

IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY: BLESS OTHERS
03.13.2022

Reading of today's passage...

Romans 12:9-21

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

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

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.

Let's talk Grocery Shopping. I am qualified to do that because, for the most part, I've been the primary shopper throughout our marriage. It started in college because some of my part-time work had me out driving around anyway, and it just made sense. Then I was working at an Aldi for a while, scoring dented cans and slightly out-of-date baked goods.

And to be honest, I enjoy the challenge of finding the deal, of scoring the Woohoo. You DO know the Woohoo, right?

WoohooYogurt

Oh yeah, I love me some Woohoos! I've never actually dented a box or can on purpose, but I can't say I haven't stood over one for a minute to see if someone was going to come mark it down in front of me.

WoohooShrmp

And don't think for a minute I'm scared of some Woohoo seafood! Conditions have to be favorable, though. You can't be picking Woohoo seafood on a high density traffic kind of day. Can't afford any sort of delay, that stuff is aging as you drive it home. "Wait a minute... is that breathing?!"

I've picked up on a few safer ways to save money at the grocery store. Cart size, that's a big deal! You think Nature abhors a vacuum, try getting out of Food Lion with a half-empty cart! Here's a guide:

Handbasket- \$20

Mini-cart- \$50

Full-size cart- \$100

Full-size cart using the undercarriage- \$130

Pulling 2 carts or more- dial 1800-STOPSHOP, and hit 7 for an intervention.

Another money saving device (Folks, this is solid gold here, and you really should have one of the sermon notes books we have for sale out in the lobby for all of this!) is the use of coupons. And when I say "coupon", I mean, of course, "custard-filled donut". Shop hungry and it will cost you. Start off with a quick fly-by through the Bakery department, and that \$.60 investment can save you \$10 or more!

But the worst part about shopping is the Adds. Not the ADS, I mean the **ADDS**. You've completed your list, you've maneuvered successfully through the barbaric horde, you've finally located where Kroger has cleverly hidden whatever it is you're looking for, and you're in line to check out. Your phone vibrates, and it's a message from someone in your household: "**And ketchup**". You make your way

out of the line, losing all the ground you'd gained. But that's OK, it's cool, good thing you were still at the store. Halfway across the store, then back in line with ketchup, BUZZBUZZ "**Get Vitamin C**". That's 100 yards away.

HahaThat'sOKitsCOOLgoodthing!mstillattheSTORE!!! ... You check-out with your pile, you're loading it into the car... BUZZBUZZ "**be sure it's the chewable kind**" ... Nope, you're gonna crush em up and sprinkle em on the kids' food!! "*Why's the mac & cheese taste orangey?*" Found the recipe on the internet, It's *French*, viva la eat your supper!

I fully realize this may change our interactions in the local grocery stores, moreso that merely seeing me be the guy that skateboards his cart back to the truck.

So far Romans has been this super-challenging deeply spiritual book dealing with concepts and mindsets that are tough. Paul has brought in terms like Reconciliation, Sanctification, Law vs Grace, Justification, Redemption, man's Sinful Nature, a whole team of heavy hitters! And suddenly in chapter 12 he produces this Shopping List of items, and he hands it to us like it's no big deal!

Turns out there's a reason for his style of presentation; it's called **paraenesis**, and it was relatively popular in the day to string together a list of ethical instructions like this, various vices and virtues. If you really want to sound scholarly you can also point out that Paul here uses **eclecticism**, or pulling from a variety of different sources. On his list there are parallels in Old Testament writings, as well as in Greek writings & Jewish writings of the era. The thing that smacked me in the head here, though, is that in verses 14, 17, 18 & 21 Paul parallels the words of Jesus. "Well sure," you say. "He was a follower of Jesus." Ah, but he wasn't when he likely heard those teachings for the first time! I find it a little fascinating to think that Paul heard these words as Saul, the Pharisee among Pharisees. And the words he once heard as just more reason to think Jesus of Nazareth was an enemy of God are now the words he is using to instruct us how to live like Jesus! That's cool!

I started out this morning reading the entire passage of Romans 12:9-21, and you may have picked up on the amount of content in this relatively short section, but I'm betting you didn't get the whole picture. So I'm going to offer you, not the Director's Cut, or even the Key Grip's Cut, but the Keith Cut, in which I simplify to

the point that it becomes Keith-accessible! And I'm going to use books to represent these items, and as we do so, it's going to bring out another aspect of this passage!

