

Honeyridge Baptist Church
#20 – Romans 12:3-21
Grace Empowered Transformed Lives!

Introduction

Our study in the book of Romans last week marked a key turning point in Paul's letter... as we looked together at Romans 12:1-2.

We've been considering over the last 2 weeks that the purpose of **Theology**... The study of God... is to drive us to **Doxology**... the Worship of God... and then the **Worship** of God is the motivating force behind our **Praxeology**... our Obedience to God

So Theology is meant to move from the **head** to the **heart**... so that our worship of God will be based on **Truth** (our knowledge of God)... and so that our Obedience to God will be motivated by the **Grace** of God!

Now as we move on today... we are going to lift up to a higher altitude as we fly over the rest of Chapter 12... as Paul starts to practically teach us how the Gospel enables us to live a totally transformed life.

So there will be a lot which we will just skim over today... and I would urge you... or appeal to you as Paul does in vs 1... to go home and personally work through this section in prayerful consideration before the Lord... and to think through every one of Paul's commands of practical application in this section in the light of all that Jesus Christ has done for you in the Gospel.

My job for today then is to help us see – in broad brush strokes – **how the Gospel changes everything**... particularly as we consider the way we think about ourselves... the way we think about other people in the church... and the way we think about those outside the church in the world.

So in the first place then, Paul wants us to see that the Gospel totally transforms the way we view ourselves... and so he calls us to:

1. Think Soberly (vs 3-8)

Now – the connection with vs 1-2 is very clear in the way that Paul approaches these verses of instruction, for he starts in vs 3 and says... “For by the grace given to me, I say to you...”

You see... Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ... and with that high calling came an authority to be able to declare the truth of God to the church ... and to command us to be obedient to his instructions...

But Paul sees himself, first and foremost... not as an apostle... but as a sinner saved by grace... as a person who himself has been... and is being... **transformed** by the Gospel... and it is this Grace of God to him in Christ... which is the basis for his appeal to us...

And so we see that Paul sets himself up as an example in the very thing which he is calling us to do...

***Romans 12:3 (ESV)** — ³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you [who have also received grace!]... not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

Now – this very first practical command which Paul issues to us in vs 3 is one which is totally contrary to the thinking and the ways of the world... which we saw last time in vs 2... is squeezing us into its mould.

Paul has urged us in vs 2... “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” ... and the first aspect of this gospel renewal... or gospel transformation which takes place in our minds as Christians... **is the way we are to think about ourselves.**

3.

You see – the world around us... tells you from the day that you are born... to view yourself in the light of your accomplishments... in the light of your talents... or your looks... or your money... or your intellect... or your things... or your friends... and so depending on how well or poorly you are doing in these categories... directly affects the way you view yourself.

All the modern emphasis on “Self-esteem” ... or “Self-worth” ... is based on these things which the world values and praises... and by which the world measures you.

But the Gospel changes everything... because as we have seen in Chapters 1-3... we are all sinners needing to be saved... we are all alike rebellious in heart and mind towards God... and are all alike under the wrath of God.

But in the Gospel of Jesus Christ... **we are saved! We are redeemed!** ... **from ourselves**... from a life of slavery to sin and death... and we are Justified freely by God’s grace as a gift... and we are adopted into God’s family... and we are given his Holy Spirit to live within us... we are given an eternal hope which will never spoil or fade... and all of this is purely because of God’s grace and mercy towards us in Christ.

So then, says Paul... “I say to everyone... Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought... but think of yourself with sober judgment... Think of yourself not according to the standards of the world... not according to the measures of this world... but think of yourself according to the standard (or the measure) of the Gospel... **of who you are in Christ.**”

Now, the end of vs 3 is not easy to understand... where Paul says that we are to think of ourselves *according to the measure of faith that God has assigned*...

Now – the word “measure” here is the Greek word “metron” from which we get our standard unit of measurement known as the **meter...**

So in the context of Romans and all that Paul has been saying about saving faith in Jesus Christ, this “measure of faith” is not to be understood as “an amount” of faith... but is meant to be understood as the **Standard of Faith** which has been given by God to all who believe.

If there were “degrees” or “amounts” of faith allocated differently to different people... then that would go against Paul’s whole argument here... which is that we are to no longer measure ourselves by comparing ourselves to others... but each one of us is to realize that we are equal in Christ... for we have each been given the same measure or standard of saving faith as each other person who is in Christ... Including Paul himself!

Tim Keller says *“The gospel prevents us thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought – we are sinners, and all our efforts earn only judgment, and we are saved entirely by Another’s kindness. And the gospel prevents us thinking ... more lowly [of ourselves] than we ought – [for] we are saved sinners, and we are loved and valued in the gaze of the only One whose opinion ultimately matters.”*

So before I move on... Is this the way you view yourself? As you look yourself in the mirror each day... as you think about yourself during the day... Do you think of yourself first and foremost as a trophy of God’s grace? Do you think of yourself not according to the standards of this world... but according to the standard of saving faith which has been given to you in Christ?

