

Living Christianly in a Colony of Heaven
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I want to bring your attention to **Romans 12**. I've been giving Dustin Rogers of Heritage Bible Church a little grief. He's taking forever to get through **Romans**, but he can because he's so much younger than me. At my age if I took it at his pace, you know, we'd already be with Jesus by the time we got to **Romans 8**. We're going faster than that.

The other thing is that I told him, Dustin, you do that because you don't understand the book, you see. But then you get to be my age, and you've read it over and over, you can see the bigger pictures. You tie the themes together.

We've gone rather slowly through this, but I want to bring this morning what we've done in **Romans 12**, as we said last week, is we've hit the hinge in the letter. Paul's style is that he would write doctrinal truths in the first half of a letter, and then he would talk about the duty of the believer in the second half. So, he would take these foundational truths of the Gospel and answer the question, "What does that look like in real life?" Then an application, and that's what we have in this twelfth chapter.

I want you to remember that way back, months ago, we were where Paul said,

Romans 1:11

I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

So, now he gives them instruction as to what it is they ought to be, how they are to apply those truths that for eleven chapters he has celebrated the glory of the Gospel. And then he asked the question, I mean, Rome was like the center of the world of its day. We've already gone through the descriptions of Rome, but basically, it's been characterized as cosmopolitan. It was an international gathering place. It was the place people, if they couldn't move there, live there, in the big city, at least they wanted to visit it sometime. It was a commercial center. It was a cultural center, but mostly it was a corrupt place.

The question is, “How is God going to penetrate Sin City with the wonderful light of the Gospel?” And His answer is, he plants a colony of heaven in their midst. He creates transformed lives and unexplainable fellowship of ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious diversity. He pours salt out of the shaker and takes the lampshade off of the lamp.

When you read about the early church, and I’m one of those idealists, I would romanticize for many years, “I wish that I could’ve been part of the early church.” You read the book of **Acts**, and you think, “WOW! Why doesn’t that stuff happen today?” only to realize that the early church had its problems, as well. You only have to read the book of **Acts** briefly, and you realize they had the same kind of struggles we do, and in fact **Romans 12** addresses the same things, things that we wish that we could go back to the early church and not experience, they were experiencing. They are here.

But God in His grace, in spite of their faults and failures, He created a light in the midst of darkness, and it was called The Church.

A letter about the church was found from 130 A.D. where it said,

The Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.

They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth,

but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and restored to life. They are poor yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things and yet abound in all; they are dishonored and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of and yet are justified; they are reviled and bless; they are insulted and repay the insult with honor; they do good yet are punished as evildoers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred. To sum it all up in one word – what the soul is to the body, that are Christians in the world.

The Epistle to Diognetes, c. AD 130

God's plan for bringing the light of the Gospel to a dark world is that He would change a group of people, that they would be marked as different but not because they were weird or strange. The fundamentalist world that I grew up in, we sought to be characterized by the things we were against. There were all these things you couldn't do. Basically, I told my dad one time, "It seems to me like if anybody is having fun doing it, we're not allowed to do that, because that would be considered sin."

And so, we look for a course of life that was so different, and we had all these lists of things that you would or would not do, and then I read **Romans 12-16**, and I find out that none of our lists show up here. But the thing that God is going to do to make them, what is it that makes Christianity magnetic, attractive, and desirable in it that God transforms people? It's different.

I want to break these verses, I guess we're going to go **Romans 12:3** all the way through **12:21**. I proved in the last hour that I could do that ... maybe not very well, but we did it.

The first two are going to be fairly easy for you to swallow. There'll be some tension there, but I just want to tell you up front, if you struggle to do the first two, then you haven't got a shot in the dark to do the third. But these are the things that the Spirit of God wants to transform in us. Notice ...

Romans 12:3-8

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you (he's writing to believers now) not to think of himself more

highly than he ought to think, but to think (but to think) with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Let me just kind of summarize this in four points. The Apostle Paul describes as the “fellowship of the saints” is simply this. It is maintained on the basis of humility. It has to be an honest assessment before God that I am a sinner that was rescued only by amazing grace, and I never become arrogant or proud about that, or I never try to convince myself that there was something loveable and redeemable in me that stirred the heart of God to rescue me. In humility we recognize that we have no claim on Him at all, and yet while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The second thing is that we learn to treasure the body. Notice ...

