2-5** - hope, suffering, and prayer.
- It was a very relevant exhortation in the Roman context for several reasons:
 - **Persecution** (a subject he will address in 17-20)
 - **The way of life then** -- less medical care & oppression built into society, & more.

“Be patient in tribulation”

- **Lord give me patience. Right now!**
- Endure in the midst of trials.
- In tribulation it’s easy to drift into self-pity or murmuring.

How do we endure hardship without murmuring and turning inward?

- By applying the other two parts of the verse! **Rejoicing and Praying!**
- If you aren’t rejoicing and praying you won’t be persevering faithfully.
- Groaning in prayer, and rejoicing in Christ; these are essential practices for everyday Christian living.

#3: Generosity and Hospitality (12:13)

A. "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality." (13)

Two practical ways to love: **generosity** and **hospitality**.

- "Contribute" The word group is often associated with financial support.

A. Generosity. Some of you just need a big thank you! Keep it up!

Why?

- It's important for you to give to advance the mission.
 - Ross: "**Money is missions ammunition.**" We fire away at the evil one and make the gospel known around the world .
- Your giving blesses those in need (Acts 4:32ff).
- Your giving supports the ministry of the church.
- But contributing financially is also for your own spiritual benefit.
 - Jesus ties giving to your heart.
 - If you aren't generous, it reveals something very troubling about your heart.

Be a cheerful giver

- How do you become a cheerful giver? You remember God is a giver! (Rom 8:32)
- How do you become hospitable? You remember God has welcomed you!! (Rom 15)

B. Hospitality (13b)

The Greek word for "hospitality" is φιλοξενία - a more expressive term than our English word; as it means "love of strangers" (φίλος, "friend," and ξένος, "stranger").

Opposite of xenophobia

Paul's day – Christians lacked accommodations for various reasons.

- Paul enjoyed the hospitality of Priscilla & Aquilla (Acts 18.3), Gaius (Rom 16) & more.

The **Motive** of Hospitality

- God is the ultimate hospitable one

The **Attitude** of hospitality here.

- Peter says do it "without grumbling" (1 Pet 4)

The **Intentionality** of Hospitality. Don't just practice it, "**pursue it! (CSB)**" Seek to show it.

"Be inventive in hospitality." (The Message)

Hospitality is **not entertaining** -- that's often about the host -- it's about serving, loving.

- It can have a transforming effect.
- Lives can be changed over a meal, on a back deck; by acts sacrifice and generosity on behalf of the host.
- **Les Mis — includes the story of the bishop whose hospitality and generosity transforms Jean Valjean.**
- He had been in prison for 19 years and gets released but can't get work because of his conviction. He reverts to petty crime. He's full of shame. But the bishop welcomes him; gives him food and shelter. Then the police bust him for stealing candlesticks, but when the bishop is asked about it, he says it's a gift for Jean Valjean, denying the charges. Valjean says...

My life was a war that could never be won . . .

Yet why did I allow that man

*To touch my soul and teach me love?
He treated me like any other
He gave me his trust
He called me brother
My life he claims for God above
Can such things be?
For I had come to hate the world
This world that always hated me...
I'll escape now from the world
From the world of Jean Valjean
Jean Valjean is nothing now
Another story must begin!*

- He ends up becoming a factory worker and a mayor.
- Hospitality is a practical way to reflect the warmth and kindness and grace we have experienced in Jesus Christ.
- He welcomes sinners and transforms them.

#4: Rejoicing and Weeping (12:14-15)

V 14 seems more related to our attitudes and actions to enemies (v. 19-21). I'll come back to it next week, but notice it reflects the teaching of Jesus (cf. Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:28);

- It's very challenging: It's not simply that we should **refrain** from retaliating or that we should simply **forgive** them. Paul is saying **more than this: We should actively seek their good as they pray for God's blessing on them.**

A. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (15)

Come alongside of people in the highs and lows of life.

