

Community - *Romans 12:9-21*

Introduction

- Today we're going to be continuing with our "vision reset" series.
- Our goal with this series, as we're beginning this new year of 2021 is to "refocus" our church on three different things that we believe are foundational to who we are as the church.
- Last week Darryl started off this series with us by reminding us first of the Gospel, and really this was such an important spot to start in this series, as the Gospel really is the key foundation on which everything we are as a church is built. It is the core of our identity as a church, and everything else that we will talk about in this series needs to be built entirely on the Gospel.
- So today I'm going to be continuing this series with the next thing we're wanting to be "refocusing" on in 2021, and that is community.
- On the one hand, community almost feels like an ironic thing to be talking about right now in the midst of COVID. Community, at least the way we're used to thinking about community seems to be a thing of the past. We're living during a time when we're all stuck inside our homes, not allowed to see one another or go out at all, and it seems like a time where community, really is impossible.
- On the other hand, this is a time when it is more important than ever to be reminding ourselves of the importance of community, as we're all struggling with isolation during this pandemic to one degree or another. It is during a time like this that the community of the church is more important to us than ever, even if that community has to look a little different right now than what we're used to.
- So tonight, as our goal is to refocus our church on community in this coming year, I want to take some time and look at Romans 12:9-21.
- This is a passage in which Paul very clearly lays out what a Christian community is to look like, and my hope is that as we look into this passage we will see how the Gospel is foundational to our understanding of what a true Christian community is.
- Before we start, though, I want to take a moment to look at the context of this particular passage.
- Immediately leading up to this passage Paul had been talking to the church, addressing an issue as to whether the Gentiles (anyone who wasn't Jewish) could really receive salvation in the Gospel. The Jews believed that they were the people of God, and therefore salvation was only meant for them.

- While the Jews are the people of God, what Paul hits at is that through Jesus Christ, salvation was made available to all, including the Gentiles.
- He then encourages the church to be unified in Christ by using an image that he uses a few times throughout Scripture, and that is the image of a body with many parts. Each part of the body is different, but serves an essential function which helps the body, which is the church, to run.
- And this leads directly into V. 9 and Paul beginning to describe to the church what a true Christian community is meant to look like, and through looking at this passage we will see that the Gospel is foundational to our understanding of what a true Christian community is.
- To begin I want to just read for you V. 9-13. This is where we're going to spend the majority of our time together this evening:

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” - Rom. 12:9-13 (ESV)

The Gospel Calls for the Christian to love the Church

- As we get right into this passage we see that there's a bit of a theme that sticks out, and that is love. Paul begins in this passage with these words *“Let love be genuine”*. This is the very first thing he says as he's beginning to describe what this community is like. As the passage continues Paul gives many examples of what this love looks like practically within the context of the church, as well as the world around us.
- As we look at these first 5 verses of our passage what Paul seems to be telling us is that the Gospel calls for the Christian to love the church
- In this Paul focuses on three areas, which are kind of the results of us loving the church, showing what a Christian community will really look like when we as Christians are committed to loving the church, and we're able to see how the Gospel is foundational for building this kind of community.

Love one another

- The first thing that Paul focuses on is that loving the church means loving one another. In V. 9 he begins with saying *“Let love be genuine”*.
- What he's talking about here is showing a very sincere love and care for one another within the church. He is not talking about putting on an act, or just claiming to love one another so

that we look “Christian enough”. What he’s talking about here is a true, sincere, and deep love for one another, and he expands on this love in V. 10:

“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” - Rom. 12:10 (ESV)

- We are called to love one another genuinely and with “*brotherly affection*”. We are to treat one another like family, because through Christ we are part of one family. We have become children of God and are to love one another in Christ in the same way that we love our own families.
- Paul also says to “*outdo one another in showing honor*”. Now, when he’s saying this he’s not trying to make loving one another into a competition, where we try to be praised as the most loving in the church, or have a “most loving” award each month at the church. What Paul is really saying here is that when it comes to loving one another we’re called to give it all we’ve got, and do everything in our power to love one another.
- And as we talk about this kind of love that we are called to show one another within the community of the church it is also important to talk about how the Gospel motivates us to show this love to one another.
- John 3:16 tells us that:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” - John 3:16 (ESV)

- This is the kind of love that God has shown to us, and later in 1 John 4:11 it says:

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” - 1 John 4:11 (ESV)

- This verse makes very clear our motivation for showing such love to one another, and that’s because such a great love was already shown to us. Our love for one another within the church is meant to be a reflection of the love that God has shown to us.
- If we have been shown such a great love by God, how could we not show that kind of love to others around us? And further, if God has shown that love, enough to send his son to die for others within the church, should we not also make an effort to love one another? So the Gospel is the essential foundation and reason that we, as the community of the church, are to love one another.
- So what does this love look like? Paul gives a few examples in V. 13 where he says:

