

Love In Action – Part 2

Romans 12:14-21

Pastor John Miller

“Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. 15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. 16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. 17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. 18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:14-21

If you have a Bible tonight I want you to open it with me to Romans 12. We're going to continue a little mini series within the book of Romans on the subject of love. The title of the message is: Love in Action. We're going to be looking at love of our enemies. It is not easy to love your enemies. It takes a supernatural ability to love. The Christian life is not easy. It's impossible apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen? We need to be filled with His Spirit to be able to love our enemies, and this is an amazing passage tonight. I want you to follow with me verses 14-21.

I suggest to you, the only way that we can put these verses into practice is to go back to Romans 12:1. I hope that as you sang that song, it was a prayer from your heart. You know, when we worship, it's not just words it's worship to God. They are prayers to God. When we sang, “Lord, I stand and I surrender...all I have is Yours,” and you make that a prayer, it's powerful. Your life can be transformed by the power of God's Spirit. When His Spirit comes in to transform your life, you find yourself even loving the unlovely. You find yourself loving your enemies. You find yourself doing good to those who do evil to you, and you find yourself praying for those who even persecute you.

Some of you already, I can tell by the way you're looking at me, are thinking, “I shouldn't have come tonight. He's going to tell us that we must love our enemies.” No. I'm not going to tell you that. God has already told you that in His Word. The issue tonight is have you really surrendered everything to Jesus? Are you surrendered to Him to where you can have His love flowing forth from your life? When we are moved by the mercies of God to present our bodies, and when our minds have been renewed by His Word to do His will, our relationships become transformed. Not only do we offer our bodies, Romans 12:1-2, as living sacrifices, but we develop a sober image, verses 3-8, of ourselves of humility, and then we begin to love one another in the church, verses 9-13. Now, in verses 14-21, we move outside the body of Christ.

It's easy to love your brothers and sisters in Christ but not so easy to love those who are outside the church who persecute and oppose us. Paul makes it very clear in this final paragraph of Romans 12 that in our relationships with our enemies we are not to curse them,

verse 14, but to bless them. In verse 17, we are not to repay evil for evil, but we are to repay good for evil. In verse 19, we are not to take revenge but let God take revenge for He says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." In verse 21, and we'll get there in just a moment, we are not to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. As we go through this passage and unpack it, I want to show you that Jesus Himself actually taught the same thing. Write this down, Luke 6:27-28. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." Oh that's so hard to do! Some of you are freaking out right now. You're saying, "Oh no! I gotta love my husband." "I gotta pray for my wife." "I gotta pray for my teenager." "I gotta pray for my boss on the job." Yes, that's true, but God will give you the supernatural strength by His Holy Spirit.

In these verses, there are six ways God's love is put into action in our relationships with the world. I want to move through them and try not to get bogged down too slow. Notice the first one is in verse 14. Love speaks well of its persecutors. If you don't want to write all that down, just write love is gracious and shows forbearance. Go back with me to verse 14 of Romans 12. "Bless them which persecute you." I want you to notice that you will be persecuted. This world is not your home. You are a child of God living in a world of people who are the children of the devil. You're living in the world that is under the prince and the power of the air. You're going against the grain. You're living in the counterculture of God's kingdom, so you're going to face opposition, persecution, and they're going to come against you in your relationship with the Lord. So, what are we supposed to do? I want you to notice it there. We're to bless them.

