

The Loop:

Transformed:

Week 4: City on a Hill pt. 1

Romans 12:9-11

Romans 12:9-21 Intro

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

-Matthew 5:14-16

It's easy to think about Matthew 5 as being about one's self. Here is my personal light. My personal life is to shine in such a way that other people see who I am and give God credit for working in me. "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." Truthfully though, the passage isn't just about an individual. A city is not one person standing on top of a hill. It's a whole community living together in such a way as to show off a different style of life with God as father and Jesus as savior and king.

God has designed it such that when churches obey scripture and live as He intends, it is appealing to people on the outside. They look and see our way of life with Jesus as the Savior. Instead of individualism, we all belong to each other and everyone matters and is important because they bring their own unique wiring and giftedness and personality and sense humor and knowledge and quirks to the table.

In God's plan, those who don't know Christ look at the community of people who do know Christ and see deep joy, love, and support. The idea is that those without joy, love, support and Christ will be intrigued by those with joy, love, support and Christ. Romans 12 is a chapter about being that family; being the people of God together. Over the next few verses of Romans, Paul prescribes ten specific commands. It can be easy to get lost in them if you aren't thinking about the big picture. The big picture is that God has designed church family to be light in the darkness.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

-Romans 12:9-13

Love must be sincere.

Paul says that there is no need for hypocrisy in the family of God because we understand that Jesus has made us acceptable. We have nothing to prove and therefore we are free to truly, accurately, and genuinely love each other. Classically, hypocrisy was a reference to stage actors that wore masks. Paul is calling us to take our masks off and live honestly with one another. If you are wearing a mask to disguise your true self from everyone, how can anyone really love you? Neither can anyone really love you; nor can anyone be really loved by you.

As a family we need to be careful, because together we have to collectively take off our masks. When we all faithfully begin to do this, we will create an environment where we take care of other people, because we have a real love for them in our hearts. Faking it just because we feel that we are supposed to isn't an option and will be replaced with real, true, honest love.

Real love doesn't put up artificial fronts. Real love forgets itself by being enthralled with Jesus and as we are filled with Jesus' real love, His love spills out of us to meet the needs of all around us.

Potential steps towards growth:

- 1.) Pray and ask God to free you from trying to act a certain way to be accepted, liked, or praised.
- 2.) Ask God to make you aware of sin in your life, including ways you act hypocritically.
- 3.) Go to a Christian friend and confess every single sin in your life that God reveals to you. Include sins of commission (doing what you shouldn't), omission (not doing what you should), and sinful desires (things you want that you shouldn't want and things you don't want that you should want).
- 4.) Reflect on the reality that Jesus offers us acceptance through the cross. We don't have to earn it or prove ourselves anymore.

Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

As Christians we love people and we hate things that harm them. That is how God is. Have you read the Bible? God hates sin. He has to hate it, because he is loving. He hates sin because of its effects both on and in people. For example, husbands, if someone beat up your wife, would you not be furious? You'd be extremely angry. That's how God is. He hates sin and evil and he wants his people to grow and be like him. Hating sin and celebrating that Jesus has taken care of our sins by his death on the cross, paying for sin and taking it away so that we need not live in it anymore. If you can sit idly by and watch sin destroy someone's life without hating it, then your love isn't sincere. That is fake love, because real love hates sin and the devastation it causes.

Evil is not defined as what we hate and good is not defined by what we cling to. That is worldview type stuff. Evil isn't what we want it to be. Liking something doesn't make it good. Evil doesn't change and good doesn't change. We change. If you don't hate what is evil, CHANGE. If you don't cling to what is good, CHANGE. Good and evil are objective because there is an objective reality called God. He determines what is good and evil.

Choosing good over evil is simply not enough. We can't just reject evil; we have to loathe it. Christianity is a change in the heart regarding how you feel about evil and good. God works in us to change us from the inside out. We must be changed deeply so that we hate evil and love good. You can't just stop liking evil if you currently love it. How do we obey? It's simple, be transformed.

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

-Ezekiel 36:26

This is a war to the grave. Love what you should love and hate what you should hate.

Potential steps towards growth:

- 1.) Prayerfully reflect on the damage that sin and evil have brought into the world. Imagine the horrors of slavery, forced child prostitution, etc.
- 2.) Imagine the feelings you would have if a terrible sin were to be committed against someone you deeply care about.
- 3.) Meditate on the brutal death of Jesus as a reflection of the awfulness of sin and how sin disgusts God.

