

# Romans

## #25: Love Your Faith Family

Romans 12:9-21

Dr. Jeremiah Ebeling ---- March 15, 2026

**New York Life Insurance Commercial Explaining the Greek Words for Love**

The ancient Greeks had four words for love. The first is *philia*. *Philia* is affection that grows from friendship. *[Two adolescent girls are shown lying side by side on their backs, talking and smiling.]*

Next is *storge*, the kind you have for a grandparent... *[A grandfather is shown sitting on a back porch with one young grandchild on either side.]* ...or a brother. *[Two young boys are shown, one helping another over a wooden fence, saying, "Let's go," and then running off together.]*

The fourth kind of love is the most different. It's the most admirable. It's called *agape*. Love has an action. *[An older woman is shown walking the hall of a care facility and then helping an elderly man to bathe.]* It takes courage, sacrifice. *[A father is shown cutting his son's hair, and then a mother braiding her daughter's hair. Various clips of people taking care of each other are quickly shown.]*

It takes courage, sacrifice, strength. For 175 years, we've been helping people act on their love, so they can look back, look ahead, and say, "We got it right." We did good. *["Be good at life" flashes on the screen. The commercial ends with the New York Life emblem and the words "175 years" and #LoveTakesAction.]*

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How about that, huh? Beautiful pictures of those three Greek words for love—three of the four. It shows the power and the depth of the relationships that each of those words capture. And what's really remarkable is that all three of those Greek words for love are going to show up in the first two verses of our passage today. Isn't that cool? I can't wait to show you that.

*Agape, phileo, storge*: all three of them show up in Romans 12:9-10, the first two verses of our passage. And the Apostle Paul needs all three of these words and what they mean to be able to capture what he's going to communicate about the power and the depth of Christian friendships, of relationships between brothers and sisters in the family of God. That's what Paul is going to do today: to show God's design for relationships in the Church.

And this morning's passage has a powerful message for Church, as in the global Church; but also for us, for each one of us. And the message that God has for us is going to be in light of Romans 12:1, which talks about the mercies of God, the mercies He has shown us. Our relationships with each other are completely transformed as members of God's family, members of God's Church. But also, he's going to show us how that mercy of God transforms our relationships even with an enemy; even with someone who would do evil towards us. And God the Father gave us this instruction in Romans 12 today, I think, to motivate us, to challenge us, to kind of reorient us in how we think about relationships with each other, with our faith family. So, I hope that's what the Lord will do in our midst today this morning.

What the Apostle Paul is going to do in this passage is use language and first century culture to talk about our relationships with each other as a faith family. He's going to start with language and culture. He's going to show us just how deep and how wide and how powerful God intends for those relationships in the Church to be.

So, let's start with language and how Paul uses language very strategically. I want to quickly define the three Greek words for love that you're going to see in these first two verses.

The first one (they were in the commercial there), *agape*, is a sacrificial love. It's a sacrificial, self-giving, other-centered, no-strings-attached love. *Agape* is the word used, first and foremost, for God's love towards us, the love that we receive and enjoy in salvation. But also, *agape* is used--in fact, in this passage today, Romans 12:9-10, we see *agape* used for the first time--in the New Testament to refer to our relationships with each other. It's this sacrificial love that we show each other as members of the family of God.

The second Greek word for love that we're going to see is the word *phileo*. That's a friendship love. *Phileo* is that friendship love where two people come together and they make a decision to trust each other, to be there for one another, to stay even when the relationships gets hard—and it always gets hard. That's what friendship love is all about.

And then this third word is *storge*. And that's a familial love. *Storge* is the innate, natural bond that you have with your blood family, the family you grew up with, with a brother, a sister, a parent, a child. It's this God-given familial love that parent and child get to enjoy together.

So, with these three words in mind, I want us to look at the first two verses of our passage in Romans 12, and I want to see how Paul uses these words strategically. He writes, **“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection.”**

### **Romans 12:9-10a**

**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection.**

And now I've superimposed those three Greek words for love here in the passage. Paul says, **“Let *agape* be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. *Phileostorge* one another with *philadelphia*.”**

So, first, when Paul is talking about what relationships in the Church should look like, in order to emphasize and elevate the importance, the value, the priority, that relationships in the Church are supposed to have, he talks about *agape* love between each other. Again, it's this divine love. It's an unconditional love, not that's been earned; it's a love that has been chosen, that God chooses to show us and that we choose to show each other. So, *agape* shows up first in these two verses.