(As each of these items is read on the left, the slide for the right will be shown. Also a book with a white jacket with the Keith Cut version written on the spine will be pulled and stacked on one of two stools/tables; one will be how the Body treats co-believers, the other will be how we are to treat the World. This will create a stack of 16 for the former, and 9 for the latter)

Romans 12:9-21—The Keith Cut

Love must be sincere.....**Love sincerely**

I love the way this begins. In the Greek, there is no verb here. It's just a statement: The Love (Agape), Sincere (anypokritos—as in a hypocrite, an actor in a play)

Hate what is evil.....**Hate evil**

Cling to what is good.....**Glued 2 good**

Be devoted to one another in love.....**Live brotherly love**

Another cool turn of Greek phrase: Philadelphia, which is the City of...? Correct! Of cream cheese! Taken from the Biblical imperative to “spread the love”! Or, possibly, that's entirely incorrect, and it refers to brotherly love. Probably the latter. For sure.

Honor one another above yourselves.....**Be selfless**

This one alone, done right, would eliminate nearly every possible point of conflict between believers. An admirable goal!

Never be lacking in zeal.....\\\

Keep your spiritual fervor.....>-----**Serve w/ Verve**

Serving the Lord.....///

The first natural trio of the passage. We don't often use words like **Zeal** and **Fervor**. Perhaps we don't really use **Verve** all that much either, but the meaning is perfect—to serve with spirit and enthusiasm—and it begs to be written thus!

Be joyful in hope.....**Hopefully joyous**

Be patient in affliction.....**Perseveringly patient**

Be faithful in prayer.....**Prayerfully faithful**

The second trio of the passage! Commentator Don Dewelt in his commentary *Romans Realized* calls this the Trinity of Triumph.

"We can and will be patient with complete abandon in any and all tribulations. 'All things work together for good to them who love God and are called according to His purpose.'" **--Don Dewelt**

Share with the Lord's people in need.....**Share well**

Practice hospitality.....**Practice hospitality**

>>Bless those who persecute you.....**Love your haters**

Here we potentially have a major shift. We are in the midst of a listing of how to interact with other believers within the body of Christ, and suddenly this guy pops up. It could simply be that paraenesis style we talked about earlier. Or, possibly, it could acknowledge that occasionally our detractors are found closer to home...

Bless and do not curse.....//

Whoa. Wait a minute. I can't curse. Can I gripe? How about mumbling expletives under my breath? Stay tuned, there's more...

Rejoice with those who rejoice.....\\

Mourn with those who mourn.....**Be alongside**

This is one that might take more practice than we'd like to admit. Rejoicing with others sounds like a "gimmee", not so hard. Although once in a while, when someone is flush with celebration, you might see a person... not YOU, of course... accidentally say something a little snarky. It's not uncommon to see a touch of envy enter into the picture. But the true challenge here might be knowing how to mourn with someone, and to do it well. There are horror stories from folks who have been through terrible times, who have been told equally terrible things by people who, for the most part, intended to offer some form of comfort. It's just that they did it poorly. It can get tricky! Sometimes the best thing you can say is to say nothing at all. May I also recommend Ice Cream as a superior social balm? "Let's go get ice cream!" "Hey, let's go get ice cream, eh?" It spans all tones of voice!

Live in harmony with one another.....**Get along**

Do not be proud.....**Be humble** (yain't alldat)

Associate with people of low position.....**Invest in Nobodies**

*Illustration of the person applying for an HR position. Let inside by a security guard, helped in the elevator by a maintenance man, met by a

receptionist. The job application was a sheet of paper and a pen, with the instructions to write the names of the three people he had met on the way up.

Do not be conceited.....**BE the Nobody!**

"It should be our desire to be hidden as much as possible by the work we do." –Don Dewelt, Romans Realized

Now we see a very specific shift, from how to act among other believers, to a consistent listing of how to interact with the World at large!

>>Do not repay anyone evil for evil.....**Let it go**

>>Do right in the eyes of everyone.....**Do right, always**

>>Live at peace with everyone.....**Again, get along**

The previous admonition seems to have pertained to how we get along inside the Church. There's little question about this one, seeing its placement, referring to how we act to those outside the body of Christ.