The word "bless" is a compound word made up of two words, "well" and "word." It means to speak well of someone. It means to say good things about them with your words. Our English word "eulogy" comes from the Greek word translated here to bless them. When you eulogize someone you say good things about them. When we're worshiping the Lord, we are blessing the Lord. We are praising Him, extolling, exalting and magnifying Him with our songs. We're blessing the Lord. We are to say good things about even our enemies. That's kind of a difficult thing to do, but we are to look for that and say good things about them. That's the positive, but notice the negative. We are not to curse them. We are to bless them and not curse them. "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not." Jesus, in the book of Matthew, the sermon on the mount, said that you bless and pray for them, and you are going to do that being like your Father who is in heaven because He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

Did you ever notice when it rains that it lands on the fields of even unbelievers? God doesn't say, "No, they're not going to get rain." God is good even to the unbelievers. The Bible says the rain falls on the just and on the unjust. If you want to be like God, then we bless and do not curse them. When Jesus was hanging on the cross in 1 Peter 2:21-23 it says, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again." Being cursed, He didn't curse back. Do you see Jesus hanging on the cross spitting back at the people or yelling back at them? They're mocking and He starts yelling back at them, "You're going to get yours at the second coming. You wait!" "There's going to be a sword coming out of My mouth and it's going to be headed right for you, Buckaroo!" Now, if I had been on the cross that's what I would've been doing. I would've been yelling back at them and screaming, "You wait until I come back at my second coming." What

did Jesus do? Our example, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." Wow! That's our Lord. That's our Savior. That's the One we're following. If we're Christ's followers, then we need to pray and bless those who would even come against us and persecute us. Love shows gracious forbearance, verse 14, to those who come against and even curse us.

Secondly, notice that love is sympathetic and understanding. I love verse 15. Love adjusts to people's moods. Love feels what other people feel. Love is concerned, caring, and sympathetic. Look up the word sympathetic. It means to feel with, to understand with. Look at verse 15. He says, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." What a great verse, a classic verse, we all know this verse. We all understand how easy it is to weep with those that weep. "Awwwww that's too bad you lost your job. That's too bad. You know, you're going through these struggles. Let me pray for you." It's not easy to rejoice with those that rejoice. It's kind of our sinful nature. When somebody has something really good happen to them that we want to happen to us, and it doesn't happen to us, sometimes we get jealous or envious. "Lord, I pray more than they do. My Bible is bigger than theirs. I go to church more often. I tithe more than they do. I'm more spiritual than they are." Maybe you're single and you haven't gotten married but you've been in everyone else's wedding. You've been a maid of honor 20 times, or you've been a best man 20 times, and all your friends are getting married. It's like, "Lord, this isn't fair! I'm better looking than they are! I'm more spiritual. What's going on here, Lord?" We begin to get all upset. Somebody calls you and says, "Oh, you won't believe it! Someone just gave me a brand new car!" You're driving an old junker and you say (gritting your teeth) "Praise the Lord. I'm really happy for you, brother." "God, I'm mad at You! I'm not going to church tonight! Lord, I've been praying for a new car. Why did they get a new car?" It's really difficult. True love never stands aloof from other people's joys or pains. It's sympathetic. It sings with them and suffers with them.

Listen to what John R.W. Stott said. He said, "Love enters deeply into their experiences and their emotions, their laughter and their tears, and feels solidarity with them whatever is their mood." Someone put it in a poem, A sorrow shared is but half a trouble, but a joy that's shared is a joy made double. I like that. So when people are weeping, "God, give us a sympathetic heart to feel what they feel, to be moved with their pain." One of the reasons God allows us to go through pain, sorrow and suffering is to give us a sympathetic heart. The world has been most greatly advanced by those who suffer. You show me somebody who has never suffered and I'll show you somebody who is shallow and hasn't got anything to contribute. God uses that to make us one with the sorrowing heart, and God help us to have a sympathetic and a compassionate heart. I know people that are loving and when you weep, they weep. When you're glad, they're glad. They rejoice with you, they weep with you, and they feel with you. That's what it means here in verse 15, that we're to rejoice with those that rejoice. Love enters deeply into their sorrows and even to their successes.

