

Friend and Enemy

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. Great to be in church with you this morning. I am going to be preaching and hopefully running the PowerPoint at the same time. It's called multitasking. And if you practice multitasking, your IQ drops by 10%. So we'll see if this works. I may not have the brainpower to pull it off. So Romans 12, if you get up in front of you, let's pray and then we'll launch straight into it. Gracious God, we thank you for what we have engaged with in the first 11 chapters of Romans, that you are a God of sovereign grace. You have a mercy and a grace towards us that we do not deserve. Your plans to do good to rescue sinners is one that has transpired throughout history. We thank you for the Lord

Jesus. And despite all of our frailty and failure and sin, your love for us is constant. We pray that you would transform us as a body of believers so that we live out this life of love. And we ask it for your glory. Amen. There you go. I failed on the first one. There we go. A utopia typically describes an imaginary society that possesses nearly perfect qualities for the members of that society.

The idea was first coined by Sir Thomas More in his book, which he wrote in 1560, called Utopia, Utopia, describing a perfect fictional society in an island. It's a dream. It's the hope of a perfect place, which is what Utopia has come to mean for us nowadays. A place where I can leave all of my troubles behind and life is as idealistic as it possibly can be. In some modern contexts, however, the word Utopia means an impossibility. That is such a place is a fiction. It doesn't exist.

There's no ever hope. It's far-fetched. It's the loot. It's the dream. No ever hope of having such a place. The American academic Lyman Sargent argues that the very nature of a Utopia is inherently contradictory because societies are not homogenous. That is, societies by their nature are made up with a whole range of diverse people with different desires, and those different desires will always be in conflict with others, and therefore, such a place of harmony, perfection, love cannot possibly ever exist because of diversity. In other words, the roadblock to any sort of Utopia of a perfect, good human society is the fact that we're all different. The differences will always fracture the community, and yet, what we have seen as we have journeyed through Romans, that that's exactly what God is building. A new society. A new society that's built on diversity.

Romans 12, as we saw it last week, it begins with, in view of God's mercy. James took us there. Verses 1 and 2 of Romans 12 look back to the first 11 chapters of Romans, and it looks forward to the final 5-6 chapters of Romans. And in the first 8 verses of Romans 12, last week we looked at this, Paul addresses the Christian as an individual. Now he addresses us as a community of believers. In the next 5 chapters, what Paul wants to do is he wants to show us how life is transformed now in view of God's mercy in the past. He defines what relationships look like for God's new society. And so I've got three points on the St. Paul's app. If you've got the St. Paul's app, open that up, little QR codes behind you on the seats, hopefully as well. New society, new love for a new society, and new power for a new love. So I want to start, first of all, by taking us back to where we have previously been, because it really sets the scene for us, for the verses that are in front of us now, and the ones that are in the coming chapters. Weeks ago now, it was weeks ago, we looked at Romans chapter 5.

[5 : 37] And I mentioned there that there was a very important concept that we need to get our minds around in order to understand what the rest of Romans was going to look like for us.

Chapter 5 introduces us to the idea that all of humanity lives in one of two realms.

All of humanity is split into two realms. There is the realm of sin and death, inaugurated by Adam, right at the beginning of the beginning of the beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 3, or the realm of grace and life inaugurated by Jesus Christ. All of humanity either has ultimate solidarity with Adam or ultimately solidarity with Jesus Christ in salvation. Sin or salvation.

And Romans wants us to see the cosmic significance of what God has done for us in Jesus. The whole of history, the whole history of humanity has been radically changed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has established a totally new realm of existence.

In which it is possible for anyone who exists to be declared right, righteous, and to be given eternal life. And so everyone who has ever lived is either in or out of that new realm in Jesus.

[7 : 27] Romans 1 to 11 has been all about God's cosmic plan of salvation in Jesus for people, both to the Jew and the Gentile.

It's unfortunate, I think, in Western society in particular, that we have the inclination to think that my relationship with Jesus is a personal thing for me. It's about Jesus being my personal Lord and Savior, a concept which the Bible does not know.

We tend to think that our conversion to the Christian faith is a small thing. It's part of my life. Maybe a change that brings certain modest reforms in my life to some areas of life.

