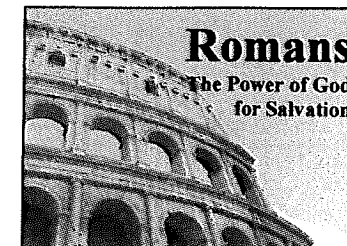


UNIT 23—Love/Romans 12:9-21



TEXT

Love

⁹Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^a Do not be conceited.

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^b says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary:

"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."^c

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

^a16 Or willing to do menial work
Prov. 25:21, 22

^b19 Deut. 32:35

^c20

STUDY

READ

First Reading/First Impressions

Which best reflects your response to this passage?

☐ I can get into this because it's so practical. ☐ Paul is being really idealistic here.

Second Reading/Big Idea

How many commands do you find in this passage? Which one seems most important to you?

SEARCH

1. In this section, Paul continues to illustrate what a "living sacrifice" (v. 1) is like. How is this dedication to God to show itself in...

our integrity? (v. 9a)

our values? (v. 9b)

our view of others? (v. 10)

our attitudes? (vv. 11-12)

our relationship with the poor? (v. 13)

our relationship with our enemies? (vv. 14, 17a, 19-21)

our relationship with those having strong feelings? (v. 15)

our relationship with those different from us? (v. 16)

our relationship with the world at large? (v. 17b)

GROUP AGENDA

2. How would you sum up Paul's general rule from which all these examples flow? (vv. 9a, 18)

3. Looking over this passage as a whole, how would you define what "love" is all about?

4. Look through the passage once again, noting all the positive "attitude" words Paul uses.

5. From these "attitude" words, what picture of the Christian life emerges?

APPLY

What can you do this week to practice "love" and "peace" in your...

family?

workplace?

small group?

community?

church?

All the commands illustrate what it means to be a "living sacrifice" devoted to love and peace. What are one or two other illustrations you could add which especially apply to our lives today?

Example: I should use my voting rights to exercise justice, not to protect my special interests.

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ If you had a very personal problem and wanted to call someone to get out of bed and come to help you—whom would you call on? ☐ Of all the Christian groups you have belonged to, which has been the most fun? The most enriching? ☐ What did you put down for READ?

TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person answering 2, etc. ☐ From what is said or implied in this passage, what are some of the problems in the Christian community in Rome? Needs? Struggles? ☐ How is this passage related to the appeal in Romans 12:1-2? ☐ Case History: Tom, one of the elders in your church, cheated you out of several hundred dollars in a business deal. What do you do?

TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What did you respond in APPLY? ☐ Where have you seen the greatest growth in your own Christian community? ☐ If you could have three wishes for your Christian community today, what would they be? ☐ For each wish, what is one step toward making this wish come true?

NOTES ON ROMANS 12:9-21

Summary/Romans 12:9-21. Paul now offers a series of loosely-connected exhortations by way of further explanation of 12:1-12, focused first on relationships between Christians (vv. 9-13) and then on relationships with those outside the church (vv. 14-21).

v. 9 **Love** . . . *agape*, self-giving action on behalf of others made possible by God's Spirit. Thus far in Romans when Paul spoke of *love*, it was in reference to God's love (1:7; 5:5, 8; 8:35, 37, 39; 9:13, 25; 11:28). There is one exception to this, namely 8:28 where he speaks of a person's love for God. But here in 12:9 the focus shifts. Paul's concern is how the Christian relates to other people. This becomes especially clear in 13:8-10.

"God in his love has claimed us wholly for Himself and for our neighbors, and the love, of which Paul speaks here, is the believer's 'yes,' in thought and feeling, word and deed, unconditional and without reservation, to that total claim of the loving God, in so far as it relates to the neighbor—a 'yes,' which is no human possibility but the gracious work of the Holy Spirit." (Cranfield)

sincere . . . genuine, not counterfeit or showy. It is possible to pretend (even to one's self) to love others. John Calvin wrote: "It is difficult to express how ingenious almost all men are in counterfeiting a 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."

v. 10 **brotherly love** . . . a second word for love is used here, *philadelphia*, denoting the tender affection found in families, now said to be appropriate to those in the church—which is the Christian's new family.

v. 10b **Honor** . . . since other Christians are in union with Christ, they are to be honored **above yourselves** because Christ is mysteriously present in them (Cranfield).

v. 11 **fervor** . . . this Greek word is also used of water which is boiling, or of metal, like copper, which is glowing red-hot.

