

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon for August 30, 2026

Romans 12:9-21 - "Let Love Be Genuine"

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew in me a right spirit, that genuine love might flow in and through me and your church for the healing and wholeness of our world. Amen.

Last week, we heard Paul reminding his readers that they are more than individuals. They are individuals who are members of one another, with differing gifts that contribute to the whole. Paul declared that we are one body in Christ with many members, and that each of us brings unique gifts into the community. In the Catechism found in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, we acknowledge Paul's statement, declaring that "according to the gifts we have been given" we are to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world, here and now, where we are and while we are here. And Paul acknowledged that we will not all do this the same way. We do not have to all march in step together, but rather we are to exercise the unique gifts we have each been given in our own unique ways. Not everyone has the same gifts. Not everyone has to follow Jesus in just the same way as the next person. The best news of all being, of course, that no one is expected to do anything that God has not already equipped us to do. I labelled it as "Team Church" – all working together, using our unique gifts, to be a community called church, a community called to be a living sacrifice in the name of Jesus.

The reading from Romans today could be considered a group covenant for Christians, a list of core values on which the activities and ministries of church are built, a reminder about how we are meant to live in the days between worship services. Paul's words are a description and an invitation to Christian community.

So, what it is that he calls us to do? Let's see if I can set it up in "Ten Commandments style":

1. Love genuinely
2. Overcome evil with good
3. Love one another
4. Show honour to one another
5. Be fervent in spirit
6. Rejoice in hope
7. Be patient in suffering
8. Be constant in prayer
9. Show hospitality
10. Bless those who persecute you
11. Be sympathetic
12. Live in harmony with one another
13. Do not repay evil with evil
14. Live peaceably
15. Do not avenge yourselves

Ok, so that was way more than ten. Paul has a lot to say about what it means to serve Christ! But there is one common theme: Love. Love is the overarching paradigm for the whole of Romans chapter 12, the first half about loving God and the second half about loving each other. Paul echoes Jesus in calling attention to love as the key moral norm for God's people. Jesus had said that all the law and the prophets

hang on two commands: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Love finds its full expression in community, where people share life together with its joys, its pains and wrongs, its sorrows.

At the beginning of our reading today, Paul assumes that his audience knows that they are to love, and he presses them to make their love for each other genuine. Genuine love is more than just being nice to people. Genuine love has a moral orientation toward the good. When we show love toward someone, we are moving them toward God's goodness. To love someone is not simply to cater to specific likes and dislikes of that person. It is rather to act toward them in ways that help them experience more of God's goodness.

And while we don't always like to talk about good and evil as if they are polar opposite absolutes from each other, there are evils in the world that we do need to fight against. There is so much hate, oppression, injustice, deception, manipulation, and violence in the world. We really can't just sit back and ignore what is going on if we truly believe in justice and peace and freedom.

Jesus calls us to follow a pattern of responding to evil not by retaliating, but by embracing those who do evil with mercy, kindness, and forgiveness. Responding to the world's evil with genuine love is how we will begin to see real change in the world. Paul reinforces Jesus' call, telling us that we are not to repay evil with evil. When we oppose those who do evil in our world with anger, we are more likely to perpetuate the evil they do. So how then do we respond to evil?

In the same way Jesus did. Jesus knew that only the willingness to respond to hostility with peace, to respond to hatred with forgiveness, can redeem evil. We need to respond with love, genuine love. Love which does not reject evil is not genuine. Genuine love must reject the systemic evils in our culture and society. This does not mean rejecting the individual, rather rejecting hateful ideology, language, and actions that deny the humanity and prevents others from living fully and freely as God intended.

This is what Jesus meant when he said that those who want to follow him will have to take up the cross. He was calling us all to follow his pattern of responding to evil by not retaliating, but by embracing those who do evil with mercy and kindness and forgiveness. Only when we can embrace those who do evil in our world with genuine love can we hope to respond to what they do in a way that will bring real change – responding to violence with forgiveness, responding to hatred with compassion, responding to hostility with peace. When we do, we have the chance to change not only what they do but more importantly who they are. As we embrace those who do evil, we have the chance to make a change that can create peace and justice and freedom.

The Gospel of Christ has always been counter-cultural, but for centuries "Christendom" masked this reality, in an assumption that we lived in a "Christian society". As a result, we have become stagnant, making assumptions that the world was made for Christians, erasing the memory that Christians are meant to go against the grain, to toss the tables, and to defend the oppressed. As Christians, we need to make a conscious choice, not just once but over and over again, about whom we are going to follow. To discern how to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. Making the decision to take up Jesus' cross and respond to the world's evil with genuine love so that we can create real change in the world.

As Christians, we are called to live by a different standard in all parts of life. It is easy to attend worship each week and leave it all at the door on your way out. To live according to Paul's core values that I listed

before is a daily commitment. So why don't we make that commitment to ourselves and to each other right now? Repeat after me:

I promise to show hospitality toward others.

I promise to live in peace and harmony with others.

I promise to be sympathetic and compassionate to those around me.

I promise to do good and let God be the judge.

I promise to bless those who persecute me, and to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

I promise to overcome evil with good.

I promise to rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and be constant in prayer.

I promise to have real and genuine love for others.

By making these promises to each other, we have committed ourselves to our calling of being a living sacrifice in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.