

Living with Friends, Neighbours and Enemies

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we come to your word, and sometimes, Father, when we come to your word, we're afraid to ask questions of your word, because we feel, Father, that it's maybe offensive to you or maybe we're afraid of the answers.

We confess to you, Father, that sometimes we're afraid of the way others mock your word or ask questions about your word that we don't know how to answer. Father, we ask that you would pour out your Holy Spirit gently but deeply upon us at this time and grant us a great confidence in you, a great confidence in your word.

And, Father, as we become more and more confident in your word, help us to listen to the Bible ever more deeply. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen. Please be seated. So this isn't a test. I don't know how carefully you were listening. When Abby read the epistle, Romans 12, and in the epistle, towards the end of it, she said, how did, what was it she said towards the end?

She said, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. So here's the question. A couple of years ago, he wasn't part of our congregation at the time, but I got his permission to say his name, by the way, just in case you're worried.

[1 : 2 2] Oh, boy, is George going to use my name and me as an example in a sermon? I got his permission. A couple of years ago, just before he joined this congregation, a man who's part of our congregation, Ross Allen, served a tour of duty six months in Afghanistan as part of Canada's fight against the Taliban.

So the question is this. Did he sin? Did he sin to go to Afghanistan to be part of Canada's mission in fighting the Taliban?

Should he be repenting about it? Should he come under church discipline? Should we fight ISIS or feed ISIS? Is that what the Bible text is saying?

So we're going to look at that. It'd be a great help. And that and a whole pile of other comments. It'd be a great help then if you could turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 12, verse 9 and following.

Romans 12, 9 and following. Because some of you might, especially those of you who are maybe guests and are seeking, just trying to search out and seek out what's going on with the Christian faith or making sense of your life.

[2 : 3 0] And you might have had a whole range of comments about the moral list, the ethics list, the virtues list that Abby read a little bit earlier. And it's a very, very deep text, Romans 12, 9.

For some of us, it would be a great thing to take if we wanted to take an afternoon or a couple of hours someday to just reflect upon our life. It would be a great text to use to reflect upon our lives, Romans 12, 9 and following.

And let's just look at this whole question and we'll begin. Actually, if you could put up the first verse on the screen, Andrew. And we're going to camp here longer on this one verse than all of the other verses between 9 and 21.

And it's partially because in some ways this is a key text to make sense of all of the things in verses 10 to 21.

This is like a key text that we have to sort of have in our mind. It's the memory verse which I suggest for the week. And if you could read it out loud with me. Love without hypocrisy.

[3 : 32] Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Let's say it together again. Love without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil.

Cling to what is good. And some of you haven't the vaguest idea in the world what abhor means. But we'll get to that in a second. So here's the thing about this text. And it looks very, very simple.

And in fact, we're going to talk about this more in a moment. For some of us it even looks like it's commanding an emotion. Because in our culture, love is often thought of as a very, very powerful and important, not only an emotion but a disposition to act.

But it's often thought of as an emotion. So here's the first thing about this text. Which is, and it's going to be, you know, talking about this ISIS issue and all of it. Unless we get this verse, the rest of it's going to be difficult to us to understand.

Some of you probably have no idea what abhor means. And some of you are thinking, I think I know what inestimable meant. But it's probably, if I asked you how many people used the word abhor or inestimable in the last six months, probably nobody would put their hands up.

[4 : 40] Maybe some of you English majors have used it. But they're very uncommon words. And one of the things which is very, very interesting about the Bible is that when Paul would have written this to the church in Rome, and it would have been in Greek in the original one, a lot of the congregation probably scratched their heads because they didn't know what he was talking about when he said that very first word, love.

Paul chose a very obscure word in Greek when he wrote this. We're very common with the word now, but I mean the Greeks had other words that we now translate as love, but this word agape was a very rare word in Greek literature prior to the New Testament.

The word agape, which is translated as love, is in the New Testament hundreds and hundreds of times, but it was rare. So virtually every time you read the word love in the New Testament, you can imagine that the original hearers were scratching their heads, especially guessing, saying, what on earth is that word?

