

Romans
Faith, Family, and Fullness
Part 12
Romans 12:9-21

Sanctification

- Set apart wholly for God and His purposes.
- Filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Sincere Love

1. Christian Love in everyday action.
 - *Romans 12:9-13*

2. Christian Love toward others.
 - *Romans 12:14-21*

2. Christian Love toward others.
(neighbors and enemies)
 - *Romans 12:14-21*



Romans: Faith, Family, Fullness Romans 12:9-21¹

I pray you've been learning and growing like I have as we've journeyed this summer through this amazing book in the Bible, Paul's letter to the church in Rome. We've been calling this series, "Faith, Family, and Fullness," because that's what this book is about: that we are justified or made right with God through faith in his gift of salvation through Jesus, and so we are a new, multi-ethnic family of faith, who live different lives than the world around us; we live lives that are filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Through these weeks, we've given you lots of background and contextual information, we've gained insight and inspiration, and we've been challenged to live our Christian lives to the fullest that God intended – being filled with the Holy Spirit, being what the Bible calls "sanctified." Remember that we've talked a lot about what **sanctification** is and we've been using this definition: sanctification means to be – **Set apart wholly for God and His purposes, and to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

Romans is all about this!

We're picking up where we left off two weeks ago. Wasn't last week's baptism service an amazing experience? So powerful in worship and testimony and celebration! I was gone two weeks ago to preach at a spiritual life weekend at a church in Oregon – I spoke five times between Friday night and Sunday morning – preached three times, did a leadership training for their church board, and taught a class. And while I was gone, Pastor Roger preached his *first ever sermon*, and wasn't it a great one! I told him I wished my first sermon was that good! The depth of his spirit, along with his comforting demeanor, allowed the Word of God to be easily delivered to our hearts. I'm so grateful for all of our pastoral team – the veterans like Casey and Roger, and the younger guys like Israel and Div (don't let the age of Israel and Div fool you; they are strong leaders with God's anointing on their lives.). We are fortunate to have this team!

So Pastor Roger started us off in chapter twelve, helping us see how a sanctified person thinks and how God changes our perspective, and then how the Spirit gifts us to serve each other. I'm a bit jealous, because he got to preach on one of my favorite passages. But remember we've said that Romans 1-7 has built up to this amazing, supernatural promise of being able to live the sanctified life by the Holy Spirit filling us when we set ourselves

¹ Resources:

NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 2: Chapters 9-16* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 78–79

William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)

William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, *Romans 9–16: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 163–164.

John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Fourth American Edition. (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1818)

Clarence L. Bence, *Romans: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1996)

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)

apart for him. From chapter 8 on, we are seeing what that kind of life looks like. And in the rest of chapter twelve, it gets very practical.

So let's start by seeing what this passage says, and then we'll unpack it and apply it. Would you help me honor God's Word by standing with me? Doing this also helps us be more alert to what it's going to say to our hearts.

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

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

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 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. 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."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:9-21, niv)

May God empower his Word in our hearts by his Holy Spirit! Thanks for standing; you can be seated.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles or Bible apps open to this passage because you'll want to look at these verses as we go through them.

At first glance, this might just look like a bullet list of things we're supposed to do as Christians. But remember, Paul has made the case over and over again that we are not made right with God by obeying the rules or the religious laws; we are made right by our faith in God's love and grace through Jesus. So Paul's not giving us a laundry list of stuff we have to do. This is a description of the sanctified life; this is what the life of a believer *looks like* when he or she has given himself or herself wholly to God and his purposes, and has been filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We've talked about this before: *the sanctified life is a life of love*. It is a life that is motivated by and demonstrated through love. Here is where this becomes very, very clear. The first verse in this passage is really the heading of what the rest of the chapter is about:

Sincere Love.

Sanctification is genuine love; it is without hypocrisy. We are called to sincerely, genuinely love others and mean it – and this is what it looks like.

So in this section, Paul gives us two different expressions of sincere love – what this holy love looks like in our daily lives, and then what it looks like toward others. So let's see the first five verses that show us...

1. Christian Love in everyday action. (9-13)

Earlier in this chapter, Paul talked about living a life of worship and thinking differently than the world around us, and then told us about how each of us has a unique role to play in the life of the church through our spiritual gifts. So now Paul is going further to show how a believer lives out that life.

