

A Peaceable Kingdom

Thomas Robinson, *Life Renewing* 2, September 24, 2017

Romans 12:9-21

⁴For as in one body we have many different body parts, and not all the body parts have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually we are **members one of another**. ⁶We have **gifts of grace** that differ according to **the grace given to us**: if it's **prophecy**, in proper relation to our faith; ⁷if it's **ministry**, in ministry; if you're one who **teaches**, in the teaching; ⁸if you're an **encourager**, in encouraging; the **giver**, in simple generosity; the **leader**, in diligence; the one who shows **mercy**, in cheerfulness.

⁹Let **love** be without pretense, abhorring what is evil, holding fast to what is good. ¹⁰With **mutual affection** be devoted to each other as you outdo one another in **showing honor**. ¹¹Don't lag in diligence as you are **ardent in the Spirit serving the Lord**. ¹²**Celebrate in hope**, persevere in **suffering**, be continually in **prayer**. ¹³**Contribute to the needs** of God's people; be diligent in **welcoming strangers**.

¹⁴**Bless** those who persecute you. **Bless!** Don't curse them. ¹⁵**Celebrate** with those who are celebrating, **weep** with those who are weeping. ¹⁶**Think** with a shared focus toward each other. Don't think haughtily, but associate with the humble. Don't be clever in your own opinion.

¹⁷**Don't repay anyone evil for evil**, but choose to **do things that are excellent** in the sight of all people. ¹⁸If possible, so far as depends on all of you, **live peaceably with all people**.

¹⁹**Don't avenge yourselves**, my beloved people, but leave room for the wrath, for it is written, "*Vindication is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.*" [Deut 32:35] ²⁰On the contrary, "*if your enemy is hungry, feed them; if they're thirsty, give them a drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on their head.*" [Prov 25:21-22]

²¹Don't be conquered by the evil, but **conquer the evil with good**.

Romans 12:2

²Don't let yourselves be shaped by this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, in order that you may discern what is God's intention – which is for what is good and pleasing and mature.

Philippians 2:1-11

¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any deep feeling and compassion, ²fill up my joy that you think the same thing, having the same love, together in soul and thinking the one thing. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty glory, but with humility of thought consider others even more valuable than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

⁵Think this among yourselves, which also means in Messiah Jesus: ⁶Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider that equality with God a thing to be exploited, ⁷rather he emptied himself, by taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. ⁸And being found in human shape, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and graced him with the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that in Jesus' name every knee should bow, of those in heaven and on earth and under earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that "Jesus Messiah is LORD," to the glory of God the Father.

Luke 6:27-28

²⁷"But I say to you who listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

Matthew 5:43-45

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven."

Renewing the Mind in a World of Conquering Evil

Paul writes to a highly diverse church (Jew, Roman, Greek, Slave, Free, etc.) in the imperial capital. People from different worlds of thought. All challenged by Jesus. In eight years many would die under Nero's persecution. Should they arm themselves? Form a militia? Split up.

Renewing the mind: How to be a community really shaped by Jesus. Learning to think in a new way, with a shared focus (16). Not conquered by evil calling us into its way (21) The danger is not suffering/persecution, but being shaped by the lure or threat of the world's ways .

Paul starts looking at the diversity of people, of gifts of grace, of ministry (4-8). That sets the challenge of a community that can embody and experience God's kingdom coming "on earth as in heaven." He calls them to that reality (9-16), always aware of how things can go wrong. He helps them to think about a hostile world around them (17-20) to resist the strong urge to respond with defensive exclusion and hostility even when it seems justified.

A Real Community with Real Love

Paul starts with work on love, not as a slogan, but a transforming pattern of life (9). Always seeking the real good of the other. Love opposes every evil, abuse, malice. But it doesn't just happen. Rather selfishness and exclusion just happen. Love is the foundation of a conscious identity and way of life shaped by Jesus. We naturally compete to get ahead of others (even in spiritual gifts). Only compete to show honor, respect, valuing each other as people (10).

This is a community of engagement, diligence, fired by God's Spirit, serving Jesus everywhere (11). It moves toward God's goal, a hope now and future, and celebrates that future. It is human and knows all the tribulations of humans, facing them with perseverance. It always lives in a constant, growing relationship to God in prayer, study, and meditation (12).

The community's diversity means diverse needs that the community shares in meeting. But it doesn't turn inward, always being diligent to welcome strangers with hospitality (13).

It is a place of blessing! It's not for cursing or harsh judgment, not even of obviously wrong persecutors (14). Genuine experiences of joy and sorrow are valued and shared together (15).

It is where we learn a shared focus toward each other defined by the reality of Jesus and all that he has done. The core of the renewed mind (Phi 2:1-11). God's reality of humility, self-giving love (16). Our instincts are for advancement, but true advancement is toward the self-giving, serving love of God that has given us our identity and outlasts all the triumphs of our world.

A Peaceable Kingdom in an Environment of Conflict

Like Jesus, Paul calls believers to reject all reactions of vengeance, hurt, evil for evil, etc. We always know our own responses are justified, only fair. But "evil for evil" is evil's conquest of us. The challenge is to respond with active excellence, genuine love, prayer, blessing. Not because the evil-doer deserves it, but because that is who we are, shaped by Jesus.

"Blessed are the Peacemakers." "God so loved the world..." God's kingdom is a peaceable kingdom that creates the opening of reconciliation between people and with God (19). We have such instincts for conflict, self-justification, revenge, this is a perennial challenge.

Living this peace means taking God's future/our hope seriously. Only God is capable of dealing with the brokenness and wrong of our lives without being corrupted by it (19). We want to heap coals on enemies, then feed them, love them; be true to yourself. Don't let their hurtful way triumph. Good doesn't conquer evil by becoming evil, but by loving doing good.