Again, what an example Jesus was. He went to the wedding of Canaan and celebrated with their joys. He also went to dinner at Matthew the tax collector's and Zacchaeus' home and people were criticizing Him saying, "He's gone to be the guest of a sinner." I believe that when Matthew said, "Lord, will you come to my house?" He said, "I'm there! I'm all over that. Let's

party at Matthew's house. I'm ready to come." He was ready to celebrate Matthew's conversion. Matthew became a disciple. Matthew became a follower of Jesus, and He rejoiced with him, but then when you see Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, and Mary and Martha are weeping and others are weeping, what did Jesus do? Jesus wept. It's the shortest verse in the Bible but one of the most profound. Jesus wept conveying His true humanity. Not only humanity, but sinless humanity, sympathetic humanity. Jesus would express joy, sorrow, and He would weep with those that weep. We need to have the same kind of compassion. When others are honored then we should be blessed. When others fall, we should weep with those who have fallen.

Let me give you a third characteristic of love in action, verse 16, love does not show partiality or it is likable and humble. Look at verse 16. He says, "Be of the same mind one toward another." Now, it doesn't mean that we agree on everything, but it means that we think about one another, care about one another, and our minds are toward one another. "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate," think the same thing toward each other or live in harmony. Paul said the same thing in Philippians 2:2. He talked about that we should be concerned with the interests of others. We should look not every one on our own concerns or our own interests, but everyone on the interest and concerns of others. Can you imagine in a church or in a family or in a marriage or in a community, in a nation, where everybody was looking out for one another? And, when you actually came to a four-way stop, "No, you go." "No, you go." "No, you go." There were accidents because people were trying to let each other go first. Or you go to a grocery store, I go to the grocery store to buy stuff about every 15 years. This week I had to venture into a supermarket. I had two little items and had to wait in these lines with tons of stuff. The express lane wasn't open. I'm thinking, "You know, if these people really loved me they'd let me get up in front. Do they know that I'm Pastor John Miller from Revival Christian Fellowship?" I had to wait and wait. You know, if we were thoughtful we'd say, "Hey, oh you go ahead of me. You only have two items, so you go ahead of me." "No, no, no, that's okay you go....never mind I will go first." But that we were considerate of one another, and when we come to church, we're waiting on one another. We prefer one another and take time for one another. We live in harmony together. I am to want you to have what I would want if I were in your shoes or your situation. I need to try to feel what you feel. I'm excited when you are blessed. He actually says there in verse 16 that we should live in humility. "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." Don't be proud. Don't avoid people that you don't think are worthy of your fellowship, but be willing to associate with people of a lowly position. Don't be a snob is what he's saying there. He's actually saying, "Don't be a Christian snob." We sometimes practice snobbery as Christians.

Think about Jesus. He was born in a manger. He was subject to His parents. He was baptized by John. He touched lepers. He touched lepers and cleansed them from their leprosy. He didn't say, "Oh, just stay away." If I were the Messiah and I could heal people I'd say, "Just stay right there. I'll heal you from here. You don't need to get any closer. It's cool. Stay. You're healed. Be gone." Compassionate Messiah that I would be. He didn't need to touch them. He could've just spoke the word and healed them, but it's just something about the human touch.

There's something about feeling somebody's arms around you or somebody hugging you or squeezing your neck or someone just putting their arm around you. Jesus would reach out. Here's God in human flesh, and here is this leprous man. Jesus would reach out and touch him, and instead of being defiled, He would cleanse that individual. I love the stories of Jesus healing the infirmed, the sick, feeding the hungry. He stopped for blind Bartimaeus when others were saying, "He hasn't got time for you. He's too busy for you. Be quiet, blind man." Jesus stopped and made His way through the crowd to blind Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus who was begging by the highway, and the God of all creation, the God of all the universe stopped and had time for a begging blind man. Yet, we fly right by them. We kind of ignore them. "Ooo, they're filthy or they've got cooties. Don't touch them." We claim to be followers of Jesus, and we don't want to touch people. We don't want to reach out to people. What an example Jesus was. Jesus was a friend of prostitutes and tax collectors. When you'd go down the street you'd see some prostitutes, and Jesus is standing there talking to them. Those are the people He was drawn to, the people who were in need. He took time for children. He said, "Forbid them not for such is the kingdom of heaven." He chose humble fishermen to be His disciples and to send out as His apostles. He didn't go to the learned or the educated or the rich or the famous. He found the working class, the common everyday laborer, fishermen. He was a carpenter, and He sent them out to do His preaching. Jesus condescend. Jesus was humble. Jesus reached out and touched people in their needs.