>>Do not take revenge.....**Let retaliation go**

>>Leave room for God's wrath.....**Let God be God**

>>"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."

I'm going to let this one be. It's actually a quoting of Proverbs 25:21-22

>>Do not be overcome by evil.....**Resist Evil**

>>Overcome evil with good.....**Always choose Good**

I need to confess something to you: I don't like this last list much at all. This is the ADD list. I could feel pretty good about just doing this bigger list, in fact, I'm really starting to get the hang of it, but adding this other junk on when I'm dreaming about getting myself clear of this messy World, well that's just mean!

I remember as a teen the first time I ran across the passage about being nice to your enemies, thereby heaping burning coals on their heads, and I thought *“This is fantastic! So clever! So sly!! Muahahahaha! I have the green light to literally kill with kindness!”* But somehow that never seemed to really fit the context. And then looking back at the Proverbs 25 passage, you read that the result of all this brain barbecuing is this: *“And the Lord will reward you.”* Again, my mean-spirited approach didn’t feel all that Award Winning. So why do it? I’ve got two reasons:

- 1) **Because God did it for us.** Maybe you were so raised in the church that you’ve never known anything else, but those of us who got here in some other way can probably look back and recognize times when God must surely have been looking out for us, preserving us from our own idiocy, our own ignorance, our own hopelessness, and our own self-abuse. In view of God’s mercy to us, we can care for those who don’t yet know Him as their God.
- 2) **Because God does it for them.** The fact that they are still here means that God is making sure they still have a chance to find their way Home. And we should never let our petty hurts stand in their way of finding Him. We should not even let our significant or tragic wounds stand in the way. For our God is a God, not of vengeance and punishment, but of reconciliation and restoration. And if our God is still taking care of them, how can we do anything but? They are His children, too, though lost for a time. And He is hoping they will decide to come home. Imagine, if you will, the parable of the Prodigal Son. In a nutshell, one son demands an immediate inheritance from the Father, and takes off with it, parties it all away, until he hits the rockiest bottom. Finally he decides to return home in hopes of getting a position as a servant. Though he travels in shame, his Father is so overjoyed to see his return that he runs to meet him, and throws a huge celebration. The older brother, who had not left, gets bent out of shape at this. It’s obvious that he feels the younger brother should be paying the price for his foolish ways. The Father says, “Look, you’ve been here the whole time with me, and everything I have has been yours. But your brother was lost to us, and has been found!” The best thing we can do is to prepare ourselves to

celebrate every time our enemies become our family in Christ.

If I were going to label these two Spiritual Shopping Lists, I'd give this one (interactions within the Church) a label that says **HAVE FUN**. I know I'm a bit weird that way, but for most of my life I've seen the possibilities that the Body of Christ offers its members. At our worst we can make some mistakes, we surely can. But we are not defined by our mistakes, nor should we be defined by our worst. The Body of Christ, the Church, has been in the trenches for all of its existence to provide relief for suffering, soothing for sorrows, and help for the hurting, food for the hungry, education for the neglected, adoption for the orphaned, healing for the sick, encouragement for the isolated, and hope for the hopeless. And it works! God's plan for us works, when we let it, and when we embrace it, and when we obey it. Being part of His Church is designed to be life-changing, and destiny-altering.

And this List over here I would have to label **HAVE FAITH**. I am too often skeptical that treating people well when they treat me like garbage is going to make a difference. But if God is MY God, then I must rely on His wisdom, and His command.

How do we do all of this? How do we manage to transform ourselves? How do we give permission to God to transform the things we seem unable to alter on our own?

"In view of God's Mercies..." That is how. For God's mercies have been extended to us, which means

He does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His love for those who fear Him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

--Psalm 103:10-12

Because God has not treated us as we deserve, because we have claimed adoption as His sons and daughters, because

“ Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.” ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. “

--2 Corinthians 5:14-16

And it turns out that God’s plan for everyone is that those who have been saved by Him will therefore represent Him, will show them those same mercies that we rely on, that we owe our lives to!

The chapter continues to say in verse 20 that ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Perhaps we should love this big list, but focus our efforts on loving those in this short list. Live in such a way as to draw attention to the difference Christ has made in your life. Be counter-cultural in a way that makes you stand out for the good that you do, for the kindness that you offer, for the encouragement that you give. Our college president used to challenge us every week: Be WINSOME, so that you might win some.