

## Living It, Part 2 – Romans 12:