And they have to go back to their equivalent of their dictionaries to figure it out. And so the ancient Greeks, they were very familiar with the idea of what we would call brotherly affection, the word Philadelphia, which is actually in the next verse.

And they were very, they knew about eros, which is often, you know, sort of sexual attraction, which is one of the main ways that we understand the word love.

[6 : 10] And they were just, they were very familiar with the type of love between friends. And they had words for all of this, but they had this rare word. And this rare word means a self-giving, self-sacrificing, self-emptying acts for the good of the other person.

I'll try to say that again. I know it's not a lecture, but this word agape means self-giving or self-emptying or self-sacrificing or putting yourself and your needs second to act in a way which is good for somebody else.

And it was a rare word. But for Christians, it's in a sense an obvious word. Paul was a very, very learned man. And probably, you know, he's maybe just reading, you know, casually some Greek fiction or philosophy or something like that, some Greek plays.

And he comes across that word and he says, no, that exactly describes what Jesus did for us. What a great word. Agape. It describes what Jesus did for us.

How he set aside his glory and his divine prerogatives and his divine splendor, his appearance as God, the honor that was due to him as God, the prerogatives that were due to him as God, the worship and veneration and fear that was due to him as God.

[7 : 34] He set all of that aside in obedience to the Father and out of love for human beings who were rebels and hated God in a sense and were completely misled. He set all of that aside and he didn't stop being God, but he takes into himself our human nature and he comes and lives amongst us as a human being, completely and utterly unrecognized, eventually rejected by his people, crucified upon a cross, which is a shameful form of death.

Everything there is to taste of death. You can't be poorer than dead. He comes to be completely and utterly poor. He rises from the dead. He's vindicated, but he does all of that because he loves human beings and wants human beings to be reconciled to the Father.

There is no better word for love than agape. And so it's almost any sense in our culture that love involves a type of self-sacrifice or putting yourself second or that it's an action, not just a feeling.

It comes from Christianity. It's from the Bible, the Christian faith that it's had. Whatever presence it has in the culture, it comes from here. And so this is really important because in our culture we're losing this.

And it's really interesting. Can you say this verse with me again, please? Love without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

[8 : 59] In our culture, we tend to think of love as primarily a feeling. We don't tend to think of love as a verb, as an action, something that we actually do. Even if we don't have a feeling of love or affection or anything like that or friendship, that it's something, things that we do.

And so in our culture, increasingly it's a feeling. And it's often seen, it's funny, in our culture, increasingly, if somebody says that there's something which is good and evil, which is coming up in a moment, people say, well, good and evil are relative.

It depends on if it's good for you or for me. But if there's one absolute in our culture, it's the absolute to love. Like, loving trumps all sorts of things. And we know in our culture that the experience of love in our culture and in many other cultures, it has a power to blind.

Like, how many pop songs and country and western songs all go around the type of idea, if loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right. You know? And love, love, love, all you need is love.

Like, just constant praise of love in our culture. And the Bible here isn't undermining the praise of love. In fact, I think that the Christian faith teaches that love is the soul's food.

[10 : 14] We were made at the very depth of who we are as in souled bodies is we hunger for love. That is what our soul needs.

To thrive. Because ultimately, God made us for himself and God is love. And only the Christian account of God makes sense of love. Because from all eternity, before any human beings existed or before any angel existed, the Father loved the Son.

And the Son loved the Father. And in some scripture texts it's described almost as if the Holy Spirit's constant movement between the Father and the Son is the love of the Father and the Son.

And the Holy Spirit is love. To have the Holy Spirit be poured out into our hearts is to have love poured out into our hearts. The Bible exalts this self-sacrificing, self-emptying, self-giving love as an action for the good of the other person.

And it is our soul's food. But it can blind. It can mislead. It can overwhelm common sense. And it's not just an emotion.