Let me give you the fourth mark of love. Love lives thoughtfully in society, verse 17. He says, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." Now, he says it a couple of times in this passage and in a couple of different ways. Here he is saying, "Don't pay back anyone for evil but, "provide things honest in the sight of all men," or be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. Don't recompense evil for evil. It's not an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. It's not, "You rip me off, I'm gonna rip you off." "You lie about me, I'm going to lie about you." "You attack me, I'm going to attack you." He's telling us that we are not to pay evil for evil. See that your public behavior is above criticism being thoughtful of others. It's so very important. We need to be concerned with others.

I want you to notice the fifth mark of love in action, verse 18. Love seeks to live at peace with everyone. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." I believe Paul wrote it that way because he realized that some people refused to live peaceably. Some people will not be pacified. They don't want to get along, but you, on your part, need to do all that you can to try to get along with others. Now, I do believe that in the context here it's outside the body of Christ, and it becomes very clear and very evident that he's talking about outside the body of Christ when you get to verses 17-21. He's telling us here that as much as we can, live peaceably with all men. You have people that are heckling and hassling you on the job, try to live peaceably with them. You say, "Well, Pastor John, they don't want to live peaceably. They hate God, they hate Christianity, and they're just hassling me, so I think we should go lay hands on them. You know, there is the doctrine of laying on of hands." No. We need to try as much as we can to live peaceably with all men. Do your part.

Years ago, when there were some people complaining and griping about me, I know you find

that hard to believe because I'm so lovely, but there was a group of people that didn't like what I was doing and how I was doing it, you know, criticizing me. I wasn't handling it very well, and I was thinking about how I could attack them back. I had a friend say to me, "John, you're not responsible for what people do to you, how people treat you, or what people say about you. You're only responsible for the way you respond to their treatment." That just went right to my heart. I said, "You're so right." I'm going to answer to God for the way I respond to the way they treat me, and if I give evil for evil then I'm only responding in a sinful way myself. Why would I want to do that? As much as lies in you, try to live peaceably with all men. It's never peace at any price, and I want to point that out. We never compromise purity for the sake of peace. In other words, we never compromise God's standards of righteousness in order to compromise and get along with someone, but as long as we can do what God has called us to do, we're obedient to His Word, we're keeping His Word, and we're not violating any of His commands, then we ought to be flexible and try as much as we can to live peaceably with those who are around us.

Lastly, in verses 19-21, love does not try to get even. Now, again, I said he kind of repeats this concept in different ways, but now he makes it very, very clear. He says, "Dearly beloved," he uses this endearing term, I'm speaking to you believers, "avenge not yourselves," don't take vengeance into your own hands, "but rather give place unto wrath," in other words, let God handle it. Let God take care of it. A lot of times when people come to me distraught about how they're being treated and how people are abusing and ripping them off, there is not often anything you can really do but just put it in God's hands or commit it to God or know that God who judges righteously and fairly will one day vindicate you and judge them. God will take care of it, so he says, "Don't avenge yourselves but rather let God take care of it." "...for it is written," he's quoting from Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." You got that? That is as clear as you can get. God doesn't want us to take vengeance. Now, that does not preclude having a police department or having a military or protecting yourself, but he's talking about in personal relationships, people to people. When somebody offends, slanders or wrongs you, lies about or attacks you, (I think the Presidential candidates need to read these verses, right?) don't render evil for evil, but put it in God's hands. God will be your defense. If you try to defend yourself, guess what? God will let you, and that's a scary thought. If you let God defend you, then God will defend you. Who would you rather have defending you? I'd rather have God defending me, right? "Yeah, but God doesn't really get 'em the way I want to get 'em and when I want to get 'em. I want to see their house blow up or something like that."

