What a Transformed Life Looks Like
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 12:9-21
Chadron Bible Church

Several years ago my wife and I went on a mission trip to Portland, Oregon. The appeal to go to was that it was viewed as post-Christian. And I would have agreed to that assessment. It was unlike anywhere I'd been in the United States. Opposed to Christianity in many ways. Because of that it was weird. And there is a sign in Portland that we saw, "Keep Portland weird." But I'm not so sure that's true anymore. Our whole nation is post-Christian now. Things that made Portland weird are now legalized nationally. So Portland doesn't stand out that much. What stands out—what is weird—is when Christians love people in a post-Christian world. When it makes no sense. That's what we want to talk about today: Keeping Christianity weird by loving people that don't love us back—something only possible with a renewed mind.

Romans 12:1-2 says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds—as our minds are reshaped by the truth realities of Romans 1-11. We become weird. We're not conformed to the patterns of this world. We're transformed. So based upon Romans 1-11, we learn some things about ourselves.



These are just a few of the realities about who we are in Jesus. And next to knowing Jesus as Savior, knowing who you are in Christ may be the next most important thing in the Christian life to live the Christian life. That's because we operate through the lens of who we think we are. As Proverbs says, "As a man thinks within himself, so he is." Remember Eeyore from Romans 6 & 7? It makes a big difference in my personal battle with sin if I know I have the Spirit in me and have everything I need for life and godliness. I've been set free from sin. So when you understand these truths, it will begin to change your life. You'll be transformed.

The same is true when it comes to loving other people because naturally we want to love ourselves. Our natural bent is selfishness. Self-focus. Self-centeredness. That's no secret, is it? Technology has exposed that side of us—You Tube, the selfie stick. We love ourselves, and we will operate subconsciously to feed 4 central cravings: love, acceptance, security, significance. Nothing inherently wrong with those things but we do use people to get them. We do dress a certain way and talk a certain way to get those things.

But here's the thing, if I understand who I am in Christ up there on the right side of the screen, my focus will start to shift from selfishness and self-focus to focusing on others and serving the

Lord. Because if that's who I am in Christ, I'm full. I have life. I'm loved, accepted, secure, significant. I've got what I need. I don't have to pretend to be something I'm not in order to feel loved or accepted. I don't have to worry about what others think of me. I don't have to use others. I don't have to wear the religious mask of serving others to get browning points with God. I'm a new creation. I'm free. I can be free from preoccupation with self to serve others.

That's the second characteristic of a transformed life/someone who has given their life to God.

1. **Sincerely <u>love</u> others as God loves us. (12:9-21).**
   The subject of love pervades this next portion of Scripture in verses 9-21.

And I'll be honest with you, this section is hard to preach because it is a smorgasbord of phrases about what real love looks it in action. Sometimes it's self-defeating for pastors to bring up food during a sermon, because everyone starts thinking about lunch. But one of my favorite things to do at a restaurant is to order the every-appetizer. The smorgasbord. Sometimes I just want to eat a bunch of different appetizers. Give us a tray full of different foods: fried pickle chips, cheese curds, chips and salsa, wings, onion rings, waffle fries… so good! That's what this passage reminds me of. It's a smorgasbord of good, soul-satisfying exhortations intended to motivate us to love others the way God loves us. To love like Jesus.

To start out, we need to define love. That's a big deal in our society.

A. Defining <u>sincere</u> love. (12:9-10)

9 Let love be without hypocrisy / Let love be sincere.

The word for love here is agape, which most of the time is used—and has been used in Romans—to refer to God's sacrificial love for us. This love is clearly more than a <u>feeling</u> because Jesus didn't "feel" like going to the cross. It was an agonizing feeling. It didn't make Him feel happy or feel good. He sweat drops of blood over it. But this is biblical love. It's not selfish. Not about me. Not about a feeling. But about <u>choosing</u> to act in a way that benefits someone else. Biblical love says I'll scratch your back even if you don't scratch mine.

We are to let love be without hypocrisy. The word hypocrite comes from the Greek theatre. Greeks loved the theatre like we like movies. Like an actor in the movies, pretending to be someone else, actors in the theatre would wear masks, pretending to be someone they're not. Christ followers aren't to pretend to love people. Sometimes we love people but are really doing it for ourselves or for browning points with God. But we don't have to do that. We know we're loved by God and are free to love others. We can love sacrificially like Jesus. I like how the NLT says, "Don't just pretend to love other. Really love them."

In order for love to be sincere it must meet God's standards of right and wrong.

Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

In our culture today, love is tolerance, and tolerance for evil. If you love someone, you'll let them be. You can't tell anyone what they're doing is right or wrong, because love is love. But I

would submit that that's not true love at all because many people, living in sin, separated from God, are living self-destructive lives or wasting their lives constructing things that don't really matter. True biblical love cares enough to share truth with them in love. If we believe evil is contrary to God and destructive to people, we can't, as one man said, just sit by and watch people destroy their lives without saying something.

