

October 3, 2021 - David Vinyard

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[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Alright, welcome back. Pinecrest last weekend. Most of us had a nice little... Oh, now I've got too much power.

Let's see if that's right. Alright. Weekend trip to Pinecrest, it was good, and most of us here had a chance to enjoy that. This past week, Amy and I went on a vacation to Cabo, which was nice. It had been a while.

And I distinguished between the two, vacation and trip. Anybody know what the difference is? Yep, Brad got it. One word, offspring. Where are they? So, vacations, no kids. That's how you know. But it's interesting, I had a similar thought while I was at both, in fact. At Pinecrest, I had this thought. I was briefly thinking about it, and then I remembered my kids. But then I also, at Cabo, thought about this.

I thought, you know, what if this was real life all the time? What if this is how it was? You know, you kind of get in that mode at Pinecrest. Certainly on vacation, you have a little bit of that. The troubles, you know, just kind of in the back of your mind are not even there.

[1 : 17] You've got surrounded by friends or believers or just, you know, the creation and kind of appreciating what's at hand. And I was just thinking, how cool that one day that's how it'll be, you know, at least for believers.

One day it'll kind of be like that, but probably a hundred times better, you know. But not yet. Not today. Today we're back to reality. And to our study in Romans chapter 12.

So if you want to kind of open there or key your app to Romans chapter 12, that's what we're going to be looking at today. I've certainly appreciated Romans. I don't know about you. Just everything covering sin and death.

You know, an explanation of what's happening in society. The level ground that we all play from and that we are all sinners. You know, that's an important feature. And then we read about hope.

We read about salvation. We read that through faith in Christ's death on the cross, there is a opportunity for a sinful man to inherit eternal life.

[2 : 17] And just what a neat thing that is. And so now in Romans, we've kind of transitioned from those foundational pieces, as Paul is teaching. And we are arriving onto our study today, which looks at what is life like for believers.

It's been that way the past couple of weeks. And how God's promises will outlast man's obedience. We saw that with the topic of Israel. And some of that applies to both the Jews and the Greeks.

But if you're Romans 12 today, this is the week where I feel like it gets even more practical. And I know you're thinking, what's more practical than Romans? Or the first part of Romans? And I say that because today it's almost like a Christian code of conduct.

Anybody here ever accepted a new job or started with a new company or just kind of pivoted to do something new in your career? If you have, you'll know what a code of conduct is or a code of ethics or what that process looks like.

It's basically a set of policies or principles that all employees or all members of that organization should emulate. They should follow. They should know about. And so that's kind of what we're going to see here in Romans 12.

[3 : 25] And if you're there, we're going to be looking at verses 9 to 21. Let's pray first and then we'll dive in and read it. God, I thank you for today. I thank you for just the great things we've been able to experience this fall, even in the past week.

God, just your creation, your providence, your encouragements, your teachings. We thank you for that. We pray for the message today. I pray that you would share your truth here through myself

and through your scripture.

And just we would read these words that we would, as most of us here as believers, that we would just soak in this text and think about what that means for our conduct here in life.

What that means for the sin that we still deal with and how we can change ourselves to glorify you. Amen. All right. So there's a lot here.

The funny thing is, is when you Google what to teach on in this text, not that that's what I do first, but I often just look. Curious what Google says about it. They say don't do it in a single message.

[4 : 24] They say it's better for a weekend. It's better for a retreat. It's better for like three or four different sessions. So that being said, we're still going to do it this morning. But we're going to read a lot here and just hang on because I think the more you hang on, the more it comes together.

So that's what I'll preface this read with. So starting in verse 9, Romans 12. It says, Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love. In honor giving preference to each other. Not lagging in diligence. Fervent in spirit.

Serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope. Patient in tribulation. Continuing steadfast in prayer.

Distributing to the needs of the saints. Give into hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. And weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another.

[5 : 24] Do not set your mind on high things. But associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil.

Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible. As much as depends on you.

Live peaceably with all men. Beloved do not avenge yourselves. But rather give place to wrath.

For it is written vengeance is mine. I will repay says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry feed him. If he is thirsty give him a drink. For in doing so you will heap coals of fire on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil. But overcome evil with good. Kind of wish it was just do not steal.

Or don't kill anybody. Romans 12 kind of hits you as overwhelming. Doesn't it? This code of conduct. There is a lot there. There is a lot of things to think about.

[6 : 24] And honestly it was a little bit defeating upon first read. I have been saved 30 years. And I am like my gosh. Draw up the opposite of that. My love tends to be selfish. Unfortunately.

I enjoy revenge if it is offered. My pride is somewhat of a parasite. I will be honest. And so that is my confession right up front.

It is like what do we do with this text? How could we as Christians even aspire to these standards? How does one prepare for this? Why do you think I fled to Mexico?

I just thought about extending my stay. No, but honestly, fortunately for us, we have Paul. And God rose up a teacher and an apostle to declare what this looks like in the life of a believer.

So it breaks down really into two halves. It is a lot to look at. But it kind of falls in between. The sections go like this. Verses 9 to 16. We kind of have this outline, this guidebook on our personal conduct.

[7 : 28] Both internal and within those around us in the church. And then verse 17 to 21, those last five verses are kind of a unique set. And it is aimed at how do we conduct ourselves before our enemies.

There is a lot into that. So we will pick that up in the second half. But I want to start by saying the goal is not to establish just these new set of rules to follow.

That is really not what it is about. It is not to force ourselves under this impossible standard, so to speak. But rather, it is by the grace of God that our conduct might amplify Christ and bless others.

Do you see the difference there? Yeah? Okay. So let us dig in. Let us look at verse 9 first. What does it say? It says, let your love be without hypocrisy. Some versions say love sincerely or let your love be genuine, real.

And I think it is important that we note that. You know, I mean, you could think about all the verses you have read or have heard or been taught that talk about the concept of loving one another, right? There is probably hundreds of them in the New Testament alone.

[8 : 37] But I think it is important that we grab that right at the onset of this text with this emphasis on love, right? It is significant. Paul leads with that for a reason. It sounds kind of like this verse that he wrote to the Galatians.

It is on your paper there. Galatians 5 verse 13. It says, For you were called to freedom, brothers. You could do a whole message on that. You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.

But through love, serve one another. And I wanted to include a ton of references here. And I just thought, you know what? It is not actually that helpful.

And I say that because you can find it on your own. But it is neat to know that wherever Paul addresses conduct for the church, it is bathed in these concepts of love. Over and over again. Brotherly love. Selfless love. Love through service. And so I think in the beginning as he is leading that, this is how our conduct should be rooted. And notice what comes next.

[9 : 39] He says, Abhor or hate what is evil and cling to what is good. And I think, well, that didn't last long. All that talk on love, we have already moved on to hate. But it is kind of anchoring the rest of the text, honestly.

If you look at the two together. It is a love that seeks others, but not sacrificing our morals, not sacrificing what we stand for, not sacrificing what we know and the truth of God.

And so it is sort of this distinguishing between this unbridled emotional love, right, and this intentional love that is rooted in the truths of God. And honestly, that foundation of verse 9 is very important because it sort of builds the rest of what comes after.

If you look at verse 10, it says, Be kindly affectionate toward one another and in honor giving preference to others. So we have this in mind and getting that right leads to the rest of this long text that we're digging through today.

Firmly based on Christian morals and acknowledging, you know, God's truths in that. And so I was studying this and just thinking like, okay, what do we do with that? We know we're supposed to love, right?

[10 : 48] Most of you would say, I get that. I'm nowhere near as loving as I want to be, at least speaking personally, but I'd like to be. You know, what can we take from that? What do we remember? And I thought of this story in Mark chapter 10.

