

CONCORD
SUNDAY SCHOOL

LESSON 35

SUNDAY,
AUGUST 30, 2020



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Romans 12:9-21 NRSV

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

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; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Background

The longest of Paul’s letters, Romans is a letter written to the believers who live in Rome. Rome, the center of the Empire, was a cosmopolitan city. There were people of many ethnicities living here. Paul himself had never visited the city, and thus, his aims for writing are more about telling the story of Christ’s power. Earlier in this chapter, Paul reminds the people that we are “many members, and one

body.” In your own devotional period, take some time to read the chapter in its entirety. Why do you think Paul felt compelled to write about unity?

Today’s lesson will focus on building a community covenant.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. Think back to a first day of school that you can remember. What usually happens on the first day of school?

What’s happening during this passage?

This is a letter that Paul has written for a specific community. In some bible translations, the header of this passage is “Marks of a True Christian.” Paul gives a list of ways that people can truly show their passion for Christ.

- Let love be Genuine
- Hate what is evil
- Hold fast to what is good
- Love one another with mutual affection
- Do not lag in zeal
- Rejoice in hope
- Contribute to the needs of the saints, especially strangers
- Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep
- Live in harmony with each other
- Do not think more highly of yourself than you are
- If it is possible, live peaceably with all

This is not an exhaustive list, but it does highlight some of the most sacred challenges for the Christian. Paul is writing to a people he has never met, but yet, still has great care and concern for. He models what it means to have “siblings-in-Christ” by offering these small nuggets of wisdom that are valid in 98% of circumstances. Paul also makes room for the impossible. In verse 18, Paul reminds the people that “so far as it depends on you,” live peaceably with all. Which means, we can only be responsible for that which belongs to us. We cannot make peace with people who do not want peace.

Why would Paul write this to these people?

Rome is the center of the Roman Empire. It was also a very diverse city with people of many religions, ethnicities and traditions. In a community like this, it is im-

portant to establish a covenant of behavior. How will we engage one another? How will we talk to each other? How do we support each other? What are our expectations of each other? What behaviors are unacceptable here? In any community, it's important to establish a covenant. A covenant helps guide people's hearts and actions.

Why do we recite the covenant on First Sundays?

We, as a community, recite the covenant to remind us of our shared values. We covenant to “avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger.” We covenant to “educate our children in the truth that is in Christ Jesus” and to “contribute regularly and cheerfully to the support of the ministry, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.” We, as a community, come together around these principles because covenants help form our identity in Christ. What is it that we believe, that we hold sacred, that we value?

Why might someone be encouraged to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep?”

If someone in our community is struggling, that means we are struggling. If someone in our community is doing well, we are doing well. As we have been reminded in the last few months, we are only as strong as our neighbor. We are only as healthy as our neighbors are. We have to have the empathy and compassion that compels us to care for our neighbors in all seasons. It is easy to support people when they're doing well, but how do we take care of each other in “sickness and distress?”

Imagine what kinds of communities we would have if instead of caring only about our individual homes and families, we engaged in cooperative economics? We might not need to depend on racist government programs as much.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today's World

Toomsboro, Georgia is now home to a Black-owned collective! 19 Black Families came together to purchase 90 acres of land. The Freedom Georgia Initiative is a fresh start for Black, self-sustaining community. The organizers attended different zoning meetings and city council sessions to establish this space. In their own words, they realized they could either “try to fix a broken system, or we could start



fresh. Start a city that could be a shining example of being the change you want to see. We wanted to be more involved in creating the lives we really want for our Black families...And maybe, just maybe, create some generational wealth for ourselves by investing in the land. Investing in creating a community that is built around our core values and beliefs.”

This community came into creation and was catalyzed by the killing of Ahmaud Arbery. The organizers of this

community had always been involved in real estate, but this tragic story sparked a movement. It made the need for self-sufficient communities even that much more urgent. A shared value in this community is the sanctity and worthiness of Black life. Sounds like heaven.

Journal: What is a value that you hold sacred personally? What about as a church? What do we value?

Closing: Sing/watch “Blessed Be The Tie That Binds,”

For a video, click here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OG5P396XMuw>

*Blessed be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like that to that above.*

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are the God who gives us our values. You have showed us through Moses, through Mary, through Christ, through Phoebe what our values must be. We thank you for the witness of Biblical and community models for justice, compassion and love.

We are in need of a community healing. We need to be able to trust each other. The days ahead are worth praying about. Give us the courage and the wisdom to be vulnerable with each other. Help us to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen

Works Cited:

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/intros/romans.cfm>

<https://www.becauseofthemwecan.com/blogs/culture/19-families-purchased-96-71-acres-of-land-in-georgia-to-create-a-city-safe-for-black-people>

Connection to Today's World

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