That’s what it means to think soberly of yourself...

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Well, Paul now moves on then to show us that we all have different gifts... Gifts given by God for us to use within the church... within the Body of Christ... Gifts which are given according the grace of God... and gifts which have nothing to do with one person being better or more important than another. All our gifts are to be used humbly in the service of the Lord... and in the service of each other.

So what follows then in vs 4-8 ... is one of a number of places in the Scriptures where various gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed... and none of the lists is intended to be complete... but instead Paul is showing how all the various gifts... those which seem more “prominent”... and those which seem more “subservient”... are all alike meant to be used for the benefit of building up the body of Christ.

Romans 12:4–8 (ESV) — 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.*

We don't have time to go through this list in detail... for there is so much that could be said about each gift which the Lord has given to us in this church... and it would be very valuable to think practically through how we can identify and apply these gifts in our local church context... But that is not the real point of Paul's exhortation here.

The main point is that the gifts God has given to his church are **diverse**... from the most “prominent” or “public” gifts... like Preaching and Teaching and Leading... to the most humble... like serving, or encouraging... or doing acts of mercy...

... **ALL** the Gifts are to be used to their fullness in the service of the Lord who gave them... and for the benefit and building up of the one body of Christ.

So as we think about the gifts that each one of us has been given... Paul is calling us to consider firstly how each one of us has benefited from Christ's gifts toward us... from Christ's preaching... Christ teaching... Christ's servicing... Christ's encouragement... Christ's generosity... Christ's leadership and Christ's mercy... and then in the light of all that you have received from Jesus... to see how we can use those gifts he has given to you to minister and serve others in the same way.

If we view our God given gifts... of which every Christians has at least one... in the light of the Gospel... there will be no place for **Pride**... for thinking too highly of yourself... there will be no place for looking down on others... there will be no place for selfishness or self-centeredness... because everything we have from God is undeserved... Every gift is a gift of his grace... and is given to us for the sole purpose of **benefitting** and **edifying** others in body of Jesus Christ.

And when we grasp this... It totally transforms the way we look at ourselves... and the way we think about ourselves.

In the second place then... Paul wants us to see that the Grace of the Gospel empowers us to:

2. Love Sincerely (vs 9-13)

Now there is probably no greater need in all of human society than this call to **Love Sincerely**... the call for our love to be **Authentic**.

Oh – there is plenty of “love” floating around in our world these days... but it is not sincere love... it is not the genuine love of Christ in the Gospel.

No... the *love* out there is mostly the **love of self**... it is the love of instant gratification... it is the superficial love of others which is all a twisted way to get them to give us what our sinful heart desires ... which comes back then to the love of self!

But – the most dramatic way in which we as Christians are to be transformed by the gospel... so that we shatter the mould of the world... is through the way we genuinely love one another.

And so in vs 9... Paul says... “Let your love be Genuine.” ... the CSB says... “Let love be without hypocrisy”!

This is the main heading of these next few verses... and all that follows in vs 9-13 are bullet points of what this Authentic love looks like.

The world around us is desperate for this kind of genuine love... because deep down in every person’s heart is a God given desire to be loved by God... a desire which we suppress... and seek to replace with all the superficial and temporary “loves” of this world.

But it is this true love of God to us in the Gospel... A love which we have experienced ourselves... which Paul is now calling us in these verses to show towards others...

Romans 12:9–13 (ESV) — 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.*

Again – we could have paused in these verses for a whole sermon... but these verses are not hard to understand... even though they certainly are hard to put into practice.

Now - It is important to note, that what Paul is speaking of here - is **only possible for believers...** because this life of genuine love... is the **product** of Gospel transformation... of Gospel renewal...

The unbeliever cannot put these things in vs 9-13 into practice – for two reasons...

- i. Because they have never understood or experienced this genuine love of God for themselves, since they continue to blind their hearts and minds to this free, genuine and complete love of Christ towards them... So they cannot give to others something which they have not experienced or received themselves.
- ii. But secondly... they cannot love others like this because they do not have the Holy Spirit living inside them... He is the one who makes this kind of love possible for us to show toward other people.

Look at vs 11... *“Do not be lazy in zeal”*... do not be lazy in showing this genuine love to others... instead be fervent in spirit... and I think the ESV footnote is correct here... that the word “spirit” should be a with capital “S” ... referring to the Holy Spirit.

The CSB says...