- [11 : 20] But the very heart of these Christian virtues that all of the other virtues that are going to follow it begins with this three-legged stool. The first part of it is love without hypocrisy.
- In other words, it's to come from our heart. It's not to just be something we do to manipulate the other person. And it's connected to these two other things. One of them is the word abhor.
- In the original language, the word which is translated as abhor, it's the only time in the New Testament that this word is there. And it's a word that actually has emotional connotations to it.
- It actually sort of is trying to say to be the goal that this verse is launching us on a quest in terms of to live a life that is actually sane, intellectually, morally, and relationally.
- And at the heart of this quest is that we're going to try to love without hypocrisy. And we're going to abhor evil. And that means actually have a type of physical and emotional revulsion to it.
- [12 : 27] It would be as if somebody said they were going to give you a tasty roast beef sandwich. My apologies to the vegetarians. A tasty roast beef sandwich or for the vegetarians, a tasty tofu sandwich if you're vegan.
- And you get the roast beef and there's maggots and it's rotting and you gag. Harder to notice maggots on tofu.
- No, I shouldn't have said that. Because it's white. That's right. Anyway, same type of idea. And that's what this word is. That as we, that the Bible is calling us to be launched on this quest that's going to call us to love, that self-giving actions for the good and benefit of others that comes from our heart, that's consistent, congruent with who we are.
- And that part of that is also going to be that as we get closer to loving people and knowing God, that there is this, increasingly, there will almost be a revulsion, a gagging, as if somebody offers us rotten meat when we are invited to do that, which is wrong.
- And the word here, I think we try and, I use in this version here, cling, to what is good. There's, the word that's translated here is cling. It's used in, in, in, in several other places in the New Testament.
- [13 : 44] We're not going to turn them right now, but if you go to 1 Corinthians 6, and there's this passage about why Christians shouldn't sleep with prostitutes. And the word for being united with a prostitute in, in sexual knowing is the word that we translate here as cling.
- And when it talks, Jesus talks about a union of the husband with the wife that's a type of sexual knowing, that, that, that holding fast to the, to the wife by the husband, that's the word which is translated here as cling.
- In other words, that the, this quest for moral and relational intellectual sanity is going to involve that we have this, that we're propelled to act in a way that is good for the other person that means in potentially putting ourselves second.
- and it's not that love is now completely and utterly blind, but you can't love if you're completely and utterly ignorant of good and evil. And it's very obvious from talking about this that this means that this opens up a whole can of worms in our culture, which I don't have time to go into, but I just, it needs to be seen here.
- I'd say, by the way, that this, this is deeply true. This is deeply, deeply, deeply true. That, but in our culture, we tend to think of right and wrong as relative, that we tend to think of it in terms of, sorry, moment here, big fancy word, utilitarianism.
- [15 : 12] That's basically how most people think of right and wrong in our culture. And within utilitarianism, it's the, you know, it's whatever's going to cause the least amount of pain or the most good for the most people, that's what you do for an act.

But the problem, there's huge problems with that. Utilitarianism has no remedy against selfishness. I mean, it sounds very good that whenever we're going to do an act that we should think of what's going to cause the most harm and the most good for the most people is some type of Catholicism.

But here's the problem. I'm going to be blindingly honest with you. I don't weigh myself the same as you. And you don't do that for me. In fact, isn't it very, very common for, let's say, political leaders?

Like, what went on in the province of Ontario with a whole range of political scandals? Did the premier calculate the greatest good for the entire province?

Or did he say that the good for himself and a couple of his friends outweighed the worth of 10 million people? And I'm not saying that to pick on him.

[16 : 20] I'm not trying to make a political point. I'm just saying that's the profound problem with utilitarianism. The fact of the matter is that every one of us think that we're worth more than the other person.

You know, it's going to discomfort me or discomfort you or the whole congregation. I choose me. That's how it weighs out in the scale. And the other deep problem with utilitarianism, even though it has, I mean, you know, partly that obviously is part of moral reflection, but just not as an overriding rule, is that utilitarianism is what allowed Stalin to kill up to 50 million people in Mao to kill up to 50 million people, and the rulers of the Khmer Rouge to kill a third of the population because to move to a classless society, it's just unfortunate that a few people have to die along the way, but the end justifies the means.