v. 12 What makes it possible to endure affliction is a *joyful hope* in one's secure inheritance in the age to come coupled with daily, continuous prayer.

v. 13 To be "renewed" is not just an interior matter of mind and emotions, but involves concrete outer action such as giving to those in need.

v. 14 "Not only to refrain from desiring that harm should come to those who are persecuting us, but to desire good to them and to show that this desire is no mere pretense by actually praying for God's blessing upon them (it should be remembered that blessing and cursing are very serious matters in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament)—this is clearly opposed to what is natural to us" (Cranfield). A clear example of how "renewal of our minds" is opposed to "the pattern of this world."

v. 15 Believers are also to share those most deeply human moments with their persecutors.

v. 16 Christians ought to provide for the world around them a model of harmony. Avoiding haughtiness, they ought to put in its place unself-conscious association with all types of people.

v. 17a **Do not repay anyone evil for evil** . . . a common Christian teaching. See 1 Thessalonians 5:15 and 1 Peter 3:4.

v. 17b Christians are called upon to do, not just what the consensus calls "good," but those things that are inherently "good" and they will be recognized as such by those of good will.

v. 20 **burning coals** . . . providing kindness of every sort to one's enemies may induce the kind of inner shame that leads to repentance and hence to reconciliation and true friendship.

v. 21 People who retaliate have allowed evil to overcome them. They have given in to their evil desires and have become like their enemy.

COMMENTS

Fellowship in the Early Church

by Michael Green

The quality of fellowship in the early church was both striking and appealing—striking because it contrasted so sharply with what occurred in other institutions, and appealing because its very quality made men and women hungry to be a part of it. At the heart of this new fellowship was the eradication of those barriers that had divided the ancient world: race, class, and gender. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” is how Paul expresses this truth in Galatians 3:28.

This kind of tradition-breaking unity was first modeled by our Lord in his selection of the twelve disciples. He included in his band a pair of traditional enemies: Simon the naturalistic Jewish zealot who was a member of an anti-Roman, guerrilla-like group and Matthew who worked for the Roman government collecting their hated taxes. The contrast in temperaments is sharp also. Peter, James, and John were aggressive and often blunt while some disciples are so low-key, you hear of them only when the list of twelve names is given (What was the role of the apostle Thaddaeus?).

This same unexpected unity is seen in the early church. For example, in the church in Antioch we find the aristocrat Manaen (“who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch”); the rigid and fire-filled ex-Pharisee Paul; Barnabas the encourager who was a landowner in Cypress and a member of the tribe from which Temple officials were drawn; Lucian, a Hellenistic Jew from Cypress; and Simeon “the Swarthy” who was most probably a black African. They were gathered together to worship, fast, and pray—(Acts 13:1-3) a most unusual occurrence in the first-century world.

What created this new unity? At its core, of

course, was the transforming death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which drew people together into new relationships. This fellowship was then deepened as Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). The unity was maintained because problems and aberrations were not allowed to disrupt the fellowship. In Romans 14:1—15:13 and elsewhere Paul, as well as the other apostles, deals swiftly and directly with such problems lest they take root and destroy this new unity.

The result was *koinonia*, or “fellowship.” This was a common Greek word used to describe the quality of life in Roman communal organizations such as dining clubs, burial clubs, sport clubs, and trade guilds. But there is a world of contrast between what happened in these clubs and what took place in the church. The trade guilds, for example, were quite exclusive and were intertwined with idolatry. They were often immoral in practice (the idol temple associated with the guild often had sacred prostitutes serving there). They were also such hot beds of political radicalism that the Roman government eventually placed severe restrictions on guilds and clubs. (The emperor Trajan refused to allow a fire brigade to be formed at Nicomedia because “it is to be remembered that this sort of society has greatly disturbed the peace of your province.”)

In sharp contrast is the practice of the early church. Listen to how Tertullian describes the church in Africa. In chapter 39 of his *Apology* (ca. A.D. 197) he begins by explaining how Christians met together for prayer and worship. Then he describes the collection: “On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety’s deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and

spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God’s Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, *How they love one another*, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death. . . . One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives. We give up our community where it is practised alone by others, who not only take possession of the wives of their friends, but most tolerantly also accommodate their friends with theirs. . . .”—Adapted from *Evangelism in the Early Church* by Michael Green (Eerdmans), pp. 180-183.