

Introduction

For the past year we've been going through the book of Romans. In chapters 1-11 the apostle Paul has laid a theological foundation for faith and practice.

In the remaining week that I have with you we're going to focus on chapter 12. This is the practical section of Romans that deals with Christian living.

As we said last week, everything that we find in Romans 12 is based on the doctrine that is laid out in chapters 1-11.

In other words, if you try to live out the Christian life without a solid doctrinal foundation, it's not going to work. Our faith is based on the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by grace through faith.

The summary of today's message is this:

Living a Christ honoring life isn't a matter of working harder to be a good person. It's realizing that we don't have what it takes to glorify God in our own strength.

We not only live in a world that has rebelled and is rebelling against God, we have a selfish sinful nature that is determined to find satisfaction apart from the God who made us.

Zeal for God comes from a transformed mind as we offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. Only then can Christ be treasured above all else, which is the source of true joy.

Romans 12 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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.

⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

There are a lot of things that I'd like to change in the world. I would like to change the political climate of today. I can't stand the vitriol and malice every day. I stopped watching the news a couple of months ago. It's like we never got out of the campaign mode.

I'd like to change the moral climate of today. Wouldn't it be great to have a resurgence of respect for the values which past generations took for granted?

Decency, restraint, honor, reverence. Today traditional values are mocked by the elite and ridiculed by the entertainment world. I'd like to change that.

The list of things that I don't like in the world can go on and on. However the number one thing I'd like to change has nothing to do with politics or the culture wars.

I'd like to see my life changed so that Christ is displayed rather than my selfish sinful nature. I can't change the world or the culture. I can't even change myself.

But I can offer myself to God as a living sacrifice. I can recognize my own deficiencies so that I rely not on my own strength but upon the One who died in my stead.

Today's message can be divided up into three pithy statements: Love God. Hate evil. Serve People. Simple enough to say, but far more difficult to do in this fallen world.

Living a Christ honoring life isn't a matter of working harder to be a good person. It's realizing that we don't have what it takes to glorify God in our own strength.

We not only live in a world that has rebelled and is rebelling against God, we have a selfish sinful nature that is determined to find satisfaction apart from the God who made us.

Zeal for God comes from a transformed mind as we offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. Only then can Christ be treasured above all else, which is the source of true joy.

First we deal with LOVE IN A FALLEN WORLD.

Romans 12:9-10 (ESV)

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

What does it mean that love must be genuine or sincere? There are a number of Greek words that are used for love; each conveying a different aspect.

You can love apple pie, but that's different from loving your spouse or your best friend.

You can love your favorite team and be devastated when they lose a big game, but that's far different from loving another person and grieving when you lose them.

Love is the greatest expression of emotion, desire, affection and aspiration that we're capable of.

The Greek word here is **agape**, the kind of love that is at the pinnacle of virtue. It is a selfless, sacrificial and noble love that goes beyond self-interest. It's the kind of love that is described in **John 3:16**.

Genuine and sincere love puts the needs and welfare of others above that of yourself. It's being devoted to another person no matter what, always seeking their best.

Have you ever noticed in the great love chapter of I Corinthians 13 that true love has all kinds of disclaimers.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does **not** envy, it does **not** boast, it is **not** proud. ⁵It is **not** rude, it is **not** self-seeking, it is **not** easily angered, it keeps **no** record of wrongs. ⁶Love does **not** delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love in a fallen world is a tricky thing; especially when we are told to **hate what is evil**. What is the relationship between genuine love and hating what is evil?

Hatred is not the opposite of love. If you love someone deeply, you will hate that which brings them harm. If your loved one is sick or has cancer, you hate that cancer and want to see it destroyed.

If your child is being led astray by an ungodly influence, and they are living in a sinful and rebellious way of life, you hate the sin that has led them astray.

The opposite of love is not hatred, but indifference. If you don't care that much, you're not going to get worked up about it. If you do care, your passions are going to be involved.

I know people on both ends of the political spectrum. They care deeply about the issues of the day. It's easy for them to get worked up, especially on social media.

As Christians, how can your love be genuine and sincere when your convictions are challenged? In other words, how can you show and demonstrate the love of Christ to those you strongly disagree with?

This ties our first two points together. We are to love God, and hate evil. In a fallen world, that's not an easy thing to do.

The real challenge for the disciple of JESUS is to allow the love of Christ to compel you rather than the hatred of sin to control you. How many times have you heard a person with strong political convictions say things that they later regretted?

When you allow your emotions to control your speech, it's easy to denounce and vilify your opponents. But when that happens, you lose the high ground.

How would you react to a militant spokesman for an alternative lifestyle who ridiculed traditional values?

What would you say to an atheist who wants to rid the public square of the Ten Commandments; *In God We Trust* on our coins, and the pledge of allegiance in our schools?

What about an obnoxious neighbor who does everything they can to irate you?

Most all of us have some person or some group in our lives that are difficult to love. We need those people; they are heaven sent. Without them, we'd rely upon our own strength.

To love God as we ought, we must know His love first. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We love Him because He first loved us. Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve.

Genuine love in a fallen world is a challenging thing. It has to go deeper than your surface emotions. It also has to underlie your deepest convictions.