And the Bible here, when it's saying love must be love without hypocrisy, abhor what is evil, cling to what is good, it's picturing that the good is not relative, that the end does not justify the means, that there's the complete opposite of utilitarianism, there is a profound challenge to selfishness.

And the fact of the matter is, is that selfishness is always the barrier to love. That at some point in time in a relationship for a husband and wife, for the marriage to last, because both are sinners, I'm a sinner, Louise is a sinner, we're both sinners, and at different times in the marriage you have to die to yourself and put yourself second, for the marriage to go.

It's of the very nature of love, real love, the soul's food, is to be willing to die to self. And it's deeply connected to recognizing what's good and what is evil, and the Bible here is obviously portraying it, not that it's perfectly known by any human being, but that there is something which is really, truly good, and things which are truly evil, evil, and that moral sanity means that we gag at evil, and we want to be as close to the good as we possibly can, because using old language, you know, every one of us has a will, the food that our will needs is goodness, is the good.

[18 : 44] If our will is given over to evil, we shrivel and die. The will feeds on the good.

The soul, the very bottom of who we are, it feeds on love. The mind feeds on truth.

And the emotions, the affections, it feeds on beauty. That's the heart of the Christian mind and the Christian worldview, and this text is inviting us to enter into a quest that's ultimately an outline of sanity.

The Bible is inviting us to be sane in every culture which has elements of insanity. Some cultures are way more insane than others.

Can you say this verse with me again? Love without hypocrisy, abhor what is evil, cling to what is good.

[19 : 54] And here's a prayer. If you could put it up, Andrew, and just, by the way, I know that these, the other points will move through them a bit, obviously, a bit more quickly, otherwise it'll be an 80-minute sermon. but these points, if you're interested in them, all my points this morning are just invitations to pray.

And it's an invitation to pray because nobody's arrived. I need to pray these prayers. You can always have more. And they'll all go on the web later on if you're curious about trying to use them later on in your devotions.

Dear Lord, please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who loves without hypocrisy, completely rejects evil, and is inseparably glued to what is good, all to your glory.

That's what this Bible is inviting us to pray. This text is inviting us to pray. Now, there's one, some of you might be saying, are you George saying that Christians are the only ones who know what's good?

That if you don't read the Bible, you don't know what's good? That non-Christians only love evil things and Christians only love good things. George, that's completely and utterly ridiculous. And some of you are saying, George, don't you know that what's good and evil is often determined by the powerful?

[21 : 10] ISIS thinks it's doing good things when it slaughters, it kills Christians and Muslims who aren't the same type of Muslims as them and destroys works of art.

They think they're doing good things. And George, you haven't even got to other things in the text which are completely and utterly ridiculous, like the Bible telling you how to feel. And there'll be a lot of pushback to this, right?

I mean, so often when I think, when I'm preparing my sermon, I think to myself, if I was to say some of these things in my local Tim Hortons or Starbucks, how would people react? Especially if they were the majority and I was the only one reading the Bible.

But here's the thing, and I know sometimes, I've had comments occasionally that some people in the congregation don't appreciate it when I ask the questions that non-Christians ask.

And that's fine. But here's the thing. Well, actually, here, we can't grow as Christians without asking questions.

[22 : 15] Andrew, could you put up the verse Romans 12, 1 and 2? All of the ethical parts of the book of Romans, in a sense, it's an unpacking of these two verses which are at a profound heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Could you read it out with me, please? I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is your rational worship.

Do not be conformed to this age, 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 pleasing and perfect.

You get nothing else out of this, you'll start to memorize the Bible. Better to know the Bible than my words. Take that to the bank, base your life on it. And you'll notice in that text, on one hand, there's obviously things about obedience, like sometimes Christians are threatened by questions because they say, George, you just have to obey.

And that's true. This text tells us that obedience is the bottom line. But it says testing. It says testing as part of the renewal of your mind.