When a person becomes a Christian, the Bible refers to that person as a spiritual infant – someone who is young in the faith and needs to be spoon fed. Salvation is really about what God can do for *me*; about getting what God has for me. But sanctification comes as a person becomes more mature in their faith, feeding on God's Word and growing in prayer and their relationship with God, that they get to the point of saying, "God, my Christian life is about *you*; about giving my life for what you want." And that is a life that loves God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loves your neighbor as yourself: to love God supremely and love others equally. Because we have experienced God's love, we learn how to love others. God is love, and God wants us to be like him – people who love sincerely. If we are going to live lives of love, it means we love God and we love others; that love is expressed sincerely toward others. It is evident in our everyday lives.

Haddon Robinson is a preacher and writer, and he once said, "Christian love does not reside in the personality being loved. It resides in the person doing the loving."²

In other words, it's not about how much someone else should love *me*; it's about how I love others.

So let's quickly go through these and see what that love looks like.

The first thing Paul says is that it means we hate what is evil and cling to what is good. A lot of Christians have used this very verse, which is about love, as instead an excuse to treat non-Christians or sinful people badly. So they'll badmouth non-Christians, protest them, or even shout horrible things at them or post terrible things on social media. But Paul is talking about *our* love, Christian – yours and mine. A sanctified Christian hates sin in *their own life*. Some Christians don't hate what is evil; they hate the consequences of evil. But we must recognize it for what it is – soul destroying, love diminishing, human killing evil from the source of all evil, the devil or Satan himself. We can't excuse evil in ourselves or secretly enjoy it.

Instead we cling to what is good. The word picture here for "cling" is like you would do if you were out in the ocean and you only had a piece of wood to float on; you would cling to that because your life depended on it.

Then in verse 10, love means we are devoted to one another. The word that Paul uses

² Haddon Robinson, "A Case Study of a Mugging," Preaching Today, Tape No. 102

describes that we are to love each other in the church *because we are family*. Somewhere we've gotten the idea that my spiritual life is a personal thing; that I accept Jesus, I do my private devotions every day, and I live out my morals. But the Christian life is a *community* life; you cannot live a sanctified life without loving each other in church. That means that we think of each other before we think of ourselves. Ours is a selfless humility. I think if we lived this out, the world would be beating down our doors to be a part of this community, because everyone wants to be in a loving family and there is nowhere they can find this kind of love except the church.

Then in verse 11, love means we do not become lazy or sluggish or indifferent about our life in Christ; we must always maintain our deep commitment because we are in a battle between good and evil; love and sin. In fact, Paul uses the words "spiritual fervor," and that word "fervor" is literally "boiling over" – it is a fiery intensity. We do not lose steam. The clear result of this kind of sincerely loving spiritual fervor is that we would serve the Lord. In the context of this passage, the Lord is served when we serve one another. There is a bit of a double meaning in that phrase, "serving the Lord." It can also be used to mean, "serve the time," which means, "Grab hold of the opportunities." So Paul is saying, seize the opportunities to serve the Lord whenever you are presented with a time to serve others."

Next comes verse 12 – do you see it there in your Bible or Bible app? Sincere love is joyful in our hope.

Maybe you remember from history class a guy named Alexander the Great. He was the king of Macedonia in the 300s BC and conquered a huge empire that stretched from the Balkans to what today we know as Pakistan. He is considered one of the greatest commanders ever that paved the way for the Roman world. There's a story that when he was setting out upon one of his campaigns, he was giving away all kinds of gifts to his friends. In his generosity, he had given away almost everything he owned. One of his friends said, 'Sir, you will have nothing left for yourself.' Alexander said, 'Oh, yes, I have; I still have my hopes.' Christians more than anyone have hope; Christians must be essentially optimists. Just because God is God, Christians are always certain that 'the best is yet to be'. Just because they know of the grace that is sufficient for all things and the strength that is made perfect in weakness, Christians know that no task is too much for them. As one scholar has said, "There are no hopeless situations in life; there are only men and women who have grown hopeless about them. There can never be any such thing as a hopeless Christian."³ The reason for that is because we have experienced God's love, and we are living it out. It's all about love.

And so we can be patient no matter what we are going through, and we can remain faithful in our prayers, never growing tired or giving up. For the Christian, sincere love is a life of daily and constant prayer and conversation with God – praying about our relationship with Jesus, praying for opportunities that we can seize to love others, and therefore, in verse 13, sharing with each other as we have needs that we are aware of. In a world intent on *getting*, Christians are intent on *giving*. That's because we are like our Father in Heaven, who loved the world so much that he did what? He *gave*. And he gave his One and Only

³ William Barclay, [*The Letter to the Romans*](#), 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 195.

Son – he could not give more than that to us. Loving and giving. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. Christians are to be the most generous people in the world. One way we do that is through hospitality; we're told that to love means we practice, or more literally pursue, hospitality. It means to strive for it, to seek after it, to aspire to it – that includes to strangers.