But that's not all. It's not just *agape* love. It's also this *phileo* love that Paul says is supposed to be in the Church between us as a faith family. This *phileo* love is the prefix for *philadelphia*, meaning “brotherly affection, brotherly love.” But he says twice that it's this friendship *phileo* love where a brother and sister in Christ choose. They're going to trust each other. They choose to show up for one another. They choose to stay, to be there for life, even in thick and in thin. That's this *phileo*.

And also, he uses this third word, *storge*, this familial love that as members of God's family we're to have. It's this natural bond that we have with a blood sibling, and we're supposed to have that with our faith siblings, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well. It's this bond that a father has with his son, that a daughter has with her mother—until she becomes a teenager, you know ... all bets are off for a few years.

But it's all three of these words that Paul brings together to try and communicate the power of relationships in the Church.

But this is really cool. Paul invents a word, because what he said is not enough yet. He invents a word. This word *phileostorge* can't be found anywhere else in the New Testament. You won't even find it anywhere else in Greek literature. He literally makes a word up because he's trying to show the gravity, the depth of what it means to be related to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. It's this familial-friend love that comes together and the two types of love amplify or magnify each other.

If you've ever had a sibling, a brother or sister, who in adulthood or maybe when you were young, you decided, *We're going to be the best of friends. We're not just siblings. We're going to be the closest of friends.* And that's such a special relationship, isn't it? Because you grew up together. And so, you have all those experiences and all those memories, the highs and the lows and everything in between that you share. But you also have this *phileo*, this friendship that bonds you as well. And you bring those two together, and there's just something awesome about that, this exponential love that you find with *phileostorge*.

And Paul's doing that. He's saying, *Look, it's this special relationship. It's unique. You're not going to find it anywhere else in life.* He's got to create this word. What Paul is doing is using language. And the words that he's choosing he is using to try and elevate, to show us the value, the priority, the importance of the relationships you have with the people you're sitting next, with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

But he doesn't just stop with language. No, he's going to bring first-century culture into the commands of Romans 12 too. And I just want to share with you for a few minutes about what that looks like, so that we can read the passage in living color—so that it comes to life a little bit more for us.

And if you want to know more about the cultural context I'm going to share with you, then there's a book by Dr. Joe Hellerman that you can buy today. It's called *When the Church*

*Was a Family*. And Dr. Hellerman lays out in this book the cultural context that we're going to talk about. Dr. Hellerman was one of my top three favorite professors in seminary. I had him during my master's and my doctoral work. I loved this guy. Wherever he went, I just followed. I wanted to sit with this guy and learn from him.

And he was such a cool guy and such a big nerd too—I mean the biggest of nerds. He loved deep-sea fishing and he was a pastor and an elder at a church. And then, New Testament Greek made him giddy. It was just fun to be around him. I learned so much from the guy.

But in this book that you just saw on the screen, Dr. Hellerman talks about Mediterranean antiquity from the first century. And he talks about what the most important relational bond was to people of the first century. And he said it wasn't the bond of marriage. It wasn't the bond of parent-child relations. He said the most important relationship in someone's life was the bond between siblings. It was brothers and sisters, your blood siblings. That's who you were closest to.

And so, you've probably heard the phrase "Blood runs thicker than water." Well, that's because your identity and your lot in life was linked to your father's bloodline. So, those brothers and sisters, your siblings that you grew up with, were the people that you expressed your affection, your warmth, for. In fact, the most kindness was reserved for a brother or sister. It was not for a spouse; it was not for your closest friend. It was for that brother or sister.

Here in the West today it's the nuclear family that we kind of prop up and that we put at the top of the list. George W. called it the nuclear family—I like the way he said it. It's your spouse, it's your children, and they are prioritized above all. But that wasn't true in the first century. It was your brothers and your sisters. That's who got the most care and love and concern and support from you. They took center stage in life.