The Pharisees were right on most of the moral issues of their day, but they were proud and arrogant.

They loved their own sense of goodness more than they loved God. They looked with disdain upon those who didn't live up to their standards.

To love God, you must first be changed by His love. That love will humble you. It will cause you to see your own need of grace and mercy.

The message that we are to proclaim to the world isn't "We're right and you're wrong." The message is "*God is holy, and we are not. From one sinner to another, I commend you to the Gospel of JESUS Christ.*"

That's how the love of Christ will compel you to love the unlovable. That's how you can live by the values that the world rejects and not feel like a martyr.

A follower of Christ is not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. If that means that you have to stand alone at times, so be it. The important thing is that Christ is honored in your life.

We are to love God and hate what is evil. Hate what is evil in your own heart.

It's one thing to have to deal with a culture that is hell bent on defying God. It's quite another to deal with my own personal sin.

A living sacrifice holds nothing back from God; not your ego, not your pride, not the vain things that charm you most. As fire consumes a sacrifice, may the grace of God through Christ consume my sin.

Only then can I serve others as a fully devoted follower of JESUS Christ.

Romans 12:10-11 (ESV)

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Zeal for God is at the heart of the life of a true disciple of Christ. It's one thing to say that you're a believer, it's quite another to be serving Him with love and devotion.

What is zeal for God and what quenches it more than anything else? The apostle John quotes **Psalm 69:9** in referring to the zeal that JESUS possessed when he cleared out the money changers from the temple. "**Zeal for your house consumes me.**"

Zeal is energized faith in action. It is an eagerness to see God's will be done on earth no matter what the cost.

Zeal without knowledge is not a good thing. Paul before his conversion was very zealous in his persecution of Christians.

Less mature believers can be full of zeal for the LORD but lack good judgment or just plain old common sense.

Zeal is more than enthusiasm. It's a desire to see God honored in all areas of life. Zeal can come across as overbearing at times because it is so passionate about the glory of God.

If people are just going through the motions of following Christ, that aggravates those who are zealous for the LORD.

A zealous person will stir things up when they seem to be stuck in neutral. We need that in the Body of Christ.

Our passage says, "never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the LORD."

What quenches zeal more than anything else? It's not the worldly culture which defies God. What tapers Godly zeal more than anything is just plain old selfishness.

It's the sin of placing your own wants, needs and desires above everything else. It's not necessarily overt or scandalous sin. Its self-centeredness; narcissism, and self-absorption.

I have seen once enthusiastic believers who were very energetic for the LORD so completely lose their zeal that they are no longer involved in the Body of Christ.

Somehow it seems easier for people to admit that their priorities have gotten out of order or that they've become disillusioned with the church for some reason or another.

While that may have an element of truth to it, they are really deflecting the heart of the matter. **At its core, sin is placing the self above the glory of God.**

What was the strategy that Satan used with Adam and Eve? Take the focus off of God, and place it on yourself. *You will not die if you disobey God, but*

- **Your eyes will be opened**
- **You will become the judge of right and wrong**
- **You will be sovereign; being like God**

Over the years I have had a number of difficult conversations with those who have wandered away from the faith. It's interesting that when I use the words such as fornication, adultery or unfaithfulness, they don't seem to flinch.

But when I call their actions "selfish," that really bothers them. It's like a slap in the face.

The moral aspect of sin doesn't seem to resonate these days. The mindset seems to be, *"Sure, what I'm doing is sinful, but we're all sinners, so what's the big deal?"*

But selfishness is another matter. The unbelieving world seems to understand personal ethics in that way. *"If what I'm doing doesn't hurt anybody else, it's okay."*

But for the Christian, we can't leave God out of the equation. He is offended by our sin. The God that we worship isn't thinned skinned, but He is holy.

When we place our own agenda above that of the LORD, we hurt everybody around us. Nothing will dampen your zeal for God more than putting your wants, needs and desires above everything else.

The response is often made, **"Is it selfish to have my needs met?"** The premise of the question is wrong. God has promised to meet your needs. More than that, He has promised to give you the desires of your heart.

When you fail to trust Him and go your own way, you make your felt “needs” an idol that you worship more than God. Quite frankly, I don’t know of anyone who has wandered away from the faith who isn’t selfish to the core.

Those are harsh words, but I start with an examination of my own heart. When I don’t like the way things are going in my life, my default mode is to feel sorry for myself and to think that my needs are more important than serving the LORD.

That’s not a good place to be. Perhaps some of you are there right now. You have no zeal to serve God or others because you’re so wrapped up in yourself.

God’s Word for you today isn’t to try harder to be good, but to remember who you are in Christ. You are a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Sometimes we are called on to serve the LORD in pain and through tears. The LORD is especially close to the broken hearted. JESUS said that it’s when we lose ourselves that we find Him.

The LORD is mindful of your situation. He will not leave or forsake you. What you cannot control you can trust Him with. When you serve others through pain, you are in touch with the mind of Christ.

We’re going to continue in Romans 12 for the rest of the month. Today’s message is simple: **LOVE GOD. HATE EVIL. SERVE OTHERS.**

There’s a lot in this world and in ourselves that would work against all of that. But if you belong to God through Christ, you can stand on the promises of the Gospel. He is faithful. You can trust Him.