Romans 12:4

... in one body we have many members, (but all)
the members do not all have the same function

There’s this incredible unity in the midst of our diversity. There’s not a uniformity, we’re not clones of one another. God keeps a distinction among us, and yet, we’re all part of His one body.

He says that we live in order to serve ...

Romans 12:6

Having gifts that differ according to
the grace given to us, let us use them

Now the younger Tom Rempel with more years before him would have done a whole month’s series on spiritual gifts at this point, but just let me highlight it by saying he gives the most complete, exhaustive list, not totally exhaustive, but the most complete list of what those spiritual enablements are. He introduces it by saying ...

1 Corinthians 12:4-5

4 ... there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord ...

So, each of us has been, by God's grace when He gave us the grace-gift of salvation, at that moment He also gave us the grace-gift of an enablement, an ability, a service to minister one to another.

In the second text, the Apostle Peter writes ... you have received the gift ...

1 Peter 4:10

... use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's ... grace

So, when He gives you an enablement, unique to you, invested in you by the Spirit, when He gives that, He expects you to exercise that for others, but He calls it a stewardship of grace.

And then in **Ephesians 4:12-16**, he basically says the gifts of the Spirit are to be exercised for the strengthening for the building up of the body so that we as the church are mature, not like children that are just tossed here and there by every wind and wave of doctrine, using your gifts.

We are to live to serve. You see, when you come to **Romans 12**, when you understand the incomparable, amazing grace of the Gospel from the first eleven chapters, then you come to the twelfth, and it forces to do a worldview change. There's a whole new paradigm. Suddenly you realize the world is not all about me. I am not the center of the universe. In fact, I have willfully taken my life and put it on the altar. I have offered myself as a sacrifice. I can't take it back. I've given myself to Him to live for Him, and He says, "I want to use you to serve others." That's a radical change. In Rome there's like a million residents or citizens, three to four hundred thousand of those are slaves. See, the Greeks nor the Romans found great delight in being known as a servant. They wanted to be served and not serve.

The thing that arrests the attention of the non-believing world around them was these people find joy in being servants. And they do it, not for self-promotion, but for the enhancement of the spiritual lives of others. How do we explain that? And it starts to create this magnetism, this draw.

You've probably often been approached by somebody in leadership at a church and says, "You know, I've been watching your life, and I've been

watching who you are and what you are. I'm involved in this ministry, and everything I see about you indicates that God kind of specially made you for it. Would you join my team?"

Most likely your first response is, "Well ...," the first thing you're thinking is, "Ooo, that sounds rather costly, it's going to inconvenience me. It's going to take my time." But your pushback is, "I don't particularly think I have any spiritual gifts. I think I'm one of those Christians that God didn't give a spiritual gift to."

The only response to that is, "Let me take you back and share with you the Gospel, because if you don't have a spiritual gift, you're not born again. It comes with that."

So, if you say to yourself, "God cannot use me in this colony of heaven because He didn't give me a spiritual gift."

Then I would say, "Let me help you no longer be an imposter in the colony of heaven. Let me point you to Jesus, and when you come to Jesus, you will lay your life on the line, and He will take it, and He will fill it, and He will use you to serve others."

But then notice the attitude. Do it with passion.

Romans 12:7-8

⁷ if service, in your serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Serve your brothers and sisters to the glory of Jesus with passion, all-in with your heart. That's the easy one. Most of you probably go, "I don't know what my spiritual gift is, but I do understand that certainly if someone is willing to leave the glories of His Father and to come down and live amongst us and die when I deserve to die and pay the penalty for my sins so that I can be set free, certainly I should owe Him something, and a little bit of spiritual-gifts service is not asking too much. He's probably OK with that.

The second one gets a little bit tougher, and that is, how to live with your friends, that is, people that you like and like you in the church.

Over the twenty-six years that Faith Bible Church has been together, we've had the delight extending our ministry to two other churches. When God opened up a door for us in Cass County, we with joy and some pain sent fifteen great families to establish that church. When God gave us the opportunity to adopt First German Congregational, painful as it was, we sent some of our very best over there, about eighty-five to a hundred of them, to be exact.

I sense that God's probably going to do that again, soon through Faith Bible Church, but this time I'm going to ask the Lord to let me put the list of members together that He takes. You may or may or not be on it depending how nice you've been to me lately.