This would have been **radical in a hierarchical culture -- when the elite wept with the poor migrant worker!**

Chrysostom said that “rejoice” came **first** because it was **easier to rejoice with those who rejoice than weep with those who weep.**

- Not sure if that's **why** it's first, but **it is difficult for most people.**
- **envy and jealousy and competition make it difficult to rejoice.**
- **A sign of growing in grace is the ability to rejoice at the success of others.**

B. What about weeping? How do we do this?

- You just show up. You sympathize. You don't need a great speech. Just be there.
- You get underneath the burdens of others.
- You will not weep with those who weep if you are self-absorbed.
- “Jesus wept” with his friends at Lazarus’ tomb; — even though he knew he was about to raise him from the dead!
- He's not detached. He enters into the grief.
- Jesus has both the **ministry of tears and the ministry of truth.**

- And we need both in our ministry to wounded people.
- We need an integrated ministry of both mind and heart; emotions and theology, tears and truth.
- Jesus was the most perfect person to every live, and he wept.
- Keller: “The best people will be the biggest weepers; not a sign of immaturity but maturity. They can’t avoid grief but are pulled into it.” That’s very Romans 12:15

#5: Harmony and Humility (12:16)

A. “Live in harmony with one another” (16a)

- Paul’s language has a meaning like “thinking the same thing to one another”.
- “Be of the same mind”.

1st Century church: The homeless, the migrant worker, the cabinet maker, and elite, the household servants, the Jew and Gentile, are called to live in harmony!

- **Paul’s prayer: Romans 15:5-7**
- This was a powerful witness of the kingdom of God in the kingdom of Rome!
- It’s a unity that should reflect the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- To live in harmony will mean working through conflict, misunderstanding, miscommunication, wounds, etc.
- Harmony takes hard work.
- It’s heart work.
- The goal is not simply the absence of strife among believers, but the presence of unity and harmony.
- **Psalm 133 speaks of the blessing of such harmony. It’s like good anointing oil (symbolizing Israel being faithful to her calling) and the Mount Hermon (making the land fruitful).**

B. “Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” (16b)

- For harmony to exists, humility must be present (cf. Phil 2)
- “Pride is the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration on the self” (Lewis)
- **Humility is thinking of ourselves less...**
- One of the signs of humility: associating with all kinds of people.
- Matthew 25: **“Associating w/ them is associating w Me.”**
- Philips para: “**Never be condescending, but make real friends with the poor.**”
- “don’t be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don’t be the great somebody.” (Message)
- **Put on the mind of Christ, who associated with the lowly.**
- A Christian should never say, “**This task is beneath me**” or “**This person is beneath me.**”
- **Jesus didn’t consider our sinful condition as beneath him.**

Conclusion

What a portrait of our life together that Paul gives us.

What counter-cultural attitudes and actions!

The reality is we will fail at these at times, but Christ never failed, and in and through him we live these exhortations out.

These verses actually provide a portrait of Jesus.

Jesus loved the church to death.

1. Jesus loved us w/ a genuine love. Not with religious pretense, but words & actions.
2. Jesus hates what is evil, loves what's good; died for evil people to make them good.
3. Jesus loved the brothers and sisters with brotherly affection. He washed their feet.
4. Jesus was dishonored that we may be honored.
5. Jesus was a man of zeal. He took up the Psalm, “Zeal for your house has consumed me.”
6. Jesus endured the cross, endured tribulation, and was constant in prayer, even on the cross, he is praying for his enemies.
7. Jesus was generous – he became poor, he gave up heaven for a cross, that we might be rich in him.
8. Jesus has shown us hospitality – the friend of sinners is “preparing a place for us.”
9. Jesus loved his enemies; he didn’t have a sword in his hand, but nails in his hands, as he prayed for them.
10. Jesus rejoiced with those rejoicing at the wedding, turning water into wine! And he wept with those who wept -- like at his friend, Lazarus’ tomb
11. Jesus unites people from every tribe and tongue
12. And Jesus, associates with the lowly -- he took a repentant thief to paradise with him! And he has associated with us.

- He died for us – We who broke his great commandment to love.
- He has forgiven us.
- He has placed us into a new family.
- He has made us citizens of heaven.
- He has given us new life, and the Spirit’s power to love the family of God & this broken world.
- Let’s Honor our King with our attitudes and actions, all the times, including in this particular cultural moment.

Soon Jesus will return and usher in a one party Kingdom, and the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.

“the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever” (Rev 12:15)

Maranatha