

August 19, 2018  
Lesson 12: Loving and Just Behavior  
Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

**Context:**

The next lesson in Justice and the New Testament returns to the book of Romans. While the book of Romans is primarily considered an explanation of Christian theology and focuses on faith and grace, there is plenty of practical application in the letter. The church in Rome is striving to be a Christian community and needs instruction.

The first eleven chapters of Romans focus on the theological reasons for the church and how it fits as the body of Christ. Chapter twelve moves to more practical steps for the church and how they are to live together and with those outside the church. To drive the point home, Paul starts off in verse nine with a call to love. Love comes from grace, the gift that God gives to the world. Just as grace transforms a person, it gives a new perspective for how one is to live with a gift that cannot be earned. The early church is called to a new reality, one at odds with the world they live in, and the new reality should reflect the structuring power of grace.<sup>1</sup> The church is to strive to model that grace in how they do life.

Paul gives them several applications. They are to do good deeds, devote themselves to each other, serve God, and are to be hopeful, patient, prayerful, generous, and hospitable. They are to pray for those who persecute them, celebrate with one another in times of joy, mourn with those in times of sorrow, and live in harmony. They are not to be proud, but are to be humble about their positions.

Those parts may be easier than what follows. They are not to repay those who transgress against them. They are to do the right thing even if it is difficult. They are to live in peace with everyone and not seek reek revenge against enemies. They are to feed their enemy, give them drink, and treat them kindly. As they do, they will experience hospitality and grace they do not deserve. They are not to be overcome by evil, but are to overcome evil with good.

The words that are given are not just for the Romans in their interactions with one another. These words are to be part of their living for whatever may come their way in life including those outside the church. In the coming decades, the Roman Christian community would face persecution where the temptation would be to retaliate. This passage though reiterates that if persecution comes, it must be borne without rancor as they are to be people structured by the power of grace.<sup>2</sup> Their code of conduct is to be rooted in grace, love, and peace with all people.

**Application**

This passage is often used when it comes to officiating over weddings. It is a beautiful passage with very practical application tips in how to do life with others. While

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Achtemeier, "Romans," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY1985), 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

the passage certainly fits what is needed for marriage, the metaphor also extends to other relationships we have with others.

Love is to be sincere meaning that when we do or say things, there is authenticity. In our relationships we should strive to be honest and transparent with others. We are to strive to be attentive to one another and serve God by sharing with others. We are to share our resources and practice hospitality. We are to celebrate with people and mourn with them. We are to strive to be in harmony with each other and not be conceited. Revenge should never be a part of our agenda and we should never have an agenda when it comes to people. We are to strive to be good and overcome evil.

I think this passage is one that should stay at any forefront of any relationship we have whether it is a marriage, a friendship, or the workplace. We are to encourage those we are closest too and should look for ways to live in harmony with each other. We should strive to do the right things even when the other person does not. We should strive for peace even if they do not choose that route.

This passage also points out to us that there is a transparency that comes with such a relationship. We are not to use others or see them as objects from which we derive something that benefits only us. We are to approach people as those we want to honor and love completely for who they are as children of God. This means loving people even with their warts and their pitfalls. It means that people love us even with our warts and pitfalls. In the midst of it all, there is grace and redemption.

Better yet, we are to take care of others and not take revenge with those who hurt us. We are to let God sort all that out and we move forward doing what we are called to do. There is freedom in the fact that we do the best we can and move on.

My personal experience is that those who hurt others and use others eventually find themselves in a place where they cannot be transparent enough when they need help. They create their own hells and do not know how to get out. They are stuck in a place that is difficult to be. My continual prayer for those who get to those places is that they will see the kindness of others and learn about real relationships. There is always hope and there is always grace.

How do you show love to others? How do you get to that point that you do life with those and learn to be with them in the moment? According to Romans, as we do life together, we are to love each other, to seek peace and to embody it in the way we live our lives.

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