

"What Does a Renewed Mind Look Like?"

Romans 12:9-21

Last week we began to look at the final section in Romans, Ch.'s 12-16. We explained 12:1-2 as a transitional hinge looking back at all the mercies of God (salvation, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, power over sin, new identity with saved Israel) in Ch.'s 1-11, as the motivating force to present our bodies (lives) as living sacrifices, daily dying to our will and choosing instead God's good, pleasing and perfect will. This, Paul said is our logical or reasonable response of service.

But to be that living sacrifice we must avoid the pressures of the sinful world trying to squeeze us into its mold (being conformed) by being transformed by the renewing of our minds. We can't change the way we live if we don't change the way we think in two major ways; 1) forming a healthy view of ourselves and 2) of each other as God calls us to live in unity with other each other by using God's gifts to reach others for Christ and build us up to serve Christ.

Now he's going to break that down even further in vv.9-21 and give us clear challenges on what our renewed minds should produce in a changed lifestyle. Again, the focus is on how we treat other believers and how we treat the unsaved. So, he begins with the key in v.9 with the statement:

Love must be sincere.

This love is not an emotional or feel good kind of love; it's the word *agape*. *Agape* love is sacrificial love. It's the put others ahead of myself love. It's the putting their needs ahead of my wants love. And, its unreciprocated love. It's not done because others did something for us nor is it done with the expectation that they will do something in response. The best illustration of this kind of love is found in John 3:16,

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God showed His love (agape) to every person in the world by sacrificing Jesus for their sins even though none of us deserved it and even though most people reject Him. This is the kind of sincere love Paul says God expects us to show because of the mercies of God. To have sincere love for others means to have . . .

Genuine Love for On Another **(12:9-13)**

"Sincere" is literally 'unhypocritical'. Hypocritical means to say one thing and mean another. So, Paul gives us this heading 'Love must be unhypocritical' and then gives us some specific ways we can demonstrate what that means (because we've changed the way we think about ourselves and others).

Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Genuine love should be demonstrated by

Pursuing that which will benefit others (vv.9-10)

The word 'hate' in English is a strong term. It's even stronger in the Greek meaning 'abhor' or 'despise'. 'Cling' to good has the idea of not letting go. We must show love to others by renewing our mind about evil and good continually. Have nothing to do with that which God calls evil and cling to what he calls good, seeking that for each other.

In the Roman culture of Paul's day, everything was about status and climbing up in the world. People were either stumbling blocks to your climb up the ladder or used as stepping stones to get to where you want to go. Paul says don't conform to the culture around you but be transformed in your minds by thinking about people the way God does; minister to their needs without thinking how they can advance you up the ladder or meet their needs even if they can't do anything for you in return. This is the way God treats us so treat others the same way. And we appreciate it when people treat us that way as well. Honour others, giving preference to them over yourself.

Did we do this for anyone in the last week or two? Did we give of our time or resources to pursue someone's good without any thought to how it would advance us in someone's eyes or return to us somehow? Does that kind of thinking even cross our mind? This is what a renewed mind looks like that pleases God.

Vv.11-12 helps us also learn how to show genuine love to one another by . . .

Being consistent in your walk with God (vv.11-12)

¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

How does this fit with what Paul just said in vv.9-10 about genuine love? Because showing genuine love is hard and is sometimes not received well and is not recognized (as much as we think we're trying to do it without recognition). That's why we must focus on our relationship with God; we're doing it for Him who understands completely what it means to sacrifice for others out of love and not receive recognition for it. Focus on our hope in our afflictions and remain faithful at prayer because through prayer our focus remains on God not ourselves.

Think about a time (or period of times) when you served someone out of sacrificial love without looking for reward and it wasn't received well or went unrecognized. It's discouraging. It can hurt. God says here, don't give up. Keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord. Focus on your hope in Christ. Keep praying so you can maintain your focus on God where it needs to be if we're going to live a renewed mind life. Keep . . .

Looking for practical ways to meet needs (v.13)

¹³Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

These two are not separate issues because in Paul's day showing hospitality was a way of meeting people's needs. Travelling evangelists and teachers or just Christians moving from community to community looking for better employment or living conditions would often find where Christians lived with the hope of being put up for the night. Read Acts 2:42-47 shortly after the church was formed. We read that they sold their possessions to meet the needs of others and they broke

bread and ate together in each other's homes. Genuine agape selfless love will seek to meet the needs of others when we have the opportunity to do so.

If we're to renew our minds so we show more genuine love to a world that needs to see it, that means they will understand us and treat us with kindness – or not! Jesus was crucified for showing genuine love to people who didn't deserve it and many of them didn't want it. Satan is temporarily the prince of the power of this air and doesn't like us showing God's love to a world that needs it. We should not be surprised by mistreatment and rejection. This means we have to renew our minds about being persecuted. Paul says a renewed mind should show ...

A Reversal of Attitude Towards Personal Offenses **(12:14-21)**

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

Paul is essentially quoting Jesus here from Matthew 5:43-48. What Jesus and Paul challenge us to do to have the opposite attitude that the world has when offended is to be

Proactive not reactive spirit (v.14)

Twice Paul repeats the command to "bless" those who offend you. Bless means to 'speak well of' instead of curse which means to speak ill of. A reactive spirit is not prepared for the possibility of hurts that come and so reacts by speaking ill of the person who hurt us. Paul says prepare for those times by having a renewed mind that speaks well of people consistently. That takes a very disciplined mindset to speak well of people in general. We are so conformed to the world in this regard because the unsaved give very little thought to what they say about other people. And it's so easy to conform to that mentality when everyone else is trashing someone in the breakroom or in the locker room or huddled in the hallway.