[23 : 29] And that both means like in evangelism, when you try to share the gospel with other people, people push back and ask questions and that's fine because sometimes, here's the thing, sometimes these questions are very, very, very, very honest questions.

Sometimes the questions aren't. Sometimes the questions, there's no person, they're not asking seriously, they're just trying to embarrass you. They'll ask you a question that makes them sound like an atheist and then as if they're a Hindu and then as if they're a Buddhist and then as if they're an agnostic and then as if they're a rationalist and then as if they're an empiricist and you don't know what some of those words mean but that's fine.

But the fact of the matter is that they're all contradictory. And when people ask a whole series of questions like that, it often means that they're actually not serious, they're not asking honest questions.

But you read the gospels, Jesus loves honest questions. He never is upset with an honest question. Dishonest questions, he often tries to make them, to flip it on them to show their hypocrisy of the question.

But honest questions, Jesus loves honest questions. Christians should love honest questions. And honest questions is how we grow. Could you put up the second prayer here, Andrew, the second point?

[24 : 45] And it's just an important thing for us to pray, especially those of us? I know I don't always like questions. You know, I get into a conversation with somebody and they ask me a question and I can just feel my face going red and I don't know how to answer the question.

And, you know, maybe there's a whole series of I just get red, you know, and I stand there feeling a bit embarrassed. And that's fine. I mean, it's not, I don't enjoy it. But life goes on.

Sunrise is the next day. And the good thing about questions like that is it can propel us to search the scriptures and search for wise Christians alive today or who have been alive before us who can give us answers to the question.

You will come across no question at a Starbucks or a Tim Hortons or a Bridgehead that has not been asked before that some wise Christian hasn't written an answer to.

So here's the second point. Dear Lord, please make me a disciple of Jesus. This is gripped by the gospel who daily meditates upon your word and asks your word honest questions so that you will renew my mind to obey your word and live for your glory.

[26 : 01] For all of us who are afraid of questions. And, you know, when I began this, you know, this question about whether we should feed ISIS or fight it, that's a real question. That's part of the difference between Anglicans and Anabaptists.

That's part of the difference between an Anglican and a Hutterite. It's a real question. It's a good question to ask and to meditate upon.

And so this second point, a bit of a challenge, especially for us Christians. I mean, it's a challenge for any seekers who are here is, are you asking honest questions or questions to make yourself look smart and other people look dumb?

Jesus loves honest questions. And Christians should love honest questions. The truth is your friend. Clarity that follows questions is your friend.

So that's why I suggest that we want to pray, Dear Lord, please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who daily meditates upon your word, thinks about the word, asks your word honest questions so that you will renew my mind to obey your word and live for your glory.

[27 : 15] So let's look. We've spent a long time on one verse. We're going to look at the others. And does the Bible command emotions? Does the Bible say that we should feed ISIS rather than fight it?

Is the Bible being foolish and impractical? Is Nietzsche right that the Bible reflects a slave mentality? That's what Ayn Rand said. Those of you university students probably are familiar with Ayn Rand's thinking.

Is it just reflect a type of slave mentality, doormat mentality? which isn't appropriate to the dignity of human beings? Is that what the Bible's teaching?

Well, let's look. We'll read verse, I'll read verse nine and then we'll keep going on. Let love in, so love without hypocrisy, abhor what is evil, cling to what is good.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Now just sort of pause here for a second. The first few verses, probably verses 10 to 13, are really talking a bit about continuing to talk about life within the Christian community.

[28 : 26] But then in verses 14 to 16, it branches into not only life with our friends, like in our Christian community, but our neighbors and our enemies. But these first ones in particular, love one another with brotherly affection.

It's specifically addressed to the church. church. And it means that the type of relations that we should have in the church are the type of relations we should have as if we were a family. Brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, aunties and uncles.

That's how we're to understand and try to view the local church and also the relations between churches. One of the things we pray about at the church prayer meetings and the staff prayer meetings when we pray for other churches is that there be a growth of affection, brotherly and sisterly affection between the churches.