And it's an example from the life of Jesus, but I like how it sort of wraps a couple of these things together. And so if you remember the story, you remember Jesus is out walking with his disciples. He's working his way through the crowds and a well-dressed man walks up.

He says, teacher or sir, what must I do to be saved? If you remember this text. Jesus says, you know the commandments. Do not kill, do not steal, do not lie. And the guy says, yeah, got it.

All these things I've done since my youth. Now you think about that moment before we read what Jesus says. You think about what has been said and that response to Jesus. Jesus came to the earth to live, to suffer, and to die.

He's the only one capable of that sacrifice for humanity. And this guy says, thanks, but I'm good. I got it. I've been doing it. I'm worthy as I am, is what he says.

[12 : 02] And so thinking about that, thinking about loving conduct, thinking about this example, look how Jesus responds. Jesus, it says in verse 21, looked at him narrowly, slapped him in the face, and poked him in the eye.

Oh, sorry, that's what I would have done. No, it says in verse 21, Jesus looked at him, and he loved him. And then he offers a gentle, loving admonition of how to change his mind.

It says he looked at him, and he loved him, and he says, go sell what you have, and follow me. I just like that story as it sort of personifies this conduct of love that Paul's referring to.

You know, Jesus, he didn't, he still, from the moral side, right, he still abhorred what is evil. He recognized this guy's pride, the pride of life, but at the same time, in clinging to what was good, he offered a redemptive response.

I just think that's a really neat example from the text of, you know, sincerely loving this man's need at the expense of himself. And so being aware of the good and the evil around us, but still keeping keen on that conduct, I think is an important piece of verses 9 and 10.

[13 : 20] What else does it say as we look down to verse 11? It says, be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. It's funny because Paul, at this point in time, he's been around the block a little bit.

He's gotten pretty good at anticipating his hearer, if you've noticed that already in Romans. He sort of says something and then thinks, I know what you're thinking, you know. And in case one would look for the loophole in this, in case one would think, you know, I'm not, there's no way I'm going to

do that.

I'm just going to, I'm just going to miss this altogether. I'll just unplug. I'll just disengage. I'll just take it easy. I'll just hit cruise control, right? And that's how I'll minimize my miss on this one.

Paul says that's out of line. He says, we're to love selflessly while serving and operating at full speed. What's neat there is the word choice in verse 11.

I like this probably the most. The phrase, it talks, that fervent, it's one of being highly active. It's the same word used to describe like a molten metal or a boiling water.

[14:26] So, literally primed for use, about to accomplish, you know, to be put to work for something else is how it describes back in verse 11 how we are to be.

Acts 20, 19 is on your handout there. It's, it says, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials. You know who those words are describing? The guy writing this letter.

It was describing their missionary journey, Paul and Silas, as they were going the second time around. And so, we might ask Paul if he were here today, Paul, what does this, how do you do this? What does this look like? How does that show up? Look at the next stanza, verse 12 and 13.

Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer, distributing to the needs of the saints and given to hospitality.

It says, we need examples on how to conduct ourselves, what to think on, how to live. It's right there. It sort of progressively goes through the code, the code of conduct for us.

[15:37] And notice it's gone from broad terms, love and hate, over to more specific, what to do. You could rephrase all of those last, verse 12 and verse 13, into questions.

You know, I was thinking about what do we take from this other than things we kind of know we're supposed to be doing. You're just asking personally, am I full of joy and hope? Or do people think of me in those terms?

Am I patient? Especially in the hard times, you know? Or do I complain a lot? Do I seek God in prayer?

Or is it sort of that last resort? Do I look for ways to benefit others? Or am I kind of caught up in my own thing? Again, this point is, it's not a new set of commandments.

It's not a fresh set of rules. It's just, Paul's offering us a standard here as believers in light of everything that's been covered in Romans to date to sort of refresh our aim.

[16:33] Make sense? Yeah? And we got a lot of verses to get through, so I'm going to keep going. That practicality continues. Look at verse 14 to 16.