“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” - Rom. 12:13 (ESV)

- And he gives another example later in V. 15:

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” - Rom. 12:15 (ESV)

- So we’re given some practical examples of what this kind of love looks like, contributing to one another’s needs, and seeking to show hospitality to one another. Joining in on the struggles and the joys that we all experience.
- So what might this look like for us as Liberty Grace? How can we be a community who is committed to showing the love of the Gospel to one another?
- Everyone, let’s commit this year to be a community that will show a genuine brotherly love to one another, because we understand the depth of love that has already been shown to us, and let this be a love that extends beyond Sunday evening services, or Tuesday Grace Groups.
- Let this love motivate us to invest in one another’s lives outside of those scheduled times, encouraging one another, checking in on those who are lonely, being willing to contribute to one another’s needs. And let this not be a love that is shown out of obligation, but a genuine outpouring of the Gospel in our lives and in our church.

Serve the Lord

- So the Gospel calls for the Christian to love the church which means first: showing love to one another, and the second thing we see is that loving the church means serving the Lord.
- Look at what Paul says in V. 11:

“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” - Rom 12:11 (ESV)

- Here Paul lays out what is the mission and the purpose of the Church, and that is to serve the Lord.
- In 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul also says this:

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” - 1 Cor. 10:31 (ESV)

- In this verse Paul is instructing Christians to do everything in their life as an act of service to God. Life is not meant to be compartmentalized so that we’re committed to serving the Lord when we’re at church, but otherwise living for ourselves. This is something which defines our entire lives.
- In order to be a church that serves the Lord, we have to first commit to being Christians who serve the Lord.

- Now look at the wording that Paul is using in V. 11. He tells the church not to be slothful in zeal, and to be fervent in spirit as they serve the Lord. This is something which is meant to be done with enthusiasm. We are not called to serve the Lord just out of a sense of obligation, that we have to begrudgingly serve the Lord as if we'd just been asked to do our least favourite chore. We are called to be excited about the work that we have to do for the Lord, and the mission that he has given us. We are meant to be a church who is on fire for the Gospel, and excited to share it in every way that we can!
- And this kind of excitement about the Gospel as the church comes from an understanding of what God has done for each of us individually through the Gospel. When you grasp the magnitude of what Christ did for us on the cross, it ignites the kind of passion and excitement that should simply overflow from us! Each and every one of us was destined for Hell, and being honest, we fully deserved it, but Christ loved us enough to offer himself as a sacrifice in our place so that instead we could have a relationship with him. This is such exciting news, and it is something that completely changes our entire lives!
- Earlier in 12:2 Paul says:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” - Rom. 12:2 (ESV)

- This type of life only comes through a complete transformation that we can only experience through the Gospel. It is only through accepting the free gift of salvation that Christ offers that we can be transformed in this way to live according to the will of God and live our lives to serve him. And it is a complete change from the way that we were before, we are no longer to be “conformed to the world”.
- Paul returns to this idea in V. 9 when he says:

“Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.” - Rom. 12:9 (ESV)

- We are called to seek earnestly and enthusiastically after the things of God, and seek to follow his will.
- So what does that look like for us as Liberty Grace church? If we want to be a church community that is committed to enthusiastically serving the Lord, we have to first commit ourselves to being Christians who serve the Lord.
- So whatever we do as a part of this church, whether that's helping during the service with prayer, reading Scripture, or leading worship, or whether that's taking part in helping the church reach Liberty Village during this pandemic through things like our phone initiative, let us do these things, serving the church, and serving the Lord with enthusiasm, passion and

excitement. Being excited to serve the Lord and help share the Gospel because we understand the magnitude of what's been done for us.

- And there is a certain level of camaraderie that comes from this, as we are all committed to serving the Lord together this way. We are all working towards one common goal, each of us contributing in different ways, and it is part of what helps us to be bound together as a family in Christ as Paul pointed out earlier in the passage. The more we are committed to working towards this common goal of serving the Lord together, the more our love for one another and our love for the church will grow as well.
- I also want to take a quick moment here to look at what Paul says later in the passage from V. 14-21:
- As this passage continues, Paul's focus begins to shift from being just about the church interacting with itself, and he begins to talk about how the church is to interact with the world around them.
- Part of serving the Lord is understanding that God has placed us within this world with a mission. We are not meant to be some isolated little community hiding away from the rest of the world.
- Back in the time of the Bible there was a group of people called the Essenes. These were people who were so committed to following every single one of God's laws and keeping themselves entirely pure and separated from any kind of imperfection that they completely retreated from all of society. They went and hid away, creating a little community on their own that had nothing to do with the outside world so that they had no chance to be corrupted by the outside world.
- This is not the life that Paul was calling the church to. We are not meant to have this tight knit loving community committed to serving the Lord but to completely cut ourselves off from anyone around us. Part of what serving the Lord means is being involved in the community around us.
- Each time I'm in Liberty Village I am struck by the amount of people who live in such a small area, and the amount of people there are within Liberty Village who need to hear the Gospel. Friends, part of our mission of serving the Lord as a church means doing everything that we can to share the Gospel with those around us.
- And this will not always make us popular with the people around us. Paul instructs the church a number of times here to love those who hate them, and bless those who are persecuting them. The world will not always want to hear the message of the Gospel that we are trying to share, but that does not mean that we are any less responsible to love the community around us by spreading the Gospel and showing the love of Christ to those around us.