Now that we've defined it, we Paul discusses our need to love fellow believers.

2. **Love to fellow <u>believers</u>. (12:9-13)**

At this point I want to invite you to think of another believer who you are struggling to get along with. You know, the one you avoid on Sunday morning. The one where you're on your way to get coffee and realize they're getting coffee too, so instead, you decide to go to the restroom or strike up a conversation with someone who is more likeable. That one.

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;

The Greek language has three words for love. The word for love here is not from agape, but from phileo, which was often used to denote the affection of family members for one another. Kind of like Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. That's what Philadelphia means. So Paul is saying that the church is to be like an extended family, devoted in love to one another.

Now, when I say that, it's hard—because there's no perfect family. There's areas where you don't get along. And if you do, it's only at funerals. But that's the point. Even though family is diverse, and family is hard, you don't give up on each other. You stick it out. Deep down, there is connection there, and as believers, we're in this together, no matter what. You're devoted.

give preference to one another in honor;

This phrase is telling us to outdo one another in bragging about each other. Catch people doing something right and acknowledging it. Show love by giving recognition and appreciation for each other. Letting people know how valuable they are. What would church be like if every Sunday we just walked around and let people know how valuable they are. It's a concrete way of showing love. I came across a statistic recently that said 83% of resilient disciples say that they belong to a church family where they feel loved, valued, accepted, and like they belong. We ought to make everyone feel that way. If we want to make resilient disciples, we need a culture like that.

11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

When I first read this part I thought Paul ditched the love theme for a second. And maybe I'm reading more into this than I thought, but the more I thought about it, I thought man, it requires a lot of discipline to love others. I used to have a quote on my desk like that talked about that: how a pastor can express love to his church family by working hard on sermons for them.

Remember, biblical love is a matter of the will. We choose to love what God loves and do His will. If we're going to love well, we can't be lazy. We have to be diligent. Disciplined in life.

People who aren't disciplined, don't love well. They tend to want things handed to them. Their lives often aren't in order. They don't have fervency to them.

The word fervent carries the idea of a pot boiling over. Overflowing. Passionate. What a contrast to religious legalism and works based righteousness where you're doing things out of duty and obligation for yourself. The gospel allows me to love others sincerely.

12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

Remember, these are things we're doing together. Renewed people approach afflictions differently. They don't have to treat it like it's the end of the world or allow it to turn their focus inward. Go into that dark hole of self-pity and despondency. We know Jesus and we know He's using it to make us more like Him and will use it to love people to Himself. I'm going to want others to see the difference Jesus makes in my life. How crazy are the stories of people who love others even though they are the ones with the greatest needs?

I like that it says we'll be devoted to prayer. Notice we won't just pray—we'll be devoted to it. Afflictions cause us to dig deeper into our relationship with God to live for Him.

I had a long conversation with a pastor friend this week who just went through cancer this year and has finally been cleared. Initially he wanted to turn inward and dive headlong into self-pity. But instead, he made the decision to say, "This isn't going to be about me. It's going to be about God. He will heal me here or by taking me home. Either way, he will get the glory." And his physicians noted the difference between him and some of the others at the cancer center.

13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

The Greek word for contributing is the verbal form of the well-known word koinonia, fellowshipping. Which means to do life together. To share in the needs of the saints essentially.

When this letter was written, many Christians were genuinely persecuted. They lost their homes, jobs. There were no hospitals. There were no go-fund-me accounts. There were no social programs like we have today.

There also weren't many lodging places and many that existed were undesirable, crime-ridden places to stay. So travelers like Christian missionaries, tourists, business people, had to rely on hospitality from friends of friends. And Christians were expected to house other Christians from time to time. Put them up for the night and provide a meal. Another concrete way to love.

Earlier this year, we got a call at the church from someone in North Carolina wondering if their son could stay at our house on his way to Utah where he'd be doing ministry. I mean, it was a little weird but after talking, we had Christian connections in a few places, and we had a great time of fellowship with him. The Lord used that young man to speak to me. That was back in February. This week, they texted me to say Happy thanksgiving. Such a cool connection!

In verse **14 the application starts to widen** to those outside the church. And you're probably going to notice some connections with the sermon on the mount.

3. **Love for <u>all</u>. (12:14-21)**

<u>But I invite you at this point to think of someone outside of the church who has wronged you recently or harasses you for your faith.</u> They difficult to get along with. A boss. A bully. Coworker. Fellow student. Family member. Got em? Good. Because now Paul says we should love them too.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

This is almost a direct quote of Jesus in Matthew 5. When we are persecuted or harmed by someone else in some way, we naturally want to call down the fire of God on them, right? Bop em in the nose? Shove a stick in their spokes? Put a dead fish in their car? That's what I want to do. I want to make them feel my wrath now. Instead, Jesus and Paul say to find a way to bless them. Bless means to speak well of and invite favor upon them.