And so, look, it's no accident that when the New Testament writers, when Jesus and the Apostle Paul and others describe what it looks like for relationships in the church family, they ask, *What are they like? What is something that we can liken them to?* What relationship did they choose? The brothers' and sisters' relationship. They used sibling language, that we're brothers and sisters in Christ. And you'll find that language is used hundreds of times—150 to 200 times—to describe relationships in the Church. Because that's the closest relationship that anybody had in their life. So, that was the relationship they chose to compare it to. The

relationship between brothers and sisters was closer than the relationship to one's spouse or to one's closest friend.

And yet, what was truly scandalous was that when Jesus talked about the faith family, when He talked about brothers and sisters in Christ, He didn't just elevate them to the level of blood siblings, a blood brother or sister. He actually elevated your faith family above a brother or a sister, a blood sibling. He elevated it above that.

And so, in Mark 3 when Jesus' mother and brothers show up, what does Jesus say about them? This is what He says: “ **‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking about at those who sat around Him as He taught His disciples, He said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’**”

When He said this, this wasn't just shocking. This was deeply offensive to those who heard these words from Jesus, who heard His teaching. And yet, you see this elevation, this prioritizing, of relationships in the faith family. Those who do the will of God, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ—Jesus is being very intentional, very purposeful, with the words that He's saying.

And I bet you've probably experienced something like this. You go on a mission trip, and you meet a brother or sister in Christ, and you have absolutely nothing in common. You don't even speak the same language. And yet, there's that one thing that you have in common. And it's the most important thing. And that's your faith in Christ. And maybe you've just experienced two hours together. That's all it takes. And you feel this bond with that believer, that fellow family member, that you've never felt with the brother that you grew up with for thirty-two years whom you've known your entire life.

Or maybe you come to church, and it's here at Grace Covenant Church when you walk onto this campus that you feel more at home. You feel more seen and cared for and loved here than you ever felt in your home growing up, or maybe even at home now with the spouse that you share life with. If you've experienced that, you have a little taste of what Jesus is talking about with relationships and the gravity and the priority that our faith family is to have in our life.

Before we jump into our passage and see this play out, I want to share with you one last thing Dr. Hellerman had to say in his book. He talked about the four kinship values in the first century. These were four primary values that blood siblings had with one another. This is what

was expected of you as a brother or a sister with your fellow siblings. I'm going to write them up here. I would encourage you, if you're a note taker, or even if you're not, to write these down. Because we're going to see these show up in our passage today.

The first kinship value that Dr. Hellerman writes about is **affectionate solidarity**. What affectionate solidarity means is that brothers and sisters had a emotional bond with each other that they didn't share with anybody else. There were a warmth and a kindness that was expected between siblings. And no one else in their life received this.

A second one is **family loyalty**. Blood siblings were expected to be fiercely loyal to one another above their loyalty to themselves or anybody else in their lives. They were to be devoted to one another throughout their lives. There was a family loyalty that was expected, that people lived by.

Third is that they **shared possessions**. Siblings were expected to meet the needs of brothers and sisters. They were the first line of defense against the economic hardships of the first century. A brother or sister would step in to support, care for, or take a sibling into their family if that was what was needed.

**We call ourselves brothers. So, we who are united in mind and soul have no hesitation about sharing what we have. Everything is in common among us—except our wives.**

**---Tertullian**

Tertullian was one of the early church fathers, and this is what he said. "We call ourselves brothers. So, we who are united in mind and in soul have no hesitation about sharing what we have. Everything is in common among us--except our wives." We hold nothing back from each other except for this one thing: our spouses. That's just for us. We're not some crazy cult.

So, that's the third value—sharing possessions. And the last one is this expectation of **no retaliation**. (These are all very long words.) No retaliation—this was the value that brothers and sisters were expected to be at peace with each other, to pursue peace in their relationships with

one another. They were expected to forgive each other when they were wronged, and they were certainly going to be wronged. This was the fourth value: no retaliation.