According to the Apostle Paul in Romans, the difference between the two realms is infinitely great. The transfer from the realm of Adam to the realm of Christ impacts every single aspect of life.

There is not a category of life it does not touch. There's not a category of life that it does not renew my thinking in.

[9 : 06] Everything is impacted. And that is what Romans 12 to 16 are all about. The Christian has been taken by Jesus from one realm to another.

The new realm of Jesus is radically opposite to the realm in conflict with God and under his judgment.

The Christian has been saved for a new life, new relationships, new home. This new realm will finally reach its goal when we are in the presence of God forever.

And until that time, the Christian takes on the character and the priorities of the new realm. And these verses are all about what we are becoming together.

Jew and Gentile becoming together, reconciled together as one people in Jesus Christ for the glory of God. As James pointed out last week.

[10 : 18] 12 verses 1 and 2 commands us not to be conformed to the pattern of this world. The realm that is under sin, the old realm. But be transformed for the new realm.

The pattern of relationships of the old realm that Jesus has rescued us from is in chapter 1. And there's an incredible descriptive list in chapter 1.

Heartless. Heartless. Approving of evildoers. God-haters. Arrogant and boastful.

Causing strife. Malice. Inventors of evil. And the first thing we notice as we turn to chapter 12. We see the opposite of those things are characterized in the new realm.

Loving. Hate evil. Serving God. Not to be proud and conceited. Live in harmony and peace. Repaying no one for evil.

- [11 : 27] Overcoming evil. Verses 9 to 16. Hopefully got in front of you at the moment.
Is a catalog of over 20 brief instructions. Regarding the way God's people should relate to each other.
And to the rest of the world. Verses 17 to 21. Seem to have an emphasis on relationships with other Christians.
Because of the vocabulary that's in there. Is one of one another. But when you go to 17 to 21. Our relationships are on view here with the wider world.
Because of the vocabulary shifts from one another to everybody and everyone. One. So. And verses 14 to 16. Is.
- [12 : 24] They're kind of like transitional verses. Between the two sections. And the reality is verses 14 and 16. Could be applied to. Second section.
And so. I've kind of broken it up into those two groups. First of all. Love must be. New love for friends.
In verses 9 to 16. Paul outlines what relationships of love look like among Christians. Amongst God's diverse church. And he makes the point. In verse 9. He gives three commands.
There's three commands in this verse. To be sincere. To hate evil. And to cling to good. Three commands. And all three tell us what it means to live a life of love.
And all three are connected to truth. Firstly. Sincere means to be unhypocritical. Not to be a phony.
- [13 : 26] In your love. We are not to be polite. Helpful. And warm. On the outside. But cold. Despising. And disconnected. On the inside. This is so important. Because. Churches. Have a tendency. Of creating cultures. Of niceness. We have a tendency. Of creating cultures. Of niceness. Where there is a.
Veneer. Of being pleasant. And it covers up a culture. Of. Backbiting.
Gossiping. Prejudice. A veneer of niceness. Often results. In the absence. Of tough love. Where people.
- [14 : 27] Tough love is where people. Love each other enough. To confront problems and sins. That they find in themselves. And in their. Friends.
A culture. Of niceness. Never. Addresses. The old realm. Unless it. Absolutely. Has to. Second.
We are commanded. Here. Negatively. To hate. But positively. To cling. We must be horrified. By what God. Calls sin.
And never. Attempt. To justify. Sin in ourselves. And we are to. Glue. Ourselves. To what God.
Calls. Righteous. Good. This is so crucial. Because love. For one another. Can in fact. Distort.
- [15 : 25] Our view. Of right. And wrong. There is often. A temptation. To give the loved one. What creates.
In them. Emotional joy. Rather than. What is best. For them. This is. A consistent. Failure. Of parents. Well. At least. This one. One. Because. So many of us. Cannot.
Bear. The tears. And the tantrums. Of our children. And so.
We give in. And there is not tough love. And yet. It's also. Pretty common knowledge. That a childhood. Without discipline. Nearly.