Last Sunday evening I got to do the wake ... I didn't know what a wake was, I kept asking people, "What's a wake, anyway?" but nobody could quite tell me. I didn't know how to dress for it. I didn't know what to expect. So, we had a wake for Angela Brigiante in Omaha, and I loved it. One of her nephews is a schoolteacher, and he talked about Aunt Angela, and he said, "I loved her voicemail, she was always changing the voicemail on her answering machine." He said, "The one I loved the best, you would call, and she would say, 'I'm sorry I'm not home to receive your call. Please leave a message. I'm making some major changes in my life. If I don't call you back, you're one of them.'" I love that ... I'll use that.

So, there are those that you wish you didn't have to associate with, and you grit your teeth. But there are some that you just are naturally drawn to. That's what he's talking about in ...

Romans 12:9-13

⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

How to do life together as a colony of heaven with those that you get along with well. Number one is love and honor ... love and honor. Choose to give inconveniently, costly if necessary, of your own life, to see their needs and to serve, to minister to their needs, and to honor them to see your brothers and

sisters in the fellowship as being more important than yourself. Whatever it is that you desire, set that aside in order to serve them.

But then in **Verse 11**, he says, “I want you to be all-in, like serving with passion.

Romans 12:11

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit

... “fervent” means to be “boiling over” in the spirit with a desire to serve the Lord, that you cannot restrain, you can’t put a lid on it, you can’t hold it back. Let the Spirit of God stir within you a zealously, a love, a passion, a fervency to be serving the Lord. How do I serve the Lord? Well, within the fellowship by ministering to the needs of my brothers and sisters around me.

But then he said, bathe everything that you do in prayer. Notice ...

Romans 12:12a

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation ...

... “patient in tribulation” Some of you have been there ... patient in tribulation. Sometimes our trials go on and on. There just doesn’t seem to be an exit ramp coming. And in the middle of that, we just stand up strong in the Lord. How do you do that? By being ...

Romans 12:12b

... constant in prayer.

Excel in your prayer life. The church moves most rapidly forward, as they say, “When she marches on her knees.” Bathe the life of the church, bathe your brothers and sisters, bathe your family in prayer.

And ... live generously ...

Romans 12:13

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Contribute to the needs ... the early church was marked by the world seeing how much they loved each other because **Acts 2**, **Acts 4**, and other places, there wasn’t a needy person amongst them. A lot of them were needy, but what would happen is if somebody saw that you had a need, they would take their stuff, and they would give it to you to meet the need. If your stuff didn’t meet their need, then they would put their stuff on Craig’s List, take the

money ... well, not Craig's List ... they would advertise or something, they would sell their stuff, take the money, and they would give to meet the need. He said, "Continue to contribute to the needs of the saints AND seek to show hospitality. That is, look for every opportunity for your front door to be open and brothers and sisters to inhabit your home. That's what it means. Open up the door of your home and make them your welcome guests. You don't go into isolation, don't take home as a refuge but as a ministry center. That's how you live with those.

Then in ...

Romans 12:16a

Live in harmony with one another. (Nurture humility.) (Don't) be haughty (Don't have an arrogant spirit.) but associate with the lowly.

That was probably the thing that was most difficult for the Roman world to explain is there are the rich and the poor, there are those who are free people and those who are slave people. They are from every race and every tribe and every ethnic group and language group, yet they are one fellowship. He said, "Don't have this little holy huddle of close friends. The church is not a country club where you have to measure up to a certain income standard in order to qualify to buy a membership. It's the attitude that we are one in Christ, that the ground at the foot of the cross is level, and we associate delightfully, even in public, one with the other.

And he said,

Romans 12:16b

Never be wise in your own sight.

Those first two are fairly easy, how to live life in the fellowship. You have been redeemed in order to be a servant. You look for opportunities to use the gifts God gave you to encourage and enrich the lives of other believers.

And then living with your friends. That's not costly, but it's not a big sacrifice. But this is where it really gets tough. How do I live with my foes? How am I supposed to maintain fellowship in the church when I have decided to schedule which of the worship services I would attend on the basis of somebody's attendance that offended me?

