

Core Values: Community

Romans 12:9-21

Recipes, Blueprints and Prescriptions

A great injustice was done last Christmas. Cheryl in making her famed cranberry punch was advised by others in the family to not add any sugar. What resulted was a cranberry, orange juice, lemon juice concoction with a hint of red hots. It was certainly more bitter than sweet. I am not complaining, mind you.

Things don't turn out as they're supposed to when you don't stay to the recipe.

A builder would do well to stay to the blueprints. Cutting corners when it comes to blueprints can spell disaster. That's been repeated far too many times with buildings when built, don't pass inspection.

The same sort of things is true when a doctor writes a prescription and it's not followed. We always do well to follow doctor's orders.

Let's hold those thoughts for a second and turn to the scripture

Good Direction for How to Live

In reading through the Book of Romans we're quick to notice a change in tone as Paul gets to Romans chapter 12.

He moves on from some pretty deep theologizing to more rubber meeting the road issues. The two, theology and real life, aren't mutually exclusive. One informs the other and vice versa. In fact, the two are intrinsically tied.

Paul talks as he starts out Romans 12 by urging us *"to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, all as an act of worship."*

He urges us to *"no longer conform to the pattern of the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds."*

He then follows all of this with a *"recipe"* for right living, a *"blueprint"* for how to live, and a *"prescription"* for how we are to conduct ourselves and we'd do well to follow it.

Paul offers good direction for how to live in the real world as *"living sacrifices."* He offers insight into what it means to be a Christian.

Paul will every now and then take to writing things down in quick succession. He usually does that near the end of his letters. I have often quipped that when Paul does that he was simply running out of parchment.

Paul is near to the end of his letter when he reaches Romans 12, but he has a lot more to say. Let's then hear the Word of God as contained in Romans 12:9-21.

Read Romans 12:9-21

There's a lot there. In fact, a sermon could be fashioned around every phrase. Cheryl's been after me not to preach as long, so I will resist.

I will give you a bit of homework though. I want you to read through Roman 12:9-21 until it begins to sink in.

A few weeks ago in talking about being Biblically-based, I mentioned a practice employed by the Benedictines called *Lectio Divina* or *Divine Reading*.

In *Lectio Divina* you not only read, but meditate on the scripture, and you not only read and meditate, but pray as you go along. In the end, you contemplate what God is saying to you and then ask yourself, "*What am I going to do about it?*"

Community-Oriented

And we are saying about ourselves that we are "*community-oriented*" and this as a matter of core value.

We have said in this regard that "*We will seek to be in fellowship with one another and be involved in the community around us, all in the name of Jesus.*"

We have also said the Romans 12:9-21 will be our scriptural base in this regard.

As we have already alluded to Romans 12:9-21 is rich with all sorts of things that stand to help us dispatch ourselves as Christians.

We find a clear word about those things that mark us as Christian disciples, those things that set us apart, if you will, from others who may not have been so touched.

A Sincere Love

Again, not to preach what could become a 20-point sermon, I hear Paul in the mix of all he says in Romans 12:9-21 talking about love and how that love might be lived out.

He says quite succinctly,

- "*Love must be sincere.*"
- "*Let love win out.*"
- "*Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*"
- "*Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*"

Paul talks a lot about developing a community of love within the body of believers to the end that those same believers go and live out that same love in the life of the world.

Again, we are saying as a matter of core value that *“We seek to be in fellowship with one another and to be involved in the community around us, all in the name of Jesus.”*

We do community here, so we can be community out there.

Building community here is important, but only to the extent that we find ourselves better prepared to build community out there.

The Christian faith is by no means insular. At its best, it is always reaching out.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse,” writes Paul.

That sounds an awful lot like Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount where he says, *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”* Matthew 5:44

We are able to do all of this because *“God loves us so much that he sent his only begotten Son.”*

John writes in I John 4:19, *“We love because he first loved us.”* I John 4:19

An Appeal to Love

Essentially, in Romans 12:9-21, Paul makes an appeal to a love that demands to be lived out.

We are to be *“devoted to one another in love.”* We are to *“honor one another above ourselves.”* We are to *“never lack in zeal”* about such things, and to live them out with a *“spiritual fervor”* that is unmistakable.

William Barclay in commenting on that *“spiritual fervor”* talks about our spiritual lives reaching a *“boiling point.”*

“I know your deeds,” says the Lord in Revelation 3:15-16, *“that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spew you out of my mouth.”*

May it never be said of us that we are just lukewarm when it comes to love.

Regardless of what takes place next weekend at the called session of General Conference I pray it will be said that we took the high road of love and led the church to do the same.

Please pray for me, will you? Pray also for every delegate. Pray that God’s redemptive love is championed and is evident for all to see.

Bishop Fairley in offering a Christmas blessing last Christmas talked about love coming down at Christmas. Indeed that did happen. God made his greatest statement of love by sending Jesus.

In challenging us about how we define love and eventually live that out, Bishop Fairley quoted those famous words from the movie *The Princess Bride* uttered by Inigo Montoya, “*You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.*”

Love is a profound mystery made profoundly real when we let Christ’s love come shining through.

Pay It Forward

I love the movie of a few years back where a young boy heeds the challenge of his social studies teacher to change the world.

The movie, *Pay It Forward* is the story of an energetic, idealistic young man who decides he will do a good deed for three people who then are challenged to “*pay it forward*” by doing a good deed for three others. The effect was exponential.

That’s the way it is when love becomes a “*rubber meeting the road*” issue.

As Christians, we are characterized by that love, all because of Jesus. Love is God’s prescription for how we are to conduct ourselves in this life.

The great preacher and theologian Phillips Brooks once wrote, “*Duty makes us do things well; but love makes us do them beautifully.*” Phillips Brooks

The Mending Wall

Since childhood I have been taken by the words of Robert Frost and his poem, *The Mending Wall*.

“*Good fences make good neighbors,*” writes Frost.

In his poem, Frost references those rock fences that have to be repaired every spring after the freeze and thaw of winter.

Frost really challenges us by bringing to mind those same fences and how they apply to life. He might even have something to say about what’s been front page news for a long time regarding a wall being built on our southern border.

*“Before I built a wall I’d ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That wants it down.”*

Love doesn't so much build walls as it tears them down, but then again we know this to be a fallen world and love isn't always in play.

You and I though, would do well to "*make love our aim.*" After all, that's what God wants us to do.

I don't know what walls there are in your life, but I do know this. Our fears need to be faced, our hurts need to be forgiven, and our prejudices need to be surrendered.

All of this happens and so much more when we let love have its sway.

Hear this once again as a matter of core value, "*We are community-oriented and seek to be in fellowship with one another and involved in the community around us, all in the name of Christ*"—all in the name of love.