Romans 12:11 (CSB) — ¹¹ *Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord.*

The word translated as “fervent” here literally means “to be set on fire”... language which is connected to the working of the Holy Spirit within us... and so I like the way Douglas Moo translates this in his commentary... where he says...

*“In zeal, do not be lazy.
Be set on fire by the Spirit;
serve the Lord.”*

Now this call to genuine, Holy Spirit empowered love... is not unique to Paul's teaching – but is found throughout the NT as the evidence of the Gospel in our lives...

John 13:34–35 (CSB) — ³⁴ *“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

I would encourage you to read 1 John 2-4 this afternoon for the expanded version, but let me just highlight a few verses of what John says...

1 John 2:9–11 (ESV) — ⁹ *Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

1 John 3:11–16 (ESV) — ¹¹ *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.... ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*

1 John 4:7–12 (ESV) — ⁷ *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

So practically then... what does this true **Gospel love** look like? How do we know that we have been set on fire by the Holy Spirit living within us as believers? Well – vs 9-13 tell us... Sincere Love...

- Hates what is evil
- Loves what is good
- Loves your fellow believers with a deep brotherly affection
- Seeks to maximize the honour given to others, instead of saying things behind their back to break them down...
- Is not lazy but is set of fire by the Holy Spirit
- Serves the Lord by serving each other
- Rejoices in hope
- Is patient in Trials
- Is constantly in prayer... for one another...
- Actively cares for the needs of those in the church
- Shows hospitality

As I went through this list... are you starting to understand something of what Paul said in vs 1... where he is appealing to us to offer up **all of our lives as a living sacrifice** to God? Vs 9-13 shows us what this looks like in terms of how we think about and love our fellow believers!

This kind of sincere love for one another requires that we first die with Christ to the love of self... to the pride of our own self-importance... so that we can LIVE fully **for Jesus**... and LOVE fully **like Jesus**.

APP: You will not be able to love your spouse like this... you will not be able to love your children or your parents like this... and you certainly won't be able to love others in the church like this... unless you have first been loved by God like this... unless you have been so radically broken and stripped of all your own self-love by the Mercies of God... that you start to see everyone around you through the eyes of Jesus' love towards yourself.

So the Gospel firstly transforms the way we see ourselves... and then secondly, it transforms the way we love others... and then in the final place... Paul wants us to see that the Gospel transforms us to:

3. Live Peaceably (vs 14-21)

Now if the first two points seem impossible without the grace of God working within us... this final one blows any hope of going it alone - totally out of the water!

Lets read what Paul says next...

Romans 12:14–21 (ESV) — 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, “Vengeance is mine, 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.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now – we have a good South African saying for passages of scripture like this... it is... Eish!

While there is some debate as to who Paul has in mind in these verses... I would suggest that the flow of vs 14-21 are all primarily targeted towards unbelievers... or towards those outside of the church... many of whom set themselves up as our enemies because of our love for Jesus Christ.

But having said that... what applies here in terms of our attitude towards our enemies... is most certainly then no less applicable in terms of our attitudes towards those within the church... whom we should already be loving with the zeal and fire of the Holy Spirit within us.

For example... vs 15 is a verse which we often quote in the context of the church... that ***we should Weep with those who weep***... and ***we rejoice with those who rejoice***... and that is certainly true... But even unbelievers do that with their friends... This comes naturally.

No – Paul’s argument here is that the Gospel has transformed us so radically... that we no longer delight in the suffering of **our enemies**... but instead we weep with them!

We no longer get grumpy at the success of **our enemies**... instead we rejoice with them!

Where does this come from? How can Paul be asking us as believers to pray for the Lord’s blessing to be poured out on those who persecute us?

Well – Paul can call us to this because he was keeping the Gospel always before him! Vs3... *“for by the grace of God given to me... I say to you...”*

You see... Paul knew first-hand what it means to persecute Jesus Christ... for you will recall that he was a great persecuter of the early church... pursuing the believers into prison... and presiding over their execution...

But he was stopped on the Road to Damascus... on one of his persecution missions... as the risen Jesus confronted him and said... *“Saul, Saul... Why are you persecuting me!”*

Blinded by the glory of Jesus... Paul knew in that instant that he should have been consumed by the wrath of a holy God... He should have been immediately sent to the pit of hell to suffer eternal judgment...

But instead... the very person whom he was persecuting... Jesus Christ himself... reached out in love and grace... and saved Paul... And then men like Ananias... who would have been on Paul's persecution hit-list... showed him Gospel love and hospitality!

So Paul is reminding us all... In view of God's mercies **to you**... **You** who also at one time hated God... **you** who also at one time persecuted and ridiculed others for their faith... Remember the grace and love of Jesus toward **you** when you were his enemy... and in the same way... seek his blessing to be poured out on your enemies.