How else should our conduct look? Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Be not wise in your own opinion. I can tell you one thing that I learned from Cabo is there was a lot of high things around us that week and not a lot of lowly, but we did notice, you know, just the difference in the folks that were at the resort and the folks that were working at the resort.

Amy pointed that out a few times. I tell you, I mean, it is a struggle. You almost feel your person wanting to, like, talk to the guys that just got off the boat, you know, not the guys doing the tables. There's just something about that. But Paul says that's not how it should look as a believer. We were talking about this this morning in our prayer set, but, you know, outside of these walls here, it sort of feels like our culture is dropping off, doesn't it?

[17:45] The dogmas and the ways of our society, they seem to really contradict everything about the truth of God. They try to explain life and weather and disease without acknowledging the creator, hyper-focused on genetic differences and skin tone, and God says, you know, I created man in my image.

They try to offer new explanations for the guilt that's rooted in just our sin. You know, new meanings to life, new false narratives of salvation, look younger, ease your pain. You know, these dogmas of the world, they just seem so opposite to what we know.

But then, we get to Romans 12, verse 14 to 16, and I notice something. I don't know if you noticed it. There's a different feel. All of a sudden, it's kind of hitting a little closer to what we would say, right?

Kindness, empathy, like-mindedness, helping your fellow man. And I'm not saying those things come from the world, but some of these principles are recently adopted.

Look at billboards. Look at bumper stickers. What do you read? Do good. Be kind. Coexist. And so, I mean, you think about it, too, like, go to a leadership seminar or read any bestseller.

[19 : 03] I mean, you can't really find any of the world's tactic without finding these concepts of empathy and how to connect with others. And so, what that shows us, what I thought about in reading this and studying this, is that the enemy has figured this out.

Not all opposites attract. The lies have been cleverly disguised in half-truths that kind of show up like verse 14 to 16. And this good practice from our culture is sold in a familiar wrapping, but under a false narrative.

We can be good enough as we are. It's kind of the, kind of the, the lie that comes to us. We can do it. We deserve better. And it appeals to us.

It sounds well-intended. My point is just to call that out. You know, reading, reading what Paul tells us to do, it's getting fuzzy with some of the things the world is trying to value. But these things are powerless.

They're based on the pride of man. And they're not, they're not supported by the same Holy Spirit that we have in our Christian code of conduct here in Romans 12. And so it's just a casual warning.

[20 : 11] It's just a calling out. You know, it might sound similar. There is some overlap between kindness and empathy, and those in themselves are good things. But we understand love and sacrifice because our God has redeemed us in it.

not because we've decided that that's how we, we want to create our own godliness. And so just take note when our culture shifts from these big opposites to sneaky familiar.

Yeah? Verse 14 to 16 helps our conduct. It helps us tone that in towards mastering our emotions, refusing our jealousy, having empathy for others despite our own state of being, and not desiring the high things, but supporting the lowly.

Corinthians 9.22 says, To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them in its blessings.

That was Paul's testimony in a lot of ways. What's ours? You know? What's mine? That last phrase in verse 16 is curiously placed, isn't it?

[21 : 23] If you reread that, verse 16, do not be wise in your own opinions. I struggle with that. I don't know. And spending a quick moment aside on verse 16 by itself, as Christians, on paper, we have access to most of life's answers, don't we?

We know the truth. We have a real, firm counter to life's fears and life's dangers. we enjoy blessings and peace that are not offered elsewhere.

So it's tough because those things are real. But it says that's not something that should feed our pride. We should not be wise in our own opinions. And so therein lies the challenge, one of the challenges in this text to our conduct.

We ought to be so focused in how we're addressing others and the loving nature that Paul is esteeming towards and so fervent in how we support, relate, and encourage others that there's really not much left at the end of it to think about ourselves.

And I'm preaching in the mirror and saying that because I know that it's so much harder to do than to read. But that is what it's about. 1 Peter 3.8, Peter writes, Finally, be of one mind, having compassion one of another.