- [16 : 21] Always. Ends in disaster. If not. For them personally. For everyone. Who knows them. It seems.
- Strange. To say it. But we cannot. Love properly. Without. Hating properly. You cannot. Love properly.
- Without. Hating properly. Any love. That is afraid. To confront. A loved one. Is not. Actually. Love. Any love.
- That is afraid. To confront. A loved one. Is not. Actually. Love. But more likely.
- A selfish desire. To be. Loved. Selfish love. Is afraid. Is afraid. Is afraid. To do. What is right. If it.
- [17 : 17] Risks. Losing. Losing. The affection. Of another person. My reputation. Becomes. More important. Than the other person's. Love. Love. And so.
- The loved one. Becomes. An idol. You love. The love. You get. From the loved one.
- Not. Actually loving. The loved person. Themselves. Now. That's just a brief. Few words. Around verse nine. In verses 10 to 16.
- We get a list. Of what love. Actually is. They. They pretty much. Fit into four categories. At least. I'm going to fit them. Into four categories. Which together. They form a picture.
- Of what relationships. In God's new society. Look like. Firstly. Real. Real love. Is committed to others. Verse 10.
- [18 : 11] Be devoted. Brotherly love. This is. Revolutionary. Because the words. Devoted. And brotherly love. Are applying. The normal.
- Relational. Expectations. Of family. Nuclear family. To the Christian community. Brotherly love. And devoted. Were first century.
- Family terms. Nuclear family terms. And now. They're being applied. To the Christian community. In other words. What Paul's saying here.
- You love. Your fellow believers. As if. You are related. To them. By blood. Because you are. By Jesus blood.
- Even if our family members. Have radically different values. And lifestyles from us. They are still. Family. Even when we find them.
- [19 : 09] Particularly challenging. We still say things like. Well. You know. He's. He's still my brother. Still my parents.
- Still my kids. You know. Like. You still. You know. You still get to that point. Where you go. What are you going to do? I'm.
- I'm. Intimately connected to this person. The word devoted here. Is a very. Very challenging description. Of Christian love. For those of us.
- Who have been. Marinating. All of our lives. In individualistic cultures. The word devoted. Is incredibly challenging. For us.
- I wonder if. Devoted to one another. Is how. You would describe. Your relationship. To the members. Of your community group.
- [20 : 04] Or to this church. Because if you don't. There really. This is a gentle challenge.
- To you. You need to. Grasp the gospel. You need to realize. What you've been saved from. And what you've been saved for. Secondly.
- Real love. Puts others first. Look at the second half. Verse 10. Honor one another. Above yourselves. It's pretty much what. Paul says in. Philippians 2 verse 3.
- In humility. Consider others. Better than yourselves. To honor someone. Is to treat them. As valuable. They are valuable.

Because they are made. In the image of God. And because they have. The spirit of God. Dwelling. Within them. Each person. Is precious. Precious.

[21 : 01] And important. In and of themselves. Because they made. The image of God. But if they're Christian. And have the spirit of God. Dwelling in them. Even more so. Precious and important. To honor someone.

Here. Is to listen to them. To know of their hopes. And their joys. And their needs. And their hurts. And their fears. To be considerate. To concentrate on more.

Their needs. Than on your own. We're pretty much told. The same thing. In verse 16. When we are called. Not to be proud. Or conceited. But instead. To be willing. To associate with people.

Of low position. The essence of love here. Is not to. Concentrate. On our own image. Our own position.

Our own needs. Our own rights. But on the needs. Of others. Real love. Is patient. That's the third category.

[21 : 57] Look at verse 11. Never be lacking. In zeal. But keep your spiritual fervor. Serving the Lord. Be joyful. In hope. Patient. In affliction. Faithful.

In prayer. The four commands. That are in those two verses. Really are connected. To the idea. Of patience. Paul is calling us.

To use. All of the spiritual resources. That have been given to us. And they are. Very significant resources. To not give up. On your Christian brothers and sisters.

That is. The spirit of God. Is. The spiritual resource. The most powerful spiritual resource. To bind us together. As brothers and sisters.

And the only reason. We would fracture. Is because. We are doing it. Under our own strength. Our own power. We are to confront.

