

"Grace for Daily Living"

The Greyhound had been thrashing about in the north Atlantic storm for over a week. Its canvas sails were ripped, and the wood on one side of the ship had been torn away and splintered. The sailors had little hope of survival, but they mechanically worked the pumps, trying to keep the vessel afloat. On the eleventh day of the storm, sailor John Newton was too exhausted to pump, so he was tied to the helm and tried to hold the ship to its course. From one o'clock until midnight he was at the helm.

With the storm raging fiercely, Newton had time to think. His life seemed as ruined and wrecked as the battered ship he was trying to steer through the storm. Since the age of eleven, he had lived a life at sea. Sailors were not noted for the refinement of their manners, but Newton had a reputation for profanity, coarseness, and debauchery which even shocked many a sailor.

John Newton was known as "The Great Blasphemer." He sank so low at one point that he was even a servant to slaves in Africa for a brief period. His mother had prayed he would become a minister and had early taught him the Scriptures and Isaac Watts' Divine Songs for Children

John Newton had rejected his mother's teachings and had led other sailors into unbelief. Certainly, he was beyond hope and beyond saving, even if the Scriptures were true. Yet, Newton's thoughts began to turn to Christ. He found a New Testament and began to read. Luke 11:13 seemed to assure him that God might still hear him: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."

That day at the helm, March 21, 1748, was a day Newton remembered ever after, for "On that day the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep waters." Many years later, as an old man, Newton wrote in his diary of March 21, 1805: "Not well able to write; but I endeavor to observe the return of this day with humiliation, prayer, and praise." Only God's [amazing grace](#) could and would take a rude, profane, slave-trading sailor and transform him into a child of God. Newton never ceased to stand in awe of God's work in his life.

Newton left slave-trading and took the job of tide surveyor at Liverpool, but he began to think he had been called to the ministry. His mother's prayers for her son were answered, and in 1764, at the age of thirty-nine, John Newton began forty-three years of preaching the Gospel of Christ.

Newton lived to be eighty-two years old and continued to preach and have an active ministry until beset by fading health in the last two or three years of his life. Even then, Newton never ceased to be amazed by God's grace and told his friends, "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: **That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.**"

The story of John Newtons conversion is an amazing example of the transforming power of God's grace. A grace that brings life to those that are spiritually dead. A grace that transforms selfish sinful hearts to hearts solely devoted to Jesus. A grace so powerful it can change how we react to those who persecute us, those who rejoice, and those who weep. A grace so radical it transforms us from self-exultation to Christ-like humility.

Today in Romans Chapter 12 verses 14-16 we will see through the writings of the apostle Paul what the transforming power of God's grace can accomplish in the lives of His people. These verses teach us that God's grace found in the gospel gives us the ability to respond with love, empathy and great humility even in the most difficult situations.

The text before us is Romans 12:14-16. Out of reverence for God's word please stand if you are able.

Read Text

Prayer

There are 3 points I would like us to consider this morning.

- I. **God's grace transforms us, we should love our enemies (Verse 14)**
- II. **God's grace transforms us, we should show empathy towards others (Verse 15)**
- III. **God's grace transforms us, we should think and act with great humility (Verse 16)**

Let us review for a moment the flow of the book of Romans. Paul spends the first 11 of chapters Romans explaining the great doctrine of Salvation. Chapters 1-8 focus on the essential doctrine of salvation. Chapters 9-11 focus on the Jews and their relationship to this great doctrine of salvation. In chapter 12 to almost the

rest of the book of Romans, Paul focuses on the doctrine of salvation applied in the lives of believers. Starting in chapter 12:1 Paul shifts from doctrine to practical daily living. There is no greater testimony to God's great work of salvation found in Romans 1-11 than our lives offered to Him as a living sacrifice.

