

Pay-It-Forward Christianity
Romans 12:9-21
The Source: August 27, 2014

A couple of years ago, my mother went out to lunch with four other women, all in their 80s. They were laughing and eating and having just a great time. After they were done eating, the waitress came up to them and said that a gentleman sitting several tables away paid for all their meals. He was watching them having a great time and laughing together. He was so delighted with what he saw that he paid for their meals. They never knew who the man was.

About a week ago, I read about what happened at a Starbucks (I can't remember what city). A person told a barista that she wanted to pay for the coffee of the person waiting in line behind her. That person was so grateful that he paid for the coffee of the person behind him. This went on for 11 hours without breaking the cycle!

We call this "pay-it-forward." Someone does something for you, and out of gratitude, you give back to someone else.

I bring this up because Christianity is sort of like these pay-it-forward examples. Extended to us is God's grace, God's mercy, God's love, God's salvation through Jesus Christ. We don't earn it; we won't work for it. It's just given to us, free of charge. As a result of God's grace extended to us, we are to pay-it-forward to someone else, to express our gratitude for this grace. You can call it pay-it-forward Christianity, and it is described in our scripture passage today. By doing what is described in these verses, we express our gratitude for God's grace given to us.

Turn back with me to the first two verses in chapter 12. In a sense, they are the introduction to the verses in our scripture passage (9-21). In the chapters before chapter 12, Paul is describing and explaining the grace of God. Then we come to chapter 12:1-2.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Because of God's grace extended to us, "therefore" we express our gratitude by holy living and a transformed mind. Verses 9-21 show us what that transformed mind looks like in our lives. It is the grace of God reflected in our human relationships.

So hear what a transformed mind looks like in our scripture passage. Read Romans 12:9-21

Quite a list, isn't it?!

Many say the first sentence is the headline – Let love be genuine. The rest follows on what love looks like. Here is a definition of love that I came across that I like:

"Love is the heart-felt affection of the Christian in response to the love God has shown toward us, especially in the gift of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Love is an affection which prompts the Christian to action."

In simpler words, our love as Christians is to be both a **response** to God's love and a **reflection** of His love. That's what these verses are about.

The first group of verses (9-16) are visible markers of love that we show to fellow believers: exhibiting brotherly affection, showing honor to one another, living zealously by the Spirit, living in hope, contributing to the needs of the saints, and practicing hospitality. This love, then, extends out to others.

Christian fellowship is so unique that the first believers searched for a word to describe it. They knew that no ordinary word could describe the relationship that existed among believers. They found it in a word that was no longer in use: koinonia. It is a special kind of fellowship because of a response to God's love and a reflection of his love. Koinonia is what transformed people look like.

So, these first verses show us how to express love between our brothers and sisters and to extend that outside our fellowship. In fact, so extended, it is extended into the presence of evil, which is the second set of verses (17-21) This is what sets Christians apart from all others by the way we respond to our enemies.

All we are doing is being consistent with the character of God that was expressed through Jesus. Hear the words of Jesus who was also very specific on how to treat those who hate us:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy,’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:38-45a)

A transformed mind sees and lives life vastly different than the rest of the world. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

As we pull back and look at these verses, two themes come out. One is passion. You hear such words as love one another...hate evil... be devoted to one another...zeal...fervor...rejoice. We are called to engage from the heart the people around us, to be deeply committed to them, to care what goes on with them, to be able to walk in their shoes and look at life from their perspective, to have their burdens be ours, to weep and mourn and rejoice, and to pray fervently. That’s a lot of passion! Do it all the way.

The other theme is generosity. Essentially the point being made here is, “Give more than you get.” Look for ways to spend yourself for someone else rather than keeping track of whether you are getting back as much as you give.

The word “hospitality” is used in this passage. Hospitality doesn’t mean extending an invitation to receive a return invitation. Hospitality is reaching out to people who are unlikely to ever pay you back, who can’t give you as much as you are going to give them. It even extends to those who mean us harm. A renewed mind will think of a way to be a blessing rather than attack.

This is an extraordinary calling.

It’s paying it forward in response to the grace of God extended to you.

Yesterday some of us were meeting and thinking about what our church will look like in 2020. In the past, we’ve been known as “The Rich Church on the Hill.” Someone in the group said, “I want us to be known as the church that cares for our community.”

Our verses today show us what that looks like.

So, let's read these together and pray that God will continue to transform our hearts and minds into this kind of people and community so our community will know of God's free grace.

(put on ppt and have congregation read with me)

- bless those who persecute us
- do not curse those who persecute us
- rejoice with those who rejoice
- weep with those who weep
- live in harmony
- don't be stuck-up
- mingle with the less fortunate
- don't think we've so smart
- don't repay evil with evil
- live peaceably with all
- don't take revenge
- feed our hungry enemies
- give drink to the thirsty enemies
- don't be overcome with evil
- overcome evil with good

Amen.

Sing *"They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love"*

Prayer

I am going to pray you through this list. I am going to ask you to pray for those who persecute you or curse you or have done evil to you. When you pray for that person, do not pray 'Lord, change them,' rather, Lord change me to love them.

So, think of someone who has persecuted you or cursed you – could be in the past or the present. (Pause) Give that person to God and ask God to change you in relation to that person (Pause)

Lord Jesus Christ, **hear our prayer.**

Think of someone you need to rejoice with, or someone you need to weep with. (Pause). Pray for them. (Pause) Lord Jesus Christ, **hear our prayer.**

Think of someone you love with whom you are not in harmony with, someone you want to take revenge on, someone you are not at peace. (Pause) Give them to God and ask God to change you in relation to that situation. (Pause) Lord Jesus Christ, **hear our prayer.**

Think of an evil person or situation, whether you know the person or not, whether you are involved in the situation or not. (Pause). Pray that you will not be overcome by it. Pray how you can overcome the evil with good. (Pause)
Lord Jesus Christ, **hear our prayers.**

The Lord's Prayer

Will you please stand.

("Passing the Peace" ppt slide)

We talked about koinonia, fellowship, harmony, love to one another, hospitality.

We now practice it in word as we extend the peace of Christ to one another.

The peace of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

Sing *Everybody Sing Alleluia*

Blessing