[23 : 01] The difficulties. Of relationships. In the church community. With patience. And prayer. Because to be. Involved. Deeply. In the lives. Of other people.

Is. Extremely. Hard work. It's. Extremely. Hard work. As. C.S. Lewis. Once wrote. The only way.

Not to have your heart broken. Is never to give it to someone else. It's the only way. Never give it to someone else. And my.

View is. That ever since. The pandemic. Has hit us. We have seen. A greater fracturing. Of community.

And less capacity. To give our hearts. To someone else. Individualism. Has. Climbed.

[24 : 03] And because. We are part of a community. Devotes one another. Our hope. And our zeal. For one another. Must not falter. Lastly. Real love.

Combines feelings. With actions. Verse 15. Tells us. The Christian community. Is to have empathy. To rejoice. With those who rejoice. Mourn.

With those who mourn. But that's not all. Verse 13 says. To share. With the Lord's people. Who are in need. To practice hospitality. That is. Real love. Is not just sentimentality.

But an activity. Of meeting needs. Love is doing. Whatever it takes. To give people. What they need. The Christian. Makes.

Sacrifices. Of. Of emotion. Of actions. Of rights. We give others. Both the truth.

[25 : 00] That they may not want. And the help. That they need. Now my best guess here. Is. That there are.

Four. Different. Groups of people. Sitting in this room. With four different messages. That you need to hear. On this one.

And. Especially to do with our life together. Here at St. Paul's. On one extreme. Are the people who say. I don't feel any need. For personal relationships.

And I don't care. If I have any. On the other extreme. Are the people who say. I need personal relationships. And I need to be loved.

And you owe me. To be loved. And it's your problem. If my love's not being met. Both extremes. Are deficient in love.

[26 : 03] And tarnished with pride. Both of them. Both of them. But the form of loveless pride. Looks different in both of them. The one expresses loveless pride. By rejecting the need to give love.

Or to receive love. That's the way pride looks like. In the heart of the strong. And the self-sufficient. The proud. The other extreme.

Expresses loveless pride. By feeling that people owe them love. And blaming others. For not giving it to them. And they certainly won't give it to anyone else.

Unless they receive it first. And that's the way pride looks like. In the heart of the weak. And the self-pitying. Now granted. That's the extreme.

Right. Of those spectrums. Ultimately. Both extremes need to discover. What real love looks like. Both extremes need to experience.

[27 : 01] Romans 1 to 11. And God's grace to us in Jesus Christ. And need to experience. Why it is that God has designed us. To give it. And to receive it from him.

And from each other. The other two kinds of people. Are moving from those two extremes. Towards each other. On the spectrum.

Because they have recognized. Their deficiencies. Their pride. And their deficiencies. Recognizing God's mercy. To us.

In Jesus. In coming to us. To love us. To forgive us. And to change us by his grace. The first of those. Second pair of people.

Is moving from self-sufficiency. And says. Look I'll be honest with you. I don't frankly look. Naturally. To close relationships. Where I can. You know.

[27 : 55] Love and be loved. But because of God's grace. I want to grow in this area. The other person.

In this pair. Is moving from self-preoccupation. And self-pity. And says. I know that others need true love. As I need true love. And I'd like to try to be that.

For someone. Without thinking about myself first. Telling my stories first. I want to. I want to meet needs in someone else.

Even as I have needs. So I want to ask you. Where do you put yourself on that spectrum? Has Romans brought any transformation to you at all yet?

Has God's grace made any move in you at all yet? So now we move to a new love for foes.

[28 : 57] Verses 17 to 21. Verses 17 to 21. Shifts the issue of loving your. Towards love. From your church family. To loving the enemy. The basic principle in this section. Is really summarized by the beginning of it.

And the end of it. It's bookmarked if you like. Verse 17. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Verse 21. Do not be overcome by evil. But overcome evil with good.

That's the principle. The word overcome here. In these verses. Is a military term. It means to be defeated. To be conquered. To be overpowered. And there are only two possibilities.

Either we are overcome by evil. Or we overcome evil. By responding to it with good. To respond evil for evil.