It's a good thing to pray for. And it's also then, it's giving us a bit of a sense now about what does it mean to love as an action that is putting ourselves second and is seeking to do good for the other.

Well, it comes here with love one another with brotherly affection in terms of love each other as if we're a family, outdo one another in showing honor. In other words, in much of the world, we outdo one another in trying to get promotions and trying to get the credit.

[29 : 48] How many of us work in situations where if things go right, the boss gets the credit, things go bad, who gets the blame? I know you can all share scars afterwards during coffee from those times when it just, you know, and we've all worked with people who just seem to be on one hand Teflon when it comes to problems and magnets when it comes time to compliments.

And the Bible says that's not the way to live a life. In the Christian community, we should try to praise each other. Verse 11, do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Just a bit of a pause here. The sin of sloth is the sin of being lazy about the things that matter to God. It's probably one of the biggest sins for churches in the year, for Christians in the year 2016, where we can be so busy, like those of you who are parents, you can be so busy taking your kids to 63 different activities a week, and you're both working on jobs, and you're both really, really harried, and before you know it, you've been really, really busy doing really, really, really culturally good things, and you haven't prayed once all day, all week, all month, all year.

And busyness is a sign of sloth. Because sloth isn't laziness, it's laziness and indifference to the things that matter to God. It's, you know, in a sense, saying, you know, maybe as a parent, I should put my kids in fewer activities, and just let them play, and maybe take a few minutes to pray and read God's Word, or have time to do something loving for others, outside of the family.

Verse 12, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. It's very easy for people, and in fact, this text has often been used to justify people staying subservient, like in a slave-like position.

[32 : 07] It's not justifying that at all. And, you know, because it, the other texts are all full of action words, right? It's filled with, is my mic going in and out?

No? Okay, it sounds like it's going in and out to my ear. So it's filled with action words. It's not saying that you don't get out of trouble, or you don't try to do what's good, or it's not saying that you just always let powerful people step on you.

That's not what it's saying here. But it's talking about the fact is that sometimes we just have lots of tribulation in our lives, and there's sometimes there's nothing you can do about it. There really isn't. And you just have to be patient, and you have to be present in those difficult times, not with optimism, because optimism tells us things are going to get better.

You know what? Sometimes things don't get better. Sometimes the arthritis stays. Sometimes the news of the cancer, it's not going to be healed.

You know, sometimes you get the bad news on the phone, and it's going to describe an aspect of your life for the rest of your life. And the Bible here isn't telling us about optimism.

[33 : 18] It's telling us about hope. And the difference between hope and optimism is optimism is a worldly belief that things will get better, often by our own power.

Hope is saying yes to the promises that God makes to us. It's a very, very different thing. It's similar, but very different. And so the Bible here is encouraging us to know the promises of God and read them and pray them.

And even if we're saying, Father, I believe in this promise, help my unbelief. So it's in the Bible. Pray it. You know? And it's one thing to go through long seasons of pain and long seasons of having not much money or long seasons of loneliness or a whole range of other tribulations.

But to have a sense of the promises of God. That you're chosen by Jesus. You might not be choice, but you're chosen. That he hears your prayer.

That there's a new heaven and a new earth. That there are things in your prayer life that can make a difference for others, even if it's just going to be an act of love and put yourself second and people don't even notice it.

[34 : 35] And you can go on and on and on. But it's an invitation, not just to believe that things are going to get better, but to believe that God has made promises and he kept them in Jesus.

He'll keep them for you. And we can start to learn them and ask that God would help us to believe them in the midst of our troubles. What verse was I on?

Just keep going through them. Verse 13. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. That's sort of an obvious one. The main thing about hospitality is hospitality in the New Testament is dealing not with being hospitable to your friends, but to strangers.

The other. People who are different than you. For a person who's involved in a certain type of youth culture, maybe with lots of tattoos and piercings, it's being hospitable to old, to old, middle-aged white guys like myself.

And vice versa. It's the stranger, the other, which we're to primarily show hospitality to. Continue on. Verse 14. Bless those who persecute you.