I'll set this text up by saying what people have done to offend you is not OK. Legitimate offenses are not OK. A number of years ago when I was still on

staff at Indian Hills, I preached a sermon from **Hebrews 12**, “The Root of Bitterness,” and I subtitled it because we hadn’t had the same cancer battles that we’ve had since, but it was, “The Cancer of the Soul.” Do you know what a cassette is? They’re little white things with double wheels on them. Over the years I would hear from people who would say, “I just listened to that sermon, again.” The point of it is simply this, “Be careful lest the root of bitterness springs up and defiles the many.”

So, a root of bitterness is a legitimate offense responded to in an illegitimate way. It is an injury that is real and legitimate. It’s not OK. But I let that injury plant a seed that I watered by repetitious revisiting of the injury or the sharing of it with others until slowly it took on a life of its own.

A root of bitterness is kind of like planting the wrong tree in your front yard and then watering the lawn so the roots just stay close to the surface where pretty soon you can’t mow the lawn anymore because they go everywhere. That’s what he’s talking about. Once you have legitimately been injured but you have illegitimately responded to it, a plant will begin to grow. The scary thing is that you lose control of who gets entangled in its roots. The first people who will get entangled in it are your family and friends, the ones closest to you.

The history of the church is just the history of roots of bitterness not chopped off early in the fellowship.

I took that long to get to the point so that all of you could raise your guard so that the Spirit of God had to work extra hard to get to your soul because quite honestly the first two probably didn’t hit everybody in the room, but I promise you this will hit ninety percent of us.

What am I supposed to do about living in the fellowship with those that have hurt me, injured me, or don’t like me?

Romans 12:14-20

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it

depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written (**Psalm 94:1**, **Deuteronomy 32:35**), “Vengeance is mine (this is a promise God makes), I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ 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.”

I gotta tell you, it was 1972, I read that text for the first time, I said, “YES! Burn, baby, burn.” I loved it ... and then Bill Boyd told me what it actually meant. Ruined my whole day.

Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.

How do I do life with my foes. Number one, I bless the offender. “Bless those who persecute you ... bless and do not curse.”

Luke 6:27-28

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.’”

How do you bless the offender? You pray for them.

This morning I was in the **Psalms**, and I found one in **Psalms 140**, and it was almost the opposite of this. It was an imprecatory prayer on enemies. But then I reread it and realized that it is an imprecatory prayer on the enemies who do not love and serve God. It wasn't on brothers and sisters in the body. Again, another ruin in my day.

Pray for those who abuse you. You see after Job had gone through the whole thing with his brothers, as I said before, they were great friend until they opened their mouths. After that everything kind of went south. Finally, he's pushing back, and he's pushing back, and he's defending his righteousness, he's not defending God's righteousness, and finally God said, “I'd like to have a word with you, Job,” and Job argues back and forth.

Finally, Job goes, “OK ... I don't have another word to say. I get it.”

And God goes, “Yeah, but I'm not done talking.” And God lays some more on him. And the end of the story is this, and God said, “Now I want you to pray for your friends,” who hadn't been very good friends.

And it says, “And when he prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes.”

Now he didn't give him replacement children, he gave him additional children. The children he had buried were still his children, but God gave him additional. He gave him his wealth back, but it all started when he humbled himself to ask that God would bless the friends.

Enemies when they do things to you, you don't have to explain them away. You don't have to say, “Well, it wasn't really that big an injury,” it's not OK. But the reality is you begin to pray for them, you pray that God will make them aware of what they've been doing or maybe what they did to you that God will work it, but you're going to ask that God will restore them, strengthen them, and bless them.

He says ...

Matthew 5:10

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great —

Matthew 5:44

But I say love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven

You see, this particular paragraph is something that the non-believer cannot do.

Jesus said, “So you're nice to those people that like you.” So the Gentiles are nice to the people that like them.” The only difference is that when God takes control of your life and you've taken your body and you've put it on the altar not to take it back again, He will give you the ability what no one else can do. That is that you can bless those who have injured you.

And then he says, practice compassion ...

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

One of my favorite devotionals from Chuck Swindoll years ago is on page 287, but I can't remember which devotional it was. But he says, “Wherever

you are, be all there.” I love that. That’s kind of my mantra for life, and when I was in graduate school, I had a classmate who pastored a church a mile down from the road from Chuck out in Fullerton, and so I said him, I said, “Is Dr. Swindoll, that thing there, is that like that?”