Paul uses Romans 12:1-2 as the foundation for the verses we are going to look at this morning. Because of the mercies of God, we can offer our lives to Him as a live sacrifice. As our minds are renewed by God's word, we live differently. This leads us to our **first point.**

I. God's grace transforms us, we should love our enemies (Verse 14)

In Verse 14 Paul commends us **"to bless those who persecute us; bless and do not curse."** Ok this is where the rubber meets the road. A true test to our faith. How do we live in a world that is hostile to the people of God?

I want to answer a couple of questions on this text. **What is cursing? What does it mean to bless those who persecute? How do we do this?**

John Murray in his commentary on verse 14 states, ***"No practical exhortation places greater demands upon our spirits than to 'bless them that persecute' us. He goes on to say, 'Implied in persecution is unjust and malicious maltreatment. It is provoked not by ill-doing on our part but by well-doing.'***

Let me say that **cursing** our enemies is a natural **human** tendency. When someone wrongs us, what is our first thought? "Get even with them". We hold grudges, we plot, we gossip, and sometimes do physical harm. Maybe not you, but I know I struggle with this. Paul says, **"do not curse"** Paul is not saying don't swear (use profanity) at them. It is much worse than that. Cursing referred to in this verse means **"asking God to assist us in our enemy's destruction"**. It's a desire for God to send them never ending wrath and punishment in Hell. To put it frankly, it is saying to them **"May God Send You to Hell"**. But who am I to desire someone be sent to hell when I escaped hell by the grace of God because of the work of Christ on the Cross?

So, what does it mean to **bless** those who persecute us?

The word “bless” in the Greek means “**God’s action or interference in man’s life to bring him to the desired relationship with Himself**”. It is asking God to save, intervene, act upon our enemies to bring them to Himself. Instead of crying down judgement, we plead for mercy and grace for them. It means, “**praying for those who spitefully use you and persecute you**” as was read in Matthew 5:44. We desire God’s best for them, which is their salvation.

I know some sitting here are thinking this is some great pie in the sky teaching, but I live in the real world. There is no way I can bless people who persecute me.

How is it that I can bless those who persecute?

It is important to remember that Jesus said in the gospel of John “***If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of this world. That is why the world hates you.***”

In this life, those that belong to Christ **will** face persecution. If you are unsure if you belong to Christ, ask yourself, “am I being persecuted for following Jesus”? Not everyone who attends a church is persecuted. Church attendance doesn’t make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car. If you know you are not a Christian you are an enemy of God and need His forgiveness. You will be helpless to live the kind of life Paul is talking about here. Turn to Christ in faith today and you will experience the transforming power of God’s grace.

It is important to recognize that the capacity to love our enemies is rooted in the power of the Gospel to transform our lives. We are unable to respond this way until our minds and our lives have first been changed by God’s grace. It is more than just a mere feeling. It is a supernatural work done in us by the Spirit of God.

Martin Lloyd Jones in his commentary on the Book of Romans speaks of a logical progression to the Christian’s response to persecution.

1. Remind yourself of God’s reaction to you.

Remember what you once were. The bible tells us we were born sinners. According to Romans 5:10, we were enemies of God. We broke his commandments and laws. There was no good reason for God to love us or

forgive us, let alone save us. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us. So, the next time we desire to respond to persecution with calling down God judgement on them let us remind ourselves how God responded to us when we were His enemies. Not with cursing, but with grace.

2. Remind yourself why they are persecuting you.

They are a sinner hopelessly lost without the grace of God. How can we expect them to act like a Christian when they are not? We need to draw the distinction between the sin of which one is guilty and the sinner who is guilty of it. The danger is that we look at the actions of the sinner and react with cursing, instead of recognizing their deep need for God's grace to transform them. Yes, their sin makes them guilty before God, but they as sinners need the mercies of God. Why are they acting this way? Because they are unregenerate, blinded, and enemies of God. They are helpless in their sinful condition. **Romans 5:12** – “**sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners**”

3. Understanding our enemies lost estate creates a Christlike compassion for them.

When we recognize the pitiful and depraved condition of our enemies should it not create a deep seeded compassion within us? We will see them in the same condition we once were. They are slaves to sin and people who are going to hell. Should we not cry out to God for their salvation? We who deserved God's judgement but received God's mercy. Our compassion for our enemies should lead us to pray for them and show them kindness. This is the power of transforming grace.