- 4.) Ask God to give you eyes to see His work in the world.
- 5.) Make a list of all the good things that God has done in your life and in the lives of others around you. Pay special attention to ways you have seen the kingdom of God breaking through in our fallen world.
- 6.) Sit down with a Christian friend, share your list, and celebrate with them

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Our culture is lonely and isolated and longing for connection. Because of this desire, most people turn to romantic relationships and sex. Our culture is dating and sex crazed. Songs, movies, television, and books are all obsessed with sex. The problem is that in the end, it comes up hollow and unsatisfying. Imagine how appealing it would be to our culture to see a church family that was devoted in brotherly love. Think about it; we are devoted and because of that it is a safe community. You aren't going to get left if relationships become difficult. You don't have to worry about being dumped or used. Everyone is a part of the family. Because we are all different, everyone contributes. We are sincere, and we care enough about each other enough to hate sin in our lives. God is transforming us to deeply, relationally connect with each other in Godly intimacy instead of using cheap sex to fill our empty void.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

-1 Corinthians 12:21-26

Potential steps towards growth:

- 1.) Stay “in view of Gods mercy.” (Romans 12:1) Reflect on the mercies of God to you through the cross of Jesus.
- 2.) Remind yourself who other Christians are in relation to God. They are in the family. God has justified them. Jesus died for them. They are your brother or sister forever. All their sins are forgiven! Will you hold against them that which God doesn't?
- 3.) God has given you his Holy Spirit. Ask him to change how you feel.
- 4.) Don't focus on peoples “not yet” (where they haven't grown, changed, been transformed yet) more than you focus on their progress by the Holy Spirit. Be more excited about the work of God in their lives than you are upset with their sin. If they are a “saved jerk” now, imagine how terrible they would be without God's grace at work in their lives.

Honor one another above yourselves.

When you love as a brother and honor above others yourself, you confirm and manifest your new life in Christ. You confirm that God has made you a new creation, giving you new desires. The way that the Holy Spirit works to grow fruit is through internal motive and external word.

Nonetheless, this can still be trying and difficult at times. How do you love someone you don't like? How do you honor someone who is dishonorable? God has given us his Holy Spirit. Ask Him to change how you feel. Remind yourself who other Christians are in relation to God. They are in the family. God has justified them and Jesus has died for them. They are your brothers and sisters forever. All their sins are forgiven, as were all of yours.

This section begins with “in view of God's mercy.” Imagine a little kid playing at the beach. His family is eating watermelon and throwing a Frisbee. Nothing is wrong until suddenly the little kid gets caught in the ocean waves and can't get his footing. He doesn't know which way is up and which way is down. He can't find the ground to get a stance and he's starting to panic.

Just as the kid is giving up all hope of survival, he feels his dad snatch him up from the waves and save him. His father brings him out so that he can get a breath and live. The kid doesn't have to be told to have affection and appreciate for his father in that instant; he just does. If you don't understand your salvation as being like that; as God's mercy being like that; then you are going to have a hard time loving people. We can only love in full view of God's mercy.

Potential steps towards growth:

- 1.) Make a list of the least desirable tasks and jobs that must be done around your house/apartment or in our church family.
- 2.) As much as possible, go and do those tasks while asking God to make your attitude be "someone has to do these things. I am glad I can be the one to do them so that others will not have to."
- 3.) Anytime your attitude becomes "I am doing so much around here. I should be more appreciated", be humbled by reminding yourself of Jesus death on the cross in your place, for your sins.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

This is a plague on American Christianity. We show up on Sundays, smile and wave, maybe serve in some small way, then go home and really come alive for our jobs, or our entertainment, or our kid. All the while, we miss out on any real passion for God. Spiritual enthusiasm is almost a foreign concept to our modern society. The problem is that if we don't have a passion for Jesus, we are in sin.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men"

-Colossians 3:23

"So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

-Revelation 3:16

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

-Mark 12:30

In working for the Lord we should find a focused and passionate service. Everyone serves something, but working for Christ means experiencing Him as more compelling than our appetites and natural desires. It means caring about Christ’s opinion more than others’ opinions. It can even mean we stop trying to earn God’s approval through serving, and we rest in the fact that Jesus has already earned God’s love for us.

Potential steps towards growth:

- 1.) If you are a “get-it done” type person, ask God to help you feel passionately about Him and His mission.
- 2.) Spend time sitting still and simply being with God.
- 3.) If you are a “passionate/feelings oriented” person, ask God to help you get ministry done and actually accomplish things.
- 4.) Make a to-do list and get started in putting your passion into practice!