[22 : 49] Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous. That's a lot there. Are you feeling intimidated? Hopefully not.

Are you feeling excited about what God can do in your life through the Spirit? Hopefully. So I mentioned this at the beginning. The second half, which is a little less than half, it's a more specific talk.

It's more directly in line of how we should treat our enemies. So Paul dedicates five verses to this out of the whole piece, which tells us what?

What's the first thing if that is the case? And it is. Our enemies are a given. This isn't a hay in case or in the off chance that. It's a staple of the Christian walk.

Don't let that surprise you. So what should our conduct look like before our enemies? Verse 17 to 21. Paul says, don't repay evil for evil. Have regard for good things before all men.

[23 : 55] Don't avenge yourself. Rather, give opportunity or place for God's judgment to work. I'm just paraphrasing here. Be faithful in the face of an enemy, demonstrating the goodness of God in

response.

Sounds kind of like turn the other cheek or seven times 70, right? From Jesus' teaching of his disciples.

But consider, think about Paul's testimony here. Think about his life. I wonder if he knew a thing or two about having enemies. I wonder if there was any relevancy for what he went through.

Saved on the road to Damascus. Local Christians kind of assumed he was their enemy. He had recently converted. As a new believer, all his old friends hated him, wanted to kill him.

So he fled, came back to Jerusalem. Acts 9, still preaching boldly. I want to say not a lot of time went by. The Hellenists drove him out. He fled to Tarsus. There he encountered a sorcerer who perverted the gospel right behind him as he's sharing.

[25 : 02] They went to Antioch. The Jews were filled with jealousy. They ran him out of towns. They said, get lost. Later in Acts, he meets a demon girl. I have not read the word annoyed in the Bible very often.

It's just one of those words that I think describes me often, but not in Scripture. This demon girl followed Paul along and annoyed him. I relate to that.

I mean, eventually, they were mobbed. They were put in prison and escaped to a place where they got stoned. I mean, it's, when Paul writes, wherever possible, live peaceably with all men, when he says to the faithful believer, don't avenge yourself, I mean, if anybody knew, he knew.

He lived through it. And I think, tactically for us, reading this text, thinking about what do we do with our conduct in light of this, Paul discovered that the only guiding practice that offers any production value when there's a guarantee of an enemy, when opposition is always there, it's that we let it go. We witness the futility of vengeance. Paul witnessed it in his own life. He knew there was no peace from trying to settle the score. And so he urges these believers in Rome as part of this, you know, calling of conduct.

[26 : 26] He says, it's better to give it up to God. Honestly. Colossians 3, 14 to 16, Paul shares a similar teaching to a different church. He says, but above all these things put on love, sounds like this beginning, which is the bond of perfection and let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which you were called in one body and be thankful.

There's a specific example in Paul's journeys that I left out and I want to take you through this because it's, I think it's keenly relevant to where we're at in this society. If you're familiar with Acts 14 to 16, Paul leaves Jerusalem after they decide that circumcision is no longer a mandate and they struggle with that.

But he grabs Silas and Timothy and they head out to a place called Philippi on their trip to Macedonia. And Philippi's different. If you don't know your history or you're not as familiar, Philippi was a Roman colony which meant that certain citizens had special rights there.

Okay? So when they arrive, they do what they always do. They go to the synagogue, they find people, they start sharing the gospel, people follow them, some love them, some hate them. And it says after a little bit of that, they were taken and they were whipped with rods and they were thrown into prison.

That's a trip. That's not a vacation. You know, in case you were scoring one of the two. It's neither. So I mentioned this. Here's what's unique and something I think we should pull out of this.

[28 : 01] Philippi was special. It was a Roman territory. Paul was a Roman citizen. It was physically against the law. It should have been prohibited for the magistrates there to whip and jail Paul.