When someone hurts us in any kind of way. Ultimately does not damage them. It damages us. Any form of retaliation.

[29 : 58] Any form of retaliation. At all. Ultimately damages us. When we do that. We are the ones who are defeated.

We are the ones who are overcome. By evil. We lose. And evil wins. The only way to defeat evil. Is by doing good to those.

Who have harmed us in any way. Whether that be perceived harm. Or actual harm. Secret. To doing this. Is seeing the evil.

That is perpetrated. As something. That is above. And distinct. From the perpetrator. How quickly. How quickly.

We jump. To attaching the evil. To the perpetrator. Someone tells the lie. You're a liar. We label them immediately.

[30 : 55] As evil. You're a liar. When we. On the other hand. Are free and loose. With the truth. We've got to understand.

There's circumstances here. Steve. You've got to understand. My personality. You've got to understand. What I'm dealing with. Was it really a lie? It was kind of a half truth. You know. When we do this.

There's really only two results. Evil doesn't infect us. Sorry. When we don't return evil for evil.

There's two results. Evil doesn't infect us. And the perpetrator. May in fact be softened. And may in fact be helped. When we turn the other cheek.

That's the essence of verse 20. Where Paul talks about. Our good deeds and words. Could he be burning coals. On their head. I used to always think. That was a metaphor. For judgment.

[31 : 54] It's like. Oh yeah. Turn good. So they'd be burned. But it's not that at all. It's actually about repentance. It may lead them.

To repentance. There are three practical ways. That we implement. The principle of overcoming evil with good. The first one. Is not to avoid the hostile person.

That's the first one. Verse 18. If it is possible. As far as it depends on you. Live at peace with everyone. It's so easy to avoid people. Who have wronged us.

We just. We justify that in our hearts. By saying. Well you know. I'm not actually seeking revenge here. I just don't want anything to do with them. And we call that love.

We call that love. HAN■■■. And we call that love. In our hearts. Bye. We call it evil. of another person, simply a payback. A silent treatment is powerfully manipulative.

[33 : 00] Avoiding evil does not overcome evil at all. But there's boundaries here, I recognise that. Verse nine still reminds us that we are not loving or wise or truthful if we enable someone to sin or to sin against us.

There are, if you like, degrees of hostility. Some enemies are so dangerous that to have anything to do with them is to invite them to sin against you even more and more and more and more and more.

So there's boundaries and I recognise that. We need to discern when we are hurt by someone else, we need to discern what is our motive. Staying away.

Is it a form of payback or is it a measured response aimed at blessing them in some way? Often you need your church family and members of your church community to help you process which one it is.

The second way to implement the principle of overcoming good with evil is to express loving words and actions. Verse 14 calls us to bless. Verse 20, to feed your enemy.

[34 : 12] This simply means that you are to speak and act courteously and kindly to those who are hostile towards you. Now you've got to be careful here. Sometimes we may do kind things to a hostile person simply to what we call rub their nose in it.

To heap shame upon them. That's not the motive here. That's not the motive here. We are to thoughtfully find ways to wish the person well and to do helpful things and speak respectfully to them.

Thirdly, is to implement the principle of overcoming evil with good is to forgive and forgo any repayment. I've preached on this one a number of times in the past so we're going to expand upon it here.

Verse 19 simply says, never avenge yourself. Now how do we do that? In fact, how do we do everything else here in this chapter?

Well, that brings me to my last point. New power for new love. The old way of life where we reject God is where we attempt to sit in his seat as ruler.

[35 : 34] We see that in the early chapters of Romans. Ruler and judge of all. The old society means we respond with some level of cursing, vengeance and retaliation to anyone who challenges my right to rule, to sit on the throne of God.

God instead calls us to respond with an undeserved love and blessing and to do whatever we can, in whatever way we can, to bless others, friend and foe.

And I would argue that the verses that are before us today are both beautiful and irrefutable.

They're both marvellous and they stand in their own right as being true. There'd be hardly a person anywhere that would disagree with these words as being beautiful and irrefutable.

And yet, oh my goodness, every time I read these verses and even in this week, I go, I can tell you how I've failed it before I've finished even reading the verses in my mind.