## 1. Love Those in Your Faith Family

So now, with the language and this first-century culture context that we just talked about, let's dive back into verses 9 and 10 of our passage here. And I want you to see how they play out in our love for those in our faith family. That's point number one. I'm going to cover several of these verses. It's love for those in our faith family, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

### Romans 12:9-10

**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.**

This is what Paul writes: **“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another in brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”**

So, you see in verse 9 here, again, this *agape* love, he says it should be genuine. Other translations will say “sincerely.” The Greek is unhyprocritical. So, love is supposed to be truthful. It's to be discerning between brothers and sisters in Christ, such that we call evil evil with one another. We hold fast to what's good. We seek the good of each other.

And then, here we go: **“Love one another with brotherly affection.”** Which of our four kinship values is that one? It's the first, right? I mean, it's in the name, too—affection, solidarity, right? **“Love one another with brotherly affection.”** It's the affection and solidarity, this idea that we're supposed to be affectionate, kind, warm, loving towards one another. It's that value of affection and solidarity.

And then he says to **“outdo one another in showing honor.”** That's our second one—family loyalty. **“Outdo one another in showing honor.”** It's family loyalty. We're to be devoted to one another above ourselves, above others; that I'm loyal to you.

And the way that plays out is, in the ancient world, honor was supreme. And losing face, being shamed—those things were death. They were to be avoided at all costs. And so, everyone competed with each other for honor. But there was one place where that competition for honor

was never to be played. And that was at your home, in your living room with your brothers and sisters, your blood siblings. You were never to compete with honor with them. No, instead, you showed honor to them, this loyalty to them. You were competitive in who could show honor first and the most.

So, Paul says that what the Church does with each other. We compete with each other, we outdo one another in showing honor. We do all that we can to show respect to each other, to be the first to show respect to each other.

What if we as brothers and sisters in Christ all made it our ambition to show each other the most respect that we possibly can, no matter what we disagree on? And we're going to disagree on things. What if we made it our primary goal that we would affirm and encourage each other, and we wanted to go first in doing that? We wanted to beat each other in seeking to do that for one another? That's family loyalty. I'm loyal to you above me, above others. That's what Paul is talking about.

### **Romans 12:11-13**

**Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.**

And then verses 11 and 12 he's going to talk about how energetic our love for each other should be in verse 11, and then how patient love is going to need to be in relationships. He says, **"Don't be slothful in zeal."** Be energetic, be excited about your love for each other. **"Be fervent in spirit."** That means to be on fire with affection for one another. **"Serve the Lord."** It's worship when we care for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

And then verse 12 is all about patience. **"Rejoice in hope."** Expect God to show up, even when you can't see it. He's working. You don't have to see it for it to be true. There's patience in that. And then, **"be patient in tribulation."** Why? Because relationships are going to endure tribulation, and there's going to be hard times. And so, Paul says to be patient with each other, and **"be constant in prayer"** for each other. Don't give up praying for one another. Pray for your church family. Pray for your faith family and be committed to doing that.

And then he moves forwards in verse 13 and says, “**Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.**” Which of our kinship values is this? It’s that third one, right? Share your possessions--contributing to the needs of the saints and seeking to show hospitality.

What he’s saying is, *Look, as believers, be eager.* Be on the lookout for brothers and sisters in Christ, maybe even complete strangers who are the victims of a round of layoffs. We’ve had some of those around here. Look for when they need help with a serious need. Be on the lookout for that.

And then it says to seek to show hospitality. That doesn’t mean to entertain friends. It means to entertain strangers. It means to be hospitable to people you don’t even know who are in your faith family, if they’re a brother or a sister, if they’re a complete stranger. Look out for opportunities to show hospitality to them.

Sixteen years ago, when my wife had just had our twins, we had just gotten back from California. We were new again to Austin. And we had a knock at the door. On the other side of the door was a woman from Grace Covenant Church whom we had never met before. We didn’t know her name until that moment. And she showed up with a delicious meal for my wife from this complete stranger and her family. And why? Because we were her faith family. So, she didn’t need to know us. She was contributing to the need of the saints. She was showing hospitality through this stranger and her crazy family.

And then sixteen years later, today, that woman and my wife are the closest of friends. And it all started with a knock on the door. Isn’t that cool? Contribute to the needs of the saints. Look for and be eager to find opportunities to meet needs. You can’t meet all the needs. That’s not what God is asking of us. But is there a need in front of you that you can meet for a brother or sister in Christ that you love, that you’re close to? Or maybe you don’t even know this person at all.