Take time this week to read Acts 7:54-8:1 look at how Stephen responded to persecution. Pay attention to who was in the crowd.

This leads us to our **second point**

II. God's grace transforms us, we should show empathy towards others (Verse 15)

(Read verse 15) Why would Paul take time to include this verse in his letter? Because Paul is building upon the idea seen in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 12 that the church is one body. In Christ, we are united to each other. Paul reminds us of the importance of sharing in both the joys and sorrows of others. The idea here is empathy not sympathy. Sympathy is pity or sorrow for someone's circumstances. Where **Empathy** is **"the ability to identify closely with someone else, to make his case your own and allow what has happened to them affect you also"**. Empathy moves us from self-interest to self-forgetfulness. Our empathy should start here at Trinity and extend to those in our community. RC Sproul states, **"it takes real sensitivity real grace and discipline to listen and watch for the moods of other people, and to express empathy."** Instead of empathy, our sinful hearts are often bent towards jealousy, envy, hatred and spitefulness towards others. But God's grace transforms us to think and act differently to those around us. It means we can rejoice with those whom God blesses without jealousy, even when our lives are a mess. It means weeping with those who weep, showing kindness, compassion and a shoulder to cry on.

A year and a half ago something happened at work that devastated me. It turned my world upside down. It started what would be a six-month long journey into deep depression and loneliness. I knew God was there, but I still felt very alone. I grew distant from my church, my family and my friends. Reading and praying became very difficult. Many may not have noticed the difference in me or if they did, they never mentioned it to me. During this time, I struggled to find healing and hope. But God in his grace made a way. While in the midst of my own depression I found myself involved in counseling others who were suffering as well. As I shared God's word with them, it ministered to me, their pain became my pain, their victories my joy. It was in sharing in the sufferings of others, that I found hope for my own suffering.

May it be said of us, that we are marked by great empathy. That those who weep, would never weep alone, and those that rejoice are surrounded by great multitudes of individuals who rejoice with them.

Last point.

III. God's grace transforms us, we should think and act with great humility

(**Look with me at verse 16**) READ

Paul shifts his attention to the topic of humility. According to John Piper, “**The Christian alternative to self-preoccupation, self-infatuation and self-exaltation is Christ-preoccupation, Christ-infatuation and Christ-exaltation. The Christian alternative to thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to, is faith—that is, turning away from self to Christ. Thinking much and thinking highly of Christ**”. Humility is not thinking less of ourselves it is thinking more of Christ. That’s exactly what Paul is getting at in verse 16. “**Be of the same mind towards one another**”. Some translations say live in harmony. He is telling us to have the mind of Christ. Who thought and acted with great humility. We should strive towards unity in the essentials of the faith and be charitable in the non-essentials. Paul continues “**Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble**.” Essentially what he is saying is don’t be a snob or stuck up. Don’t look down on people if they don’t have the same social status, job, or resources that you do. In chapter 2 of the book of James (VS.1-9), James confronts the sin of favoritism shown to the rich and the harsh treatment of the poor in the church. Yes, the bible calls “favoritism” a sin. James say in verse 2:9, “**But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers**”. May we repent of this behavior if it is found true in us.

These exhortations of Paul to **bless our enemies, to show empathy to others, to think and act with great humility** demands actions that sinful men are incapable of accomplishing. Something supernatural needs to happen in us. We need the transforming power of the Spirit of God working in us. Let us live according to the spirit and put to death our sinful flesh for the Glory of God.

Let me close by reading these same 3 verses from The Message, a paraphrase version of the scriptures.

14-16 Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they’re happy; share tears when they’re down. Get along with each other; don’t be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don’t be the great somebody.

Let us pray