[35 : 44] Bless and do not curse them. This is really inviting us to deal with the problem we have with anger and hatred. That when people hurt us, our natural reaction is to hate them, to be angry at them, and want to not just see them punished, but to see them obliterated.

How many people in the U.S. want to see Trump be completely and utterly obliterated? How many Trump supporters would love to see Hillary Clinton completely and utterly obliterated?

I'm taking the U.S. example, but I'm doing it because we can get the point. It's a natural part of being human is that there are people that we hate, that we're angry, that we want to obliterate them.

And this text is directly challenging that as the way to deal with human beings. Verse 15. This is the one that some people would say that it's commanding us to have an emotion, rejoice with those who rejoice.

I mean, and people might say, well, how silly is the Bible commanding us to rejoice? You can't command somebody to rejoice. You can't command a feeling. But if you look at the text again, and you just think to yourself, well, maybe the text isn't stupid.

[37 : 09] Maybe it's smart. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. It's calling us for empathy. In a very, very concrete way, it's calling us to try to look at the world, walk a mile in somebody else's shoes.

To try to look at the world from their perspective in their eyes. Doesn't mean that everything they want to do is right, or everything they want to do is wrong. But it's calling us to not put ourselves first and see ourselves as the center of the universe, but to actually try to look at the world from another's point of view.

Verse 16. This is a really important verse for those of us who live in a government town, where if you go into a meeting with others, you know, maybe in politics, or I guess in business as well, or a political meeting, and the tendency is to want to flock to the popular, the powerful, or the up-and-coming, and treat as toxic those on their way down.

You know, we've all been in those types of receptions where their eyes are just dancing around, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, but they're looking for somebody way more important, or cool, or hip, or beneficial to themselves to spend time with.

And this next verse is saying, notice the wall weeds. A wall weed is a wallflower, but not as pretty. Far more plain.

[38 : 49] Notice the toxic, the wall toxic people, the weak people. Notice the servers. Notice the waiters. Notice the janitors.

And notice them. And the working class and the lower working class. And notice them. And walk towards them, not away from them.

Verse 16. Sorry, I guess I skipped it. Oh, yeah. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, which is excessive pride, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

A major problem with all of us is that we're legends in our own minds. And most people don't share our own legendary status in our own minds.

Now we're going to get to the part that deals with ISIS. And I see my time is running out. I'll have to, we'll deal with this in a sec. But look at the ISIS thing here. Repay no one evil for evil. Verse 17.

[39 : 53] But give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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. 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.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. And, um, how do we understand this text?

You know, one of the problems we have, this isn't a text, remember I said at the very, very beginning that it's verse 9 is sort of like the toehold. If you were rappelling down a mountain, this is where you'd hammer something into the rock so that you're not going to go crashing down the mountainside when you go rappelling.

That the rappelling would actually work because you have this firm anchor in solid rock that helps you to understand things. And the common human problem is, in fact, which is often characterized, not entirely fairly, it's by the modern left, but, you know, there's an element to it that on one hand, there's a whole way of thinking in the West that people are basically good.

[41 : 14] That, um, what can be good for me can be, you know, there's a type of moral relativism, a type of belief that at the same time it's a bit of contradictory that things are right or wrong depending on who you are, but contradictorily we also believe that people are basically good and that it's basically that the enemy needs a type of therapy or a type of lesson and it's very, very powerful, especially in university settings and people who have degrees.

It's a very, very common type of way of viewing the world. The other way of viewing the world, which is very common, is to basically see war as a type of god, like a love of violence. In the time that Paul was writing, there was actually a god of war.

Like, in fact, that the, many of the, um, Roman, um, like the armies, they'd actually worship a god of war, different gods of war, and there can be a worshipping of violence and a worshipping of war, and the Bible here is going in between the two of them.

In fact, interestingly enough, the Bible isn't here saying something which is black and white, it's causing us to take a step back to try to say, it's very, very obvious from verse 9 that the Bible doesn't believe that things are relative and it doesn't believe that, um, that people are basically good.