Maybe a helpful exercise could be to sit down and write out positive traits of those who have hurt you or people who you find hard to show agape love to. Ask God to help you be proactive to bless those who have hurt you so that when we are offended – and it will happen – we don't react negatively because we've already acted positively.

Vv.15-16 are not separate from the command to bless and do not curse. The verbs are participles which mean they support the previous main verb. We should read it, '*Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse, rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn, living in harmony with one another, not being proud but being willing to associate with people of low position.'*

If Paul is still talking generally about the people we find difficult to love then he's helping us guard against rejoicing when things go bad for our offender or being disappointed when things go well for them. This is how the world responds. Paul wants us to reverse our mindset towards those who hurt us by

Relating to others through life's common experiences (vv.15-16)

Rejoicing and grieving expresses the highs and lows of life. We all have them. A good way of building a relationship with those who dislike us or we have guarded perceptions of is to relate with

them on the common level of human experiences. How many friends have we made simply through the common bonds of parenting or a shared hobby, sport or interest? How many people have we gotten to know (whom we didn't know well before) through a shared grief or hurt? When we see each other at through the shared experiences of life it helps us to live in harmony and not be proud and associate with people who society considers of 'low position'. In Paul's day there were strict levels within society and it was very difficult to rise above yours and find those above who would be willing to associate with.

All this is still in the context of blessing those who hurt us. Because the last section is clearly still with this in mind.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 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. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

In a world where people are quick to sue someone who hurts them we need to take Paul's words seriously. When we are offended lets . . .

Give God room to work in the lives of our oppressors (vv.17-21)

This reversal of attitudes is designed to either bring about the person's repentance or affirm their guilt. Under the Mosaic Law you were allowed to pay an 'eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth'. That Law was written so that you didn't hurt the person more than they hurt you. But Jesus brought about a new ethic. Bless those who curse you and pray for them. Offer them to strike your other cheek. Carry their cloak a second mile. Paul follows the same line of thought but this isn't really new, because the burning coals comment is a quote from Prov. 25:21-22.

So, what does God require when we've been mistreated? To act like God. Be proactive to bring about healing. Starting with,

Do your part to reconcile (vv.17-18)

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil." There are no exceptions. 'Yeah but you don't know what they did to me' doesn't fly with God because He did His part to reconcile with everyone by sending His Son Jesus and they killed Him. God did not destroy the world moments after they killed His Son. He gave them another chance to repent by raising Him from the dead. God did what was in His power to do so we must do what's in our power to do; forgive.

If we've been hurt directly because of our own sin, then we must ask forgiveness and move towards reconciliation. But if we've been hurt even without cause, God expects us His people to make the first move towards reconciliation. What that does for us is diffuse the temptation to get them back somehow. What that does for them is opens the door for forgiveness and healing if they want it.

When we take revenge, we are taking the place of God. So, Paul says,

Don't play God (vv.19-20)

When Paul quotes Deut. 32:35 he's also referring to the context of that passage where God is talking to Israel that He will punish those who reject Him and hurt His people:

³⁵ It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

'In due time', 'the day of disaster is near'. God is the final judge so let's leave it with Him to deal with. He will do a far better job than we will and anger and vengeance only hurts us. Instead, as Paul quotes a proverb, of hurting them, do what you can to help them. The image of burning coals on the head is foreign to us but the point is when we help and heal instead of hurt we have a purifying effect. Coal was symbolic of burning and cleansing of sin. Instead of vengeance bringing about a change in our offender's heart, kindness and grace does a better job. And that's why he ends with *Overcome evil with good.*

Defeat the power of evil with good (v.21)

Isn't that what the cross was all about? When we seek vengeance on our own we become overpowered/controlled by evil. It can consume us. We have to leave it with God and release ourselves from evil's desire to control us through revenge. When we act like God, doing good to those who hurt us, we defeat evil's power. But don't expect it to happen all at once. The enemy likes to bring up the offenses done to us again and again. Choose forgiveness and kindness and be free.

All this of course is the result of our minds continually being renewed daily. Thinking about God's ways versus our ways and choosing His will over ours. Living for the purpose of serving Him and others and not living by our own agenda in our own little world where we are the center.

Back in 12:2 Paul commands us not to be conformed to the pattern of this age but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The word transform is the word we get "metamor-phosis" from. A change from within that results in a change on the outside like the caterpillar to the butterfly. But the change in our outside behaviour can't happen if we don't renew our minds through God's Word and see our life from His eyes. When we read the Word of God what words can we take with us and apply to our daily jobs, roles and responsibilities?

How can we take Romans 12:9-21 into our daily routine and apply it to the people we interact with? Who needs to see genuine love instead of superficial love? Who has offended us and we need to be proactive towards bringing reconciliation? Ask God to show you who needs genuine love and ask Him how you can do something that benefits them or meet their practical needs. Think about that person who has offended you or you find difficult to get along. Pray for them first and foremost. Watch how God changes your attitude toward them through prayer alone. Then seek to bless them (speak well of) instead of curse (speak ill of). Resist the temptation to retaliate to the verbal jibes people fire at you (even in jest) or the gossipy slander that permeates your work space or class or team or sadly family. Let God work through as you consistently seek to follow His ways and not the world's ways.

Live proactively this week not reactively. Renew your mind from God's Word and watch how God changes the way you speak and act because you're seeing people and life's circumstances from God's perspective now.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net