To help you do that, bless others that is, I would suggest thinking about their why. Why are they doing that to you? Sometimes love finds a way to see through their actions and into their heart at what's really going on. Most of the time that bully at school or that child that misbehaves is actually acting out of desperation for love and attention. They aren't loved themselves and so they're venting on you, trying to make themselves feel better by putting someone else down.

That's what I like about that moment in Jesus Revolution where Chuck Smith finally realizes that the hippies are just seeking God by their poor choices. They're trying to find satisfaction in the things of the world and it isn't working. It's such a big moment for him Deep down, there's a lot of hurt in their life and they're seeking attention. Blessing them might just show them the way to Jesus.

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

Paul encourages us to identify with others and their needs at the moment, and not focus so much on ourselves. We should rejoice when things are going well for others. And that can be hard, especially when things aren't going well for us. It's tempting to harbor a selfish reaction of jealousy. But we should join in on the joy others feel.

Sincere congratulations
How do you respond when that person gets the job and you don't? When they get a raise and you don't? Can you be happy for them? When that person starts, and you have to sit on the bench?

But we should also enter into the sorrow others are feeling. And this can be difficult because it's takes time to be a listening ear, and it can be exhausting. It can change the tenor of your day. But it's worth it. You'll never regret loving others.

16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

This is essentially saying love without bias. So we aren't to treat the rich man different than the poor man or the Jew over the Greek over the barbarian. Social class. All that. None of those externals should matter. We should love everyone. We're to see everyone as made in the image of God, created by God for a purpose, and someone for whom Christ died. As one man said, "Feelings of superiority are neither realistic nor appropriate for those who owe all to God's grace."

Honestly, the lowly could be anyone who is not like us. We tend to think we're better than everyone else and know better than everyone else. Because of that, we start to associate only with the people who look like us and think like us. They look different. Act different. Think different. Because of that, we look down on them. I think we'd do well to challenge ourselves to hang out with people who aren't like us.

Well, the final section centers on persecution. And again, this church was really physically persecuted. They lost jobs and homes for their faith. We don't experience much of that in the West, but we are still opposed and spoken against in many ways, especially now that our culture is post-Christian. How do we respond to that?

17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.

Again, it's pretty simply: biblical love does not lead us to do what is contrary to the will of God. Which means it's not okay to repay evil with evil. We don't love when we do things that are evil.

Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

These thoughts go together because of the "all men" reference. There are some things that all men agree upon. In the name of humanity, we can agree on this issue somewhere. Society and cultures, imperfect as they are, know there are certain rights and wrongs. Culture to culture, it varies, but it's true. And we should use these are areas of common agreement to build bridges with people. We should pursue unity in those things. Respect those things that all men respect. For example, you may not be for the new, green stuff—but you're probably not for destroying the planet. We can all agree we should take care of creation. Be good stewards.

But at the same time, Paul acknowledges there are some people who it doesn't matter what you do or say, they will argue with you about anything. Some people find conflict in every aspect of their lives—marriage, kids, work, neighbors, church, finances—but it's never their fault. It's always somebody else's. While we aim to be peacemakers, there are some people who just can't not have conflict. But we can do our part to be at peace. Have a clear conscience.
We'll finish it up here through verse 21:
19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him,

and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So coming back to the definition of biblical love, we find that it is very different from our culture. Our culture would have us believe God is a God of love who never judges anyone. But a God like that wouldn't truly be loving. Love and wrath are not contradictory. Because He is love, He must also judge sin and sinners at the end of the day. Because He cares.

And one of the best ways to stifle our urge for revenge is to remember that a perfectly just God will one day right all wrongs. Yes, we have a responsibility to defend the weak and to pursue justice, but we should not retaliate when others attack us personally. We leave it God and love them as Christ loved us—even while we were His enemies (Rom. 5:8).

My job is to love. When your enemy harms you, and you bless them in return, that is so contrary to this world that it will mess with their heads. Paul says you'll heap burning coals on their head. This is a quote from Proverbs 25 and is a practice form ancient Egypt. Carrying burning coals on one's head was a public ritual of repentance for a wrong committed and the guilty conscience that resulted. The coals were carried in a dish as a sign of remorse and a desire for forgiveness. So the point is correction. So Paul is saying they develop a guilty conscience from their actions because you treat them so well even though they have harmed you. Eventually they may become your friend.

This is how we **overcome evil.** If we want to overcome evil—not just stifle it for a few years through government, law, and politics—**we have to love well**. That's how Christianity won over the persecutions of the Romans Empire. They didn't have politicians to rely on. They just loved Jesus and loved others. They took love seriously. They kept Christianity weird.

In closing, consider those folks you had in mind: in church and outside of church. People you're struggling to love. And let's take them to God in prayer together.