I remember years ago when I was a youth pastor in Oregon, we took about 300 students to Tecate, Mexico, to help build our Nazarene campground, to help build houses, and to hold VBS in those small barrios. In one particular area, the homes were made of cardboard and corrugated metal sheets. Their floors were dirt. In one home, I saw a lady sweeping the dust off the ground near the entrance to their home. In my memorized Spanish speech, I told her we were doing a special program for *ninos* and *ninas* by the “autobus” – the school bus parked within sight of her home. She thanked me and invited me into their home. The children were so excited to have me sit down at their table – a giant wooden cable spool. She wiped off the table and served me corn tortillas and beans. *They had nothing* – and she was showing *me* hospitality! What an example of sanctification and love and hospitality. Hospitality always costs us something, and we are to strive after the opportunities to show it.

How are you doing so far? Are you getting the picture of how expansive, extensive, and expensive it is to live the sanctified life – a life of love? It doesn't get any easier, because now comes the rest of the section. So far, the focus has been mostly on loving each other in church, or showing love to those in need around us. Now it gets more intense; now starting in verse 14 we are to show...

2. Christian love toward others. (Romans 12:14-21)

You might think that's what we've been talking about, but now our attention turns toward loving people who are hard to love – even people who persecute us and are our enemies. So understand, this isn't just loving people we like; it's loving people who don't like us. This is...

2. Christian love toward others – neighbors AND enemies.

Remember in the first few verses of this chapter that Roger preached about, we were told that living this sanctified life will prove what God's will is; well, here's the proof. This is what God's will is – to sincerely love those who hate us and persecute us, and it starts by blessing them.

To bless means to “speak well of, to highly praise, to extol.” In fact, we are to bless them and *not* curse them. The word “curse” means “to pray against.” We *never ever* pray against people! We pray against evil.

Let me ask you this: by show of hands, how many of you are being actively, personally persecuted? How many are being attacked, beaten, threatened with death for being a Christian? Not many, if any. But if you spend much time on social media, you begin to *feel* persecuted, don't you? Truthfully, more and more, those on the extreme side of the woke

folk in our society are blaming Christians for a lot of things. And so we read about that or watch videos about that, and in our hearts we begin to pray against those people. Or, in the words of Paul, we curse them. This is not the sanctified life! Instead, if we are living sanctified lives of love, we are to *bless* them. When Paul says we are to bless those who persecute us (and by the way, Paul is quoting Jesus!), he means all those who are persecutors – whether we are the personal recipients of it or not. So that includes what we see and do on social media.

We are to speak well of them, praise them. How can we do that?

It's way more than praying prayers for God to intervene for the well-being of those people. Jesus had called his followers to bless, love, and do good to their enemies—those who hated and abused them (Luke 6:27–28).⁴ Paul's talking about loving those within the church and those outside the church. So that means in verse 15 that, when others succeed, we are happy for them – never jealous of them – even our enemies. Even when their success means we are not succeeding. A sanctified person is sincerely happy for others when they succeed, even if it's at our expense. And, equally, we mourn with those who mourn; the word literally means to weep. It's more than feeling sad with those we love who have experienced loss; it *is* that, but much more. It means we don't take pleasure in the failure or downfall or pain of those who are our enemies. Are you happy when you read about a gang member being arrested? The sanctified person grieves. He grieves the wasted life. She grieves the lost potential. He or she is moved to pray for their well-being. That doesn't mean the gang member *shouldn't* be in jail or receive justice or the consequences of unlawful behavior, but we never rejoice in that.

So in verse 16 it says that sincere love lives in harmony with one another. That phrase means to “Be of the same mind toward one another.” We are to be unanimous in our love for each other and in our unity in the church with each other. Being of the same mind we will agree on the essentials, our relationships will be harmonious *even when we disagree*, when we have differences of opinion. This isn't mindless uniformity (see Romans 15:5; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2; 3:15–16; 4:2). We might say, “Be on the same page with one another.”⁵

That means that we can disagree on things that are not essential, which by the way includes our politics. We can be in harmony with each other from both sides of the political aisle!

This calls for true, sincere humility. There is no one in this church who is beneath you. Neither is anyone outside the church beneath you. It doesn't mean you put yourself beneath them; it means you realize we are all on equal footing; we are all sinners in need of a savior. We are all people who need God's grace.

⁴ William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, [*Romans 9–16: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#), New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 164.

⁵ William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, [*Romans 9–16: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#), New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 165–166.

In all these verses so far, Paul has been giving us a kind of rapid-fire picture of sincere love in action. Now, in verses 17-21, Paul turns his attention to a single issue or theme – nonretaliation.