- So the Gospel calls us to love the church by first loving one another, and secondly by serving the Lord.

Focus on Christ

- Third, after showing that loving the church means loving each other and serving the Lord, Paul points out that loving the church means focusing on Christ.
- Look at what he says in V. 12:

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” - Rom. 12:12 (ESV)

- Paul gives these three instructions for what is to define the life of the church.
- He tells them first to rejoice in hope, but what hope is it that he is referring to?
- What he’s getting at here is the hope that the church has in Jesus Christ and in the Gospel.
- And friends, let me encourage you with this. We do have a reason to rejoice in the hope that we have in the Gospel. The knowledge of what has been done for us, and the love that has been shown to us in Christ is such an amazing truth that should fill our church with constant and overflowing joy! The knowledge that the creator of the universe loved us enough to sacrifice his Son on our behalf so that we could have a relationship with him is such an amazing truth, and it is truly cause to celebrate and rejoice as the church in the hope that we have in Christ.
- The second instruction that he gives is actually one that is incredibly pertinent to us as the church right now, and that is to be *“patient in tribulation”*.
- He instructs the church to be patient as they face difficulties and struggles. This was very applicable to the church in Paul’s day when they were facing persecution and constant threats from the world around them, but it can also be applied to us today as we are facing the struggles that are brought on by this pandemic.
- This goes back to what he said before about rejoicing in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. This hope that we have in the Gospel is a hope that is greater than anything in this world ever could be. Jesus showed through his death and resurrection that he has complete authority over sin and over death, and he provides a hope for us that is beyond this world, which is the hope of eternal life in him.
- No matter what we are facing now, no matter what struggles are coming our way, whether that is the struggle of isolation in the pandemic, or persecution from the world around us, we are instructed to have hope because we know that these struggles will not last and we are looking ahead to the eternal life that we will enjoy in Jesus Christ when he returns to put right everything that sin has broken in this world.

- The third instruction that he gives to the church to be focused on Christ is to be constant in prayer.
- We are to understand where our help and our strength comes from, and who is the source of this great community that we have been gifted with.
- To be constant in prayer for the church is to be constantly reminding ourselves of where our true strength comes from, reminding ourselves of the hope that we have to rejoice about, and reminding ourselves of the reason that we are able to be patient in tough times. Not through our own strength or ability, but through the strength of Christ.
- To be constant in prayer is what helps us to keep our focus firmly fixed on Christ, where it needs to be, and help us in both loving one another, and serving the Lord. In order for us to have a healthy community within our church, we need to be committed to this kind of prayer, and to keeping our focus on Christ.
- Committing to this type of prayer as a church is also a great way to grow our sense of community together. I really enjoy the prayer meetings we have together on the first Tuesday of every month in which we gather together to pray over our church, our world, and situations we are facing in our own lives. It is a time that reminds us of where our focus is, and where our strength comes from.

Conclusion

- So in this passage, Paul shows us how the Gospel informs our view of our Christian community, and that the Gospel calls us to love the church by loving one another, serving the Lord, and focusing on Christ together!
- I also hope you can see today how each of the three things we're talking about in this series are so interconnected. The Gospel provides the foundation for who we are as Christians and as a community, and it also calls for us as a community to engage in the mission of reaching the world around us!
- And it is such a blessing to be able to be a part of this kind of community. It is not easy though. To build this kind of a community, and have a church that is truly dedicated to Christ in this way takes a lot of commitment, but is it ever worth it.
- Being a part of the church is not just a Sunday afternoon commitment. It is a whole life commitment to love the church by loving one another with a genuine brotherly love, serving the Lord enthusiastically together, and having the focus of everything we do be firmly fixed on Christ.

- Let us commit together to make Liberty Grace a church this year that seeks to excel in each of these three areas, and grow as a community together in love, and service to God, and focus upon Christ!