

Sept. 3, 2023

Romans 12:9-21

“In Here and Out There”

There is a dichotomy that every disciple of Jesus Christ faces of living betwixt two realities. We are citizens of heaven, while at the same time pilgrims in this world. And so, there is constant tension we face. The pull of the kingdom of God and the pull of this world.

Phil 3:20 “²⁰ But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior”.

Heb 11:13 “¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

I Peter 1:17 “¹⁷ And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as temporary residents.”

I believe this dichotomy drove Paul to write incessantly about how we are to live considering this fact. **For the community of faith there is an in here and an out there.** And so, it should be no surprise that we are given clear instructions regarding life in in here (life in the faith community) and out there (life outside the faith community). We find such instructions in our text this morning. In verses 9-13 Paul gives the prescript for life within the community of faith and in verses 14-21 he gives us instructions for life with those outside the community of faith. So, let us this morning examine what Paul instructs more deeply.

Life in here. V9-13, “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.* ¹⁰ *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;* ¹¹ *not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;* ¹² *rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;* ¹³ *distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*” What a list Church. It is no coincidence that Paul starts with love. For love is the defining characteristic for the community of faith, for disciples of Jesus Christ. And when it comes to love Paul writes there is to be no pretending, no faking it. When genuine love is absent from the community of faith it is palatable. And those out there pick it up very quickly when they enter in here. When love is prevalent among the body of believers all these other things Paul prescribes happen. So, if our initial response to hearing this text was, “how can we possibly do all this”, we can’t apart from love. Agape, that love that produces among us a deep affection and concern for, and benevolence towards one another. Sisters and brothers, love is the key to not only life in here, but life out there. **Romans 13:10** “¹⁰ Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.”

John 15:13 “¹³ There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

1 Peter 4:8-10 “⁸ Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. ¹⁰ God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one

another.” Church, love must have its way in here first, producing righteousness, selflessness, commitment, steadfastness, and generosity before it could ever have its way out there.

Life out there. V-14-21 (NIV), “¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” How hard this teaching is. The New Interpreter’s Bible commentary states the following on these verses of scripture, and I quote, “It is hard to imagine this teaching becoming the norm in the church, as it clearly did from the very start, unless it was firmly rooted in the words and example of Jesus himself”, end quote. In other words, no one could do this in his or her own strength. It goes completely against our nature to defend and protect ourselves. Who blesses those who mistreat them? No one, except followers of Jesus. Why? Because we follow his example. He overcame evil with good and so must we. He blessed those who persecuted him and so must we. He sought to live at peace with all men, as much as possible, and so must we. He rejoiced with

the rejoicing and wept with the weeping and so must we. So, this week when some random person is not happy with your driving and flips you the sign, follow them to the gas station, apologize for upsetting them and offer to pay for his/her gas. When your neighbors allow their dog to poop in your yard and leave it, do not pick it up and toss it in their driveway. Place it nicely in your trashcan. When you are labeled intolerant because you will not compromise what you believe, do not get mad at that individual. Instead, invite him or her to lunch or dinner and pay for it. When your friend or loved one says something mean and unloving do not go along with it, call them out. When your boss mistreats you, do not cuss him or her (in your mind), buy him/her Starbucks or Biggby Coffee the next day instead in the name of love. Church do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. Life in here and out there. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.