I’ve said this many times because I believe it. There is no better place to be than Grace Covenant Church when a crisis or some serious need shows up in your life. I just thank you so much. This church is so kind, so loving, so generous with your time, your money, your resources. You do this.

I don’t know if you know, but there’s a group of men in The Word and the Way community who are eager to help anybody who needs it: widows, single parents and their

children. If a need arises, I just call some mystery number and talk to some mystery person, and, boom, the need is met. That's what these guys do. They're just incredible men. But they're living out this value—sharing possessions. They're living out verse 13 of our passage and loving their faith family.

See, verse 13 is one of the key ways that the Christian church made such a difference in the first century. It's what made it stand out. In fact, a Roman emperor named Julian Apostate (how about that for a name?) lived in the fourth century. And this is what Julian said about the Church. He hated the Church! And this is why. He says that the Christian faith “has been especially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It's a scandal that there's not a single Jew who's a beggar, and that the godless Galileans” (he called them godless because they didn't believe in the pagan Roman gods) “care not only for their own poor, but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”

Basically, he's saying, *I can't stand these Christians. They care for the dead better than we care for the living. And they care for the living really well, too.* But it was stuck in his craw. He was trying to advance paganism, and instead, Christianity grew. This is one of the major reasons why it was growing.

And so, our stuff is really God's stuff. The resources, the money, the things He's entrusted to us—He's given us those things. And one of the reasons He's given us what He has is so that we might contribute to the needs of the saints; that we might seek to show hospitality to complete strangers who are in the family of faith, who are in the family of God; to love each other in this way. That's one of the reasons that He's been so generous with us. You can't meet every need. But what need can you meet? Let's always be asking that as a faith family. Let's be asking that with one another.

You know, I think it would be really fun if we could tick some people off because of how generous we were as a church, with each other and with the community around us. Wouldn't that be fun? That would be awesome.

## **Romans 12:15**

**Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**

Well, let's keep going. In verse 15 (we're going to skip over verse 14 and come back to it) Paul says, "**Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.**" Which kinship value is this one? It's that first one again, right? It's affection and solidarity. It says to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

And when you think about Grace, this is a large church. We have 3,600 men, women, youth, and children who go to church here and call Grace Covenant home. We can't do this with 3,599 people, right? So, the way that this worked—really, the way a lot of this works—is that you've got to make a big church smaller. You've got to be in a life group or a community or Quest or Women's Bible Study. Even the row or section where you're seated right now, if you sit there every Sunday in the same seat, those people could be those people for you, that you rejoice with, that you weep with, that you enter the emotional experiences of life with them.

And when you think about rejoicing with those who rejoice, and the opportunity we have there, what God is saying is that He wants us to be intentional about celebrating each other. Look for opportunities to say, *Man, that's awesome! Let's go grab a meal together. Let's celebrate that together.*

But I want to say this. In order to really rejoice with someone, you have to be able to love them, and you have to love them more than you love you. Because if I love myself more than I love them, then their success may be a threat to me. And there's something sick in my soul. And I've experienced this before, when I can't rejoice with a brother or sister in Christ, and it's because some jealousy or insecurity, some diseases in my heart keeps me from being able to do that. God wants us to get after that, so that we would be able to rejoice, we would be able to celebrate the milestones and the successes and joys of life with one another.

And then, secondly, he says, "**Weep with those who weep.**" God invites us to enter the emotional experience of loss with one another; to meet each other in those times of loss.

And I'd like you to notice, what does this passage NOT say? It doesn't say, *When a brother or sister in Christ weeps, share a theology lesson on God's sovereignty.* It doesn't say, *Think of something really profound to say in response.* It doesn't say, *Give them a pep talk and help them to see how good life really is. Just focus on the positive and it will all work out.* It doesn't say any of those things.

It says to weep with them. It says to get over whatever fears, whatever awkwardness you might feel in doing this, and enter that experience with them.

It looks like this. It looks like sitting with a person, with a brother or sister in Christ. If you can't sit with them, call them. And you do just a few things. You don't have to do them all that well. But you listen. Let them share if they want to, or if they don't. You express your love and your care and concern for them. And then you just ask them if you can pray for them.