“Oh, yeah, my son plays football on the team, and his daughter is the cheerleader,” and he said, “It is totally embarrassing to sit in the stands with Chuck. He is ALL there.”

That’s what he’s talking about here. “Rejoice.” It’s like somebody comes to you and says, “WOW! God has done this wonderful thing in my life.”

You go, “Oh, that’s great.” Now, you should be excited about it, celebrate when God does something good. We have a tendency to hear that when God did something good for somebody, and we’re jealous of that. Like, “Uhh, why does God like him better than me?”

Rejoice in that, but at the same time, “weep with those who weep.” That’s what compassion is. Compassion is the God-given ability to feel the heart of the injured. It’s to feel their pain as though it’s your own and respond accordingly. So, he said the way that you deal with even the foe is that when they’re going through hard times, rather than rejoice

I looked it up in **Proverbs**, you can look it up yourself, but he says, “When your enemy has fallen, don’t rejoice lest God change His mind and He begin to bless them.

So, when God does great things in their lives, you say, “Thank You, Lord.” When God allows hard times to come to their life, rather than say, “Well, they got what they deserve,” instead you say, “Oh, God, I feel the pain that they’re feeling.”

And then fight for unity.

Romans 12:16

Live in harmony with one another.

I think in all of Paul’s letters he at some point he urges the battle for unity. It’s not natural. We’re easily divided people, so we have to fight strong to maintain the relationship. Then he says, “Make room for God.”

Romans 12:17-18

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Make room for God.

You cannot be responsible for the response of the one who injured you legitimately, and it's not OK. How they respond to your response of kindness is between them and God. Your responsibility is not to control or run their life, but your responsibility is to turn them over to the Lord and do whatever is possible on your behalf to restore the broken fellowship.

Because most of us are wired to become control freaks, we have a tendency to think that there's something more that I can do, that I can change their mind, their heart, their direction, and they'll come to their senses, they'll fall on their knees, they'll weep all over my sandals, they'll ask me to forgive them. That's not the case.

The question is, "Have you done what you can do in order to build again the broken bridge?"

Then, I love this ...

Romans 12:19

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."

Instead of avenging yourself ...

Romans 12:20

To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink (it's a reference to **Proverbs 25:21**) for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

Like I said, 1972 when I first read that, I thought, "That's great. Man, God's just going to singe them, He's going to burn them. They're going to get what they have coming to them," only to find out that's not the proper interpretation of that. When you read it in the context, what it simply means is that brother, that sister who did something foolish, who was for the moment playing the idiot and went to bed at night and failed to bank the coals of the fire. And they awakened in the morning to find out that nobody had OCD issues and nobody had gone back to make sure they had banked

the fire and the whole thing had gone out and there was nothing but cold in the home, and yet the children are about to get up and the house cold and they have a meal to cook and there's no fire to cook it.

So, the head of the home humbles himself and goes to the neighbor and say, "I've been a fool. I've been an idiot. I went to bed, and I didn't bank my fire. Would you be so kind as just to give me one of the hot coals from the fire that you banked?"

And he says when you treat with kindness those who have treated you unkindly, it is as though not that you put a coal ... they would carry all their things on their heads so this pan on their head ... it's not that you put one hot coal there and said, "You better hurry up home so it doesn't go out," but instead you would liberally take from your hot coals, and you would pile them up so that by the time they got home, there would still be one hot coal in the middle so that he could warm his home and cook his meals.

Jesus said, "When you do that, when you treat with kindness those who have been unkind to you, when you bless those who have cursed you, as it were, when they have done what is not OK, when you do this kindness to them, meet their need, instead of saying, "What, are you some kind of an idiot or something? Did you not marry smart enough that somebody would at least do that," instead they were met, not with humiliation, but with grace. Every step home as those coals warmed their body in the chilling morning, they're reminded of the grace that you poured at them, totally unmerited without any favor, grace toward them.

Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

God's plan is that we kill 'em with kindness. We continue to love them when they're so unloveable until finally they can't help but look at us and say, "Why do you love me like that?"

And the answer is, "Because of what Jesus has done for us."