[36 : 58] These are incredibly hard words. Beautiful, but incredibly hard. True love is very hard.

Loving people who are very different to you is incredibly hard. You must work at it. And yet, and yet, in our individualistic culture, the temptation is just simply to avoid it.

Or to somehow minimise love to a point where it's more passive. It's just not me doing bad things to people. And if I don't do bad things to people, then I'm, you know, as long as I don't toot my horn and flash my lights at people who cut me off in traffic, then I must be a polite driver.

As long as I don't do that. Which I failed in this week, by the way. Okay. It's so easy just to minimise love to a point where it just is not sacrificial.

And I could just withdraw and withdraw and withdraw and withdraw away from people and providing I don't have anyone to love, well, there you go, I'm loving people. At least not being bad to them.

[38 : 18] Notice here, please notice this, and especially if you are being challenged, by these words. Notice this, there is no persecution so great that Paul makes exception to the rule.

There's no footnotes and caveats at all in these verses. There is no hurt, there is no wrong so deep that we in any way are excused from loving another person.

So how's that possible? Because there are very few lives who live like this.

And I struggle with it so much. Where do we get the power to live a life this loving, this patient, this forgiving, this brave?

Verse 19, Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, it is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord.

[39 : 26] This is almost exactly what James says, not this James, James in the New Testament says, I was looking at him at the time, what James says about no retaliation, leave room for God's judgment seat.

The secret to overcoming evil with God is leaving room for God's wrath. In other words, the connection with James is, get off God's judgment seat.

That's the secret. Step off his seat. Stop playing God. If we are having trouble overcoming evil with good, then it's because we're sitting on God's judgment seat over everyone else.

All resentment, lack of forgiveness, and vengeance is taking on God's role as judge over others. It is playing God. We think we know what the other person deserves.

And we are handing out the judgment on what we think they deserve. And yet only God is the qualified judge of humanity. So there are two ways of getting off God's judgment seat.

[40 : 50] First, you look to yourself. Be more aware and conscious of your own sin and failure than you are of others. Look to yourself.

Realize how sinful and imperfect and yourself deserving of judgment that you are. Realize that you don't know everything. That we don't know all about the offender.

We don't know everything that they are facing, everything that they deserve. Pride won't allow forgiveness. And forgiveness won't allow pride.

If you cannot forgive, it is because you are sure that you are not as sinful as the other person. But the main way to get out of God's chair and start loving and forgiving is not just to look to yourself, but ultimately look to Jesus, who helps you to look to yourself with more clarity.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, incarnate Son of God, second member of the Trinity, the Godhead, didn't take the chair himself.

[42 : 04] He had every right to sit in the chair. He had every right to sit in the chair because he was perfect and because of his knowledge of all things.

He knows exactly what is in every human heart, but he didn't sit in the chair. John 12, 47, I did not come to judge the world, to save the world, the first 11 chapters of the Roman tells us that Jesus came to save, to pardon, to redeem.

How dare we, how dare we, who were saved by his grace, decide that we are now going to sit in his seat and play judge?

How dare we do that? Look to what Jesus did for you. Look at the way he was patient.

He was patient with his enemies. Isaiah 53 tells us, and this is a kind of a summary, he was despised and rejected by humanity.

[43 : 16] He was despised and he held, and we held him in low esteem. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. He was oppressed and afflicted, and yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before each year is silent, he did not open his mouth. The one who had the right to sit in the judgment seat didn't sit there.

He was patient under affliction for us. He saved us through his patience. So friends, if you're getting in the end of chapter 12 here and going, oh my goodness, checklist.

I need to write this checklist of actions that I now need to do so that God loves me more. Before, you've missed it.

You've missed it. Before love is something that we do, it is someone that we meet.

[44 : 34] Before love is something we do, it is someone that we meet. Jesus Christ, who did not sit in the judgment seat, but surrendered it.

Surrendered it. Afflicted by us for our sin. So that we might be lifted up. Not despised in God's eyes, but his much-loved children.

We will only love like Romans 12 calls us to love as a church community so long as we look to and we treasure Jesus together as his people.

Amen. Amen.