Do you know what it sounds like to care for and love someone who has experienced a loss? It sounds like this: silence. Most of all, it's a ministry of presence. It's a ministry of listening. You don't have to know what to say. You don't need to try to fix them. You can't. Don't offer advice—not now. That's not going to help. Just sit with them. Listen. Express your care, your love, your concern. Get through the awkwardness and just be with them. That's what it means to weep with those who weep. If the tears come, let them come. But weep with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul invites us to do that, that we might know and that this person might know they're not alone; that there's someone who cares for them—one of their faith family members.

## **2. Love Those Who Don't Love You**

Now Paul is going to change the tone of how he's talking, but he's not changing subjects. He's still on the same subject. And the second point he makes in this passage is that he calls us and commands us to love those who don't love you. Love those who maybe you don't love; to love those who have made themselves your enemy, even. This is what he says. This is how you love those who don't love you.

## **Romans 12:14, 16-21**

**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them ...  
16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them ... Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written: ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

Wow. “On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Which of our four kinship values do you see here? It’s that last one, isn’t it? It’s no retaliation—seeking peace, seeking to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And when you get to this part of the passage, I think it's easy to think of those who have made themselves our enemies who are not Christians, who are outside of the church. But again, Paul hasn't changed subjects. He's still talking first and foremost about relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ. Absolutely, it applies outside the church too, to nonbelievers. But he's still talking about your faith family.

And I bet your experience has played that out. I bet you've seen that of your five toughest relationships that you've had in your life, two or three of them were with a fellow brother or sister in Christ. It's true for me.

So, Paul asks the question, *What does it look like for a Christian to respond to persecution, to evil, to opposition?* Well, he says this is what brothers and sisters in Christ are to do: we're to bless and not curse, we're to seek harmony and live in harmony. It says for us to avoid pride. Don't be haughty. Never be wise in your own sight. That's two different ways to say, *Don't be proud; be humble*. He says, to repay no one. Don't seek revenge. Give thought to do what is honorable; act honorably. He says to live peaceably with each other. Never avenge, but leave it to the wrath of God. What he means by that is to trust God's sovereignty, His justice, His timing, and He'll make things right. He'll be able to cut through the motivations and what happened or didn't happen. Trust it to the Lord.

On the contrary, we can feed our enemy. When he's hungry, give him something to eat. When he's thirsty, give him something to drink.

And then he finishes with, **“Overcome evil with good.”** We can overcome evil with good.

And I look at that, and I say, *Man, that sounds impossible*. You know? Is it just me? That absolutely seems impossible to do those things in response to someone who has committed sin or committed evil against you. I don't even know how you start to do that—unless instead of looking at the person right in front of us, this person who has become our enemy, who has committed this evil against us; instead of looking at them, we can raise our heads. And when you do that, what you're looking at, what you have the opportunity to see is Romans 12:1: **“In view of God's mercy ...”** And you set your sights on God's mercy, the mercy that He has shown you.

And you think about the mercy He has shown us. Our entire lives God has been nothing but infinitely loving towards us. And what was our response to Him? Infinite evil. That's what Thomas Aquinas says. He says our evil towards God is not finite. No, it's an infinite evil. The

reason is because He's an infinite God who is infinitely great. So, we respond to His infinite love with infinite evil. And what does God do next? What is His next step? He takes on the consequences for our infinite evil against Him. And what does He do? He does this: He blesses us. He chooses to live in harmony with us. He is humble. He doesn't repay us. He acts honorably and peaceably with us. He doesn't avenge us. He gives us food to eat. He gives us things to drink. He provides for us. He overcomes our evil with good. That is His response to our infinite evil that we've committed against Him.

And so, when we can raise our heads with Romans 12:1: **“In view of God's mercy ...”** Our view is on the mercy of God towards me, towards us. What that allows us to do is when we look back then to this enemy, this person who opposes us, the sins that they committed towards us just shrink. It's still evil—there's no doubt about it. But they just look so much smaller when your view is on God and what He has done for you in all His mercy, in His infinite love and mercy towards you.

That's what we can do. And then we can respond in these ways. It's the power of the Holy Spirit and our view on God's mercy. That's how we can respond.