Twice in these verses he calls us to live at peace with everyone... to live in harmony with those who are our enemies: vs 16... and vs 18...

Now it won't always be possible to guarantee their response to you... but Paul is saying that you must do whatever you can from your side... to make sure that you are living at peace with those outside the church... Those who may even be your enemies!

And the key to getting this right is Gospel Humility... vs 16 b...

Romans 12:16 (ESV) —... *Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

Romans 12:16 (CSB) —... *Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.*

Now – as much as Paul is requiring this attitude towards unbelievers... how much more then should this not be our attitude towards those within the body of Christ...

And yet there are some of you in this church... who are treating your own blood bought brothers and sisters in Christ in such a way that Paul says should not even be the case with unbelievers...

There is pride in your heart... a haughty spirit... a looking down on others... a self-righteous arrogance... which is resulting in hurt and separation and bitterness which is tearing apart of very body of Christ.

If Paul is calling us as Gospel transformed people to live in harmony with our enemies... and to strive as far as we can from our side to live at peace with our enemies... **how much more** should we not do so within the members of the body of Christ... both within this local congregation... as well as with other Christians in the wider community of our town...

Paul is calling us to shove our self-righteous-wise-in-my-own-eyes-Pride into our pockets... and to go and make right with our fellow believers.

“Oh, but Clinton... You don’t know what they said in Bible study the other night... You don’t know how wonky their theology is... You don’t know the hurtful things they said... You don’t know that they ignored me in the mall... etc”

No... I don’t know... But what I do know is that if you are using those things to justify your lack of love for them and peace with them... then you don’t understand the Gospel!

No wonder the world is not challenged by our lives as Christians... because not only do we fail in these things towards those outside the church... but they look in on us bickering and backbiting amongst each other... and they call us hypocrites... and there is nothing which attracts them to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so in these final verses 19-21... Paul reminds us to let God be God!

Romans 12:19–21 (ESV) —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.”*

As we consider those who have wronged us... as we think about those who persecute us... who have actually committed **evil** against us... Paul says we are to repay **no-one** evil with evil... to never avenge ourselves... but to leave the person up to the Justice of God.

On the contrary... he says that we are to show them love... and in doing so... they will be exposed in their own shameful behaviour towards you... and will either be won over in repentance... or will be storing up even greater wrath for the day of judgment.

How they respond to your love is not your business... Your business is to love them **because of the gospel**.

Again... how does a deep and proper understanding of the Gospel help us to love our enemies?

Well – Paul has already told us back in Romans 5:10... that it was while we were enemies of God... that we were reconciled to him through the death of Jesus. (See also Eph 2:4-5)

And so it is as we ponder on God’s grace to us in Christ Jesus... that we recall the words of Psalm 103:10...

Psalm 103:10–12 (ESV) — ¹⁰ *He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.* ¹¹ *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;* ¹² *as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

If this is perhaps an area where you are struggling as a Christian today... to forgive a brother or sister in Christ... or to bless those who have wronged you... who perhaps have hurt you greatly... then let me encourage you to go home and read What Jesus has to teach us about this very issue in Matthew 18:21-35... In the Parable of the unmerciful servant...

You have been forgiven soooo much... are you not willing to forgive litte?

And so as we close this morning... I want us to see the very serious warning on which Paul ends this section... something which I think we need to take seriously today as Christians

Paul says to us... that in view of God's mercies to us in Christ... in the light of the Gospel of God's compassionate and loving grace... if we think highly of ourselves... if we do not Love others sincerely... if we do not Live Peaceably with our neighbours... if we respond to evil with evil... if we respond to persecution with bitterness... if we respond to these things in a spirit of Pride... in a spirit of self-righteousness... in a spirit of unforgiveness... **then we are being overcome by evil!**

This is not a small matter in the life of the Christian... and the devil knows this... and he has brought great destruction in the history of the church of Jesus Christ... this church included... because believers like you and me have not taken God's word seriously at this point.

So as I close today... let me read to you from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians... where Paul saw the same things raising its ugly head in that congregation... as it may be in our hearts today...

1 Thessalonians 5:13–19 (ESV) — ¹³ ... *Be at peace among yourselves.*
¹⁴ *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* ¹⁵ *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.* ¹⁶ *Rejoice always,* ¹⁷ *pray without ceasing,* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* ¹⁹ *Do not quench the Spirit.*

So may I encourage you... urge you... appeal to you in view of God's mercies to you... to **think soberly of yourself...** to **love others with the genuine love of Christ...** and to **live peaceably with everyone** in this community in which God has placed us... and with those outside!

Do not be overcome by evil... Do not quench the Spirit of God... instead... Overcome evil with Good... be set on fire by the Holy Spirit... to serve the Lord... and to love one another.

Let us pray.