Are you doing okay? This is a lot, isn't it? Take a deep breathe. Let's continue.

In the world the Romans lived in, there was a law called the “Lex Talionis,” or the “Law of the Talon” – it was about eye for eye, tooth for tooth retaliation. The Jews had their own law about this in Leviticus 24 (19-21). But remember Jesus said that love does the opposite – listen to Jesus' words about this:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (or, be sanctified or holy, as your heavenly Father is holy). (Matthew 5:38-48, niv)

So Paul says to do what is right in the eyes of everyone, or, do what is morally good – that which is noble, admirable, praiseworthy (Philippians 4) – in the opinion of all people. Everyone wants to be treated with love, even if they act like they don't.

Then Paul gives us a very good description in verse 18 of what love looks like toward others (by the way, this is also a great way to deal with conflict management): if it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Sincere love finds a way of affirming positively the worthy ideals and aspirations even of non-Christians. (v 18; see Psalm 34:14; Matthew 5:9; Mark 9:50; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Hebrews 12:14). But Paul is a realist; he realizes that being at peace with everyone won't always be possible because peace requires the cooperation of *both* parties involved. So regardless of whatever the other person does, love means that *you* live at peace with others. Even if they don't. [see Mark 13:22; 14:35; Galatians 4:15].⁶

There we get to verses 19-20, which sort of sounds like they are contradicting everything Paul has just said. Let me read it again:

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written:

⁶ William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, [*Romans 9–16: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#), New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 169.

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 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."

First, I think we all understand that it's not for us to seek revenge – that is God's job. So what does it mean to "leave room for God's wrath"? It means if we take things into our own hands, we are crowding out God's ability to do what is right and best in that person's life. We aren't leaving room for God. Listen: vengeance is the sole prerogative of the Judge of the universe. We must trust God to carry out justice, to allow *him* to right the wrongs and to bring justice. But remember: as long as that person – that perpetrator of evil against you – as long as that person is alive, there is room for God's grace and forgiveness to work in their lives.⁷ Do not crowd out God's best for that person by seeking your own revenge. Leave that up to God. In fact, do the exact opposite: meet their needs! Give them food and drink, show them hospitality – show them love.

Then comes this weird statement: if you treat your enemy with love, you'll be heaping hot coals on their head. Wait...what? Doesn't that sound like a sort of twisted way of getting revenge? It sounds like he's saying, if you *really* want to make your enemies miserable, treat them with love! That'll scorch them!

But of course, that would be the opposite of sincere love for others, so what does this strange statement mean?

Ancient Egypt, with which the Old Testament Jews would have been very familiar because of their 400 years in slavery there, the Egyptians had a ritual of penitence: to show someone you were truly sorry, you would carry a pan of blazing coals as a symbol of your sorrow. Borrowing from that imagery, Paul is saying that showing love to your enemies might make them ashamed enough to repent and to be spared judgment.

To treat people with love and kindness instead of vengeance is the way to soften them. Vengeance may break the spirit; but kindness will break people's hearts.⁸

Love makes the ultimate and eternal difference.

Paul then wraps up this last part by saying, "Don't be overcome by evil; overcome evil with good." So this does not mean that if we love people we will always win the battle or defeat our enemies. For sure it means the antidote for evil isn't more evil; that only doubles and then escalates the evil. Treating your enemies with love could very well turn them into your friends, bringing an end to their evil and helping them see that God has a life of love for them too. Now, that won't always happen – but that doesn't matter. We don't love in order to win; to love IS the win. We love because God has loved us. We love because love *is*. Whether we win or lose in this world is not the point. Whether we see justice in this

⁷ William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, [*Romans 9–16: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#), New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 169.

⁸ William Barclay, [*The Letter to the Romans*](#), 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 200.

world or not is not the point. Love IS the point.

This whole passage might look like a long bullet list of things to do, but that's not the way to look at it. Paul has painted a picture of sanctification for us in this passage of Scripture.

Vincent Willem van Gogh was a Dutch Post-Impressionist painter who is among the most famous and influential figures in the history of Western art. If you were to stand very close to a masterpiece painting by Van Gogh, you would see brush strokes, lines, and colors. But the further you back up, the more the picture comes into being – a beautiful work of art of a starry night or sunflowers or any one of the other 2100 paintings and portraits that he painted.

If all you see in this passage is a bulleted list of things to do, you need to back up. Because Paul has painted for us a beautiful picture of a sanctified life; a life of love to church family, neighbors, friends, and even enemies.

When you set yourself apart for God and his purposes and the Holy Spirit fills and empowers you, YOUR life is a masterpiece, a work of love.

Prayer

Pastor Roger – Benediction:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:5-6, 13, niv)