So, what does this look like for life in Lincoln? What does God expect from us? Let me just suggest three things. Number one, each and every member is mission-essential. There is not one member of this body that does not have a gift that God has given them at the moment of their salvation that we can live without if we are to accomplish the mission. But the mission is not to

create a country club or a holy huddle. The mission is to live as light in Sin City. It's to be a people that are so radically transformed that those who are looking for a light of hope, they're looking for a message of promise, will look at us and say, "I want what they have."

In order for that to happen, it means that every single one of us has got to be on mission and recognize that God has given me a unique, special thing to do for His glory. Embrace it and do it.

The second principle is this: Genuine Christianity lives for others. That's the hinge that happened in **Romans 11** and **12**. All of a sudden when you understand that there was no merit, there was nothing in us that would move God to love us, and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, and when you come to grips with that incomprehensible truth, then suddenly your worldview changes and it's not about me anymore, it's all about Him. Being all about Him, He wants us to live our lives for the growth and the good of others.

The last one is: Opposition creates opportunity. Without any resistance, without any offences there is never a situation whereby we can display God-only empowered love toward others. Without some hard times coming our way, without some bumps in our road, we will never be in an environment whereby we can respond. See, the world can do good things to people that like them. They will go off the charts to try to do nice things for people that will either be indebted to them or that will repay them. Only those that are born again by the Spirit of God are able to do that kind of thing for those who have mistreated them or been rude to them.

These verses have got to be heard here ...

Ephesians 4:30-32

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with (that seething, stirring) malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another (which is a great place for a period, but then he said), as God in Christ forgave you.

You see, when we struggle with this third one, "How do I live life with my foes? When I don't do the forgiving thing, the bless the enemy thing, what I am basically declaring is I have a failure in my comprehension or

understand of Who God is and what God has done.” Even as God in Christ has forgiven you, you say, “I can’t forgive them,” then you don’t understand Who God is and how many times you’ve offended and sinned against Him.

You somehow think that God got a good deal with you when He saved you. Like, “I only like one or two really bad things in my whole life, but these other people in the church, I know their story. I can tell you their story.” If you’re from a small town, you just go to the coffee shop, the neighbors will tell you their story. But we forget that it took all of the grace of God to save even me, “even as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

So, we have two things messed up in our thinking. Our perception of the holiness of God and the awareness of how deeply we have sinned against Him, and yet, in all of that, He forgives us. How is God going to transform Sin City? He’s going to plant a colony of heaven, a people that are so radically changed that they become a magnet, not by the style of their life, by their clothing, or by their entertainment choices, but by the transformation of what they are.

Tertullian in 197 AD put it this way:

We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. This strong exertion God delights in. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation. We assemble to read our sacred writings ... and with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations of God’s precepts we confirm good habits. In the same place also exhortations are made, rebukes and sacred censures are administered. For with a great gravity is the work of judging carried on among us, as befits those who feel assured that they are in the sight of God; and you have the most notable example of judgment to come when anyone has sinned so grievously as to require his severance from us in prayer, in the congregation and in all sacred intercourse. The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the

things of God. Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are ... not spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines or banished to the islands or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred. See, they say about us, how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves would sooner kill.

Linda and I were wrestling with this as we drove back from Omaha yesterday and said, "What's the trigger? What's the secret? Who can do this?"

And the answer is, "Only he who is experienced in the filling and the control of the Spirit of God." There is not a possibility in your flesh that you can live well with your foes unless the Spirit of God takes full and complete control of your life.

Closing Hymn:

Hold Us Together

Matt Maher *et al*

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It don't have a job, don't pay your bills
Won't buy you a home in Beverly Hills
Won't fix your life in five easy steps
Ain't the law of the land or the government?
But it's all you need

And love will hold us together
Make us a shelter to weather the storm
And I'll be my brother's keeper
So the whole world would know that we're not alone

It's waiting for you knocking at your door
In the moment of truth when your heart hits the floor
And you're on your knees

And love will hold us together
Make us a shelter to weather the storm
And I'll be my brother's keeper
So the whole world would know that we're not alone

This is the first day of the rest of your life
This is the first day of the rest of your life
'Cause even in the dark you can still see the light
It's gonna be alright, it's gonna be alright

This is the first day of the rest of your life
This is the first day of the rest of your life
'Cause even in the dark you can still see the light
It's gonna be alright, it's gonna be alright

Love will hold us together
Make us a shelter to weather the storm
And I'll be my brother's keeper
So the whole world would know that we're not alone.