And the passage says, *Look, when you do this, “you heap burning coals on your enemy's head.”* And no, that doesn't mean that you set your enemy on fire. I was kind of hoping that's what it meant. That's not what it means. I studied it. What it means is ... it refers to, very likely, an Egyptian ritual where someone who was guilty would express repentance by carrying a bowl on their head of burning coals. Why, I don't know.

But the point of the passage is that when you respond with blessing instead of cursing, when you pray for those who persecute you, you heap these coals on their head. You heap kindness into that bowl in the form of hot coals. This kindness is what brings them to a place where they might possibly repent. Humiliation and embarrassment might be the motivators. But they might get to a place where they repent. That's what blessing and kindness can do to an enemy, Lord willing. That's what can happen.

Now we say all this. And I also want to say, even as you seek to forgive, as you seek to bless and love an enemy, you might still have to call 911. If there's somebody who's harming you, you might still need to call 911. You might need to not be alone or not even be around someone who's injurious to you, who harms you, who's dangerous for you. And yet, you can

still do these things even from a distance. You can bless. You can NOT seek revenge. You can express love as God has shown mercy towards you.

Many years ago, we had a family that lived next door to us for about a year and a half. And it was eighteen incredibly hard months for me. Because particularly the father of this family made decisions that put our family, our kids, our neighbors, in harm's way. I mean, it got so bad that Dayna and I were on Zillow. We were thinking about moving, wondering where we would go. *We're getting out of here.* It got so bad that there were many days when I had to make a conscious decision not to hate this dad and the choices he was making. I had to wake up and decide, *Lord, am I going to hate today? Or am I going to do something better?*

And I am so proud of Dayna and our four kids, because all those years ago, in light of how hard it was, still, the choice that we as a family were able to make was that we were going to bless. We were not going to repay. We were going to be kind. We were going seek harmony. We were going to seek peace.

And do you know what happened? They moved out. They've been gone for a few years. I'll tell you—they moved out and were gone for several years. And then we heard a knock at the door. (Two different times we've heard a knock at the door.) We opened the door, and the person standing there was this dad and one of his family members. They were just driving by their old house, and they saw our house and thought of us. And they just wanted to say hello.

You know, one of the hardest things that we'll ever do is love those who are our enemies, who persecute us, who oppose us, who even commit evil against us. And so, I wonder, is there an enemy in your life who it's time to bless? In view of God's mercy towards you ... I bet we each one have somebody like that. And I will say that the struggle, the fight, that internal brawl that's required to bless and not hate, to love and not repay is worth it. Because sometimes you get a knock at the door. And God says, "You know what? It was worth it, wasn't it?" And you say, "Yes, it was."

Love those in your faith family. Love them with an *agape, phileo, storge* love. Love them as a brother or sister in Christ. Love those who don't love you, in view of God's mercy towards you. That's what Romans 12:1-21 is all about.

Let's pray. Let's thank the Lord for this passage and ask Him to apply it in our hearts and lives.

*{Prayer}*

*Lord, we just praise You. We praise You for Your mercy towards us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And Lord, Your mercy hasn't just saved us. It has absolutely brought us together as a faith family, as a church family, that we might love and care for and support one another in the ways that Romans 12 has laid out; that we get to enjoy that together. And you've also freed us not to repay in kind when we have an enemy, someone who's out for us and up to no good. Lord, we can respond to that enemy with blessing and with love.*

*And Lord, I pray these things for my heart, for my brothers and sisters in Christ here this morning. I pray that for each one of us.*

*And Father, I also want to pray for our students, the individuals and families who on mission this week. They're on mission trips in Ecuador and in Houston and in Austin, around the city and the globe. Lord, we lift them up to You. And I pray, Lord, that their love for each other, like this passage says, would be a witness: a witness to those who serve the living God, who has done that great work in them. And I pray for their ministry, Lord, that they would experience and talk to the people You want them to do so with; that men, women, children, and young people would come to know You this week because of their ministry and would give their lives to You. I pray that those believers that they interact with, the missionaries, would be encouraged with the witness of these teams that we're sending out. We pray for protection for them, that You would watch over them and keep the enemy far from them. And we ask them to bring them home safely, that they would be changed from the inside out through their experience. In Jesus' name, Amen.*