He was mandated under his Roman culture due process in a fair trial. And I share that because I think we read these texts or I think we look back on history of the apostles and what they went through and we think they didn't really have another option.

We just assume they were always the underdog. We think they're outnumbered, nobody cares about them, they're just out there doing God's work, which they were. But in fact, on more than one occasion, vengeance was an option.

Paul might have had these guys strung up, honestly. Their penalty could have led to a payout for Paul. Maybe he wouldn't have to make tents as often had he gone this route.

You know? There was occasion, even under the law of the time, where vengeance or settling the score could have happened.

[29 : 11] Should have happened. But he carried on. And I just share that example thinking about, you know, even in Paul's own testimony, he elevated the opportunity to serve the Lord and give place to God owning that side of it.

And I also share that example because we're in a unique time. It's been mentioned several times today already, but something else to consider. A time might be coming for us. It might already honestly be here where our own authorities, our own magistrates, our own leaders would gladly bend the law to become our enemies.

I read that text and I thought about it saying it wouldn't be the first time in history. It certainly probably won't be the last. We might find ourselves in a similar circumstance to Paul. We may not be offered fairness.

We may not be offered legal protection at the time. And so be ready is I guess the message there. Thinking about that concept of conducting ourselves before our enemy.

What our life looks like in the face of opposition. What will we do when that shows up? How will we respond when that moment arrives? Will we seek peace?

[30 : 30] Verse 18. Do we pursue good in the circumstance? Verse 17. Do we have the faith and patience to be wronged? Verse 19. Will I give place to the author of creation and the righteous judge to work on my behalf?

Verse 20. Some heavy stuff. In Acts 7, rewinding before all that happened, being filled with the Spirit, Stephen is there and some of you know the story.

He's just, it's a great, it's a great, if you go back and read Acts 7, what Stephen says in that single moment of response to the Jewish leaders. He basically declares to them the error of their ways and what they missed.

And when they can't stand that conviction and that guilt anymore, they mob him. And it says in Acts 7, 59, and they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin. I don't, I just think about that and think about how to respond in that moment, you know.

[31 : 36] And so that's sort of the higher calling we have in Romans 12. And we're almost done here. It ends with this section on how to respond to our enemies. You know, and it's just a reminder that in every city, in every country, in every language, in decade of time, where there is an opportunity for the gospel, wherever men serve God, there are certainly enemies.

Where there is truth, there is perversion. Where there is servitude, there is greed, envy. Where there is freedom, there are oppressors. And Paul writes these words as a guideline for our conduct and as a caution for we believers.

Not to put this list of do's and don'ts, not to give us a new law, not to establish the standard that just defeats our minds. That's not the point. It's to affirm us into the right patterns of thinking.

Peter says this in 1 Peter 3.9. He says, Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless. For to this you were called that you may obtain a blessing.

It's a good verse. Daryl Lynn talked about last week about things to just tuck away. I feel like that's one of them. As the musicians come up here and we close, just, whoever said the Christian walk was easy, I don't know if they, if they spent much time in Romans or thought about what it looks like.

[33 : 02] And I certainly don't want people to leave here thinking about, wow, this is just, this is just an intimidating list. How could we ever get through it? Rather, I want you to be encouraged. I want you to think about just what it means to be a believer, what it means to have the Spirit of God with us and helping guide us in this way.

And I like this verse. It's probably been shared recently in another message, but Colossians 2.8 is on there. And in light of everything we talked about today, it says, Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the traditions of men and according to the basic principles of the world and not according to Christ.

I think if you're here today and you're thinking, I got this all on my own. I don't need the teachings of Paul. I don't need the examples of God's Word. That's the oldest line in the book.

You know? That's mankind's greatest wish to be like God on their side without God. But for those who are saved by the power and sacrifice of Jesus, if we're interested in living in a way that honors that sacrifice, we can find peace and we can find hope and we can find blessing in what this calls us to do.

To be encouraged, let's sing and we'll close this morning. Thank you.