I heard about one Irishman that was a Christian, and some guy slapped him on the cheek. He did what Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek." He slapped the other cheek, and after he slapped the second cheek the Irishman just flattened the guy. This guy gets up and says, "What's the deal? I thought you had something in your Bible about turn the other cheek? He said, "Well, Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, but He didn't tell us what to do after that." I don't know about that. We need to put it in God's hands. All of us face people who oppose or come against us, so put it in God's hands. Leave it for God. Vengeance belongs to God.

Remember King David when Saul was persecuting and throwing spears at him attacking him?

David found Saul asleep in the cave and had the opportunity to just run his javelin right through him. One of David's men said, "Let me pin him to the ground right now! One fatal swoop and he'll just be dead! Let me have him, David." How easy it would have been. "So, just do whatever you want. I'll see you later." David said, "No. God put him in that position. I'm going to leave him there. God is going to take care of it." David put it in God's hands. God took care of Saul, and David was exalted. The Bible says that if we humble ourselves God will lift us up. I believe that's true. When we humble ourselves and trust the Lord, God will defend and take care of us. What we're doing is demonstrating Christian love.

In verse 20, Christianity goes beyond nonresistance to active benevolence. Did you ever notice in this passage that it has the negative and the positive for each command? And, they are commands, by the way. Don't curse but bless. Don't give evil for evil but contrariwise blessing. So, there is this negative and this positive. I think it's important that we learn that lesson.

Notice verse 21, he says, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Listen to this quote by John R.W. Stott. He said, "It is good never to retaliate because if we repay evil for evil, we are doubling it, adding a second evil to the first, and so increasing the tally of evil in the world. It is even better to be positive, to bless, to do good, to seek peace, and to serve and convert our enemy, because if we thus repay good for evil, we reduce the tally of evil in the world, while at the same time increasing the tally for good. To repay evil for evil is to be overcome by it; to repay good for evil is to overcome evil with good. This is the way of the cross. Such is the masterpiece of love." I've never really thought about that. If I render evil for evil, I'm doubling evil in the world. If someone is evil toward me and I turn around evil back toward them, then we have two evils committed. But, if someone is evil toward me and I turn around and am good toward them, then I've eliminated the evil in the world and I've added the good in the world. That's Christlike. Not only is that Christlike, but that is what Jesus did when He came from heaven and died on the cross for our sins.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to Romans 5, and we'll close with this description of what Jesus and God did for us on the cross. Notice Romans 5:6. Paul says, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Jesus showed His love toward us in that He died for us when we were ungodly. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth..." or displayed or demonstrated, "...his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Aren't you glad that Christ showed us love and gave Himself for us when we were His enemies, when we were in rebellion toward Him, when we were at war with Him? We were wicked sinners running from Him and enemies of God, yet He came from heaven, died on the cross, to reconcile us back to God. Notice verse 9. "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." You see, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He loved the world, the world that was in rebellion, the world that was an enemy, the world that

hated Him, the world that is running from Him, the world that was shaking their fist at God. God demonstrated His love and He sent His Son to die on the cross.

As we go into communion tonight and we break this bread and drink this cup, just remember that God showed and demonstrated and manifested His love for you when you were his enemy—not on God's part, but on your part. The enmity, the hostility, was with you. Hateful and hating one another, hating God and running from God, but God, in His love, reached out to us. Now, if God can reach out to us when we're enemies don't you think that we ought to love our enemies, pray for them, reach out to them, and seek to win them? As we break this bread and drink this cup tonight, I'm praying that we will all as individual believers, worshipping corporately, recommit and re-surrender our lives totally to God and be willing to say, "Lord, I'm going to love my enemies. I'm going to pray for those which persecute me, and I'm going to reach out to those who are even against me. I want to manifest Your love for them. If you died for me while I was Your enemy that You might reconcile me, Lord, I want to give my life for them that they might be reconciled to You." Let's pray.