And at the other hand, it's also saying that you definitely don't want, you have to completely and utterly dethrone and take away as an idol anything to do with war. And it's definitely the case that there are times when a gentle answer turns away wrath.

[42 : 42] And if this was the only text in the Bible, it might be that that's how we would view it, that we should, should just sort of give in to ISIS. But the very, very next verse, which we're going to look at next week, talks about the state. It talks about the role of the state in having the sword.

It's a, it's a, it's a complete rejection of pacifism. Although the type of pacifism espoused by Hutterites and certain Mennonites, I think is very noble because they would be willing to be slaughtered.

And there's no naivete about human beings being basically good or that ISIS is basically good. No naivete in true Anabaptist thought.

But it's not a biblical good to allow innocent people to be slaughtered. It is a biblical good to do what you can to prevent the slaughter of innocents.

Thou shalt not kill. And it's, it's not a biblical good to allow yourself to be slaughtered. And the Bible here is not saying that the good can be determined by evil people because obviously from ISIS's point of view it would be a good thing if we laid down our arms and allowed them to walk over us.

[43 : 57] But there's no real way that you can understand that that could ever possibly be a positive good to allow people who would completely and utterly suppress religious freedom and oppress women and people who have sexual orientations which the Bible say are wrong but they're still human beings for which God died and there's no biblical justification to murder them because of their sexual orientation or to hate them.

There's no biblical warrant for any of that. And it is not at all even remotely loving to see this text as meaning a capitulation to any type of responsibility to defend the weak and the innocent and to defend religious freedom or prosperity.

So the text is calling us to a type of in some ways uncomfortable middle place that calls for prayer and reflection. It's out of texts like this that this idea that there can be a just war has developed and I know there's complications with it but it's vastly wiser than naively believing that human beings are basically good or worshipping the idol and the god of war.

I've gone beyond my time. Let me just say Andrew, could you put up the third prayer? We'll do the last two very quickly. Dear Lord, please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who is dying to all of the sloth, envy, unforgiveness, greed, anger, and hate in my life which is why Jesus died for me and help me to live free and whole for your glory.

That's what the Bible wants us to do. It's outlined insanity. Here's this final thing I was going to go through. I don't have time to do it but there's another powerful motivation for a Christian when they read this because if we read this script by the gospel what do we understand?

[45 : 58] Who showed love to me but Jesus? Who died on the cross for me bearing evil because he hated evil? That was Jesus. Who died clinging to what was good by obeying the Father and seeing the good that this was a good creation worth dying for?

That was Jesus. Who did not repay evil fruit? Like you go all the way through this text we have to read this text as a follower of Jesus understanding what Jesus did for us on the cross and if you look at this text from a different thing Jesus blessed those who persecuted him we persecuted him but he blessed us he did not curse us you know he came to identify with us to take upon himself our human nature in a sense to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep he died so that we would be at peace with God because we were enmity with him he became humble he was the opposite of haughty so that he would die upon the cross he associated with me when I was completely and utterly lowly he did what was good for all could you put up the final prayer Andrew?

Dear Lord please sorry I have to turn the page Dear Lord please help me to remember that in wrath I treated you as my enemy please help me to remember that you showed me mercy when Jesus died upon the cross in my place please help me to live in humble gratitude to Jesus Christ crucified and then live for the good of people and for your great glory this entire text only makes sense to be launched on a journey on a quest of moral sanity understanding what Jesus did for us we were the violent ones we were the ones who clung to evil we were the ones who wanted him rejected and he died for us please stand father we ask that your holy spirit would do a deep work within us that you would deliver us from all fear of honest questions that you would deliver us from a fear of the truth that you would grant to us father a love of the truth a love of clarity a love of honest questions that you would grant us father a love of your word but most of all father we ask that you would make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel who father live our lives out of gratitude for the mercy you showed us on the cross that you father would daily humble us as we meditate upon your mercy shown to us in the person of

Jesus and as father your holy spirit humbles us by helping us to meditate upon the mercy shown to us by Jesus help us to live for the good of people and for your glory and we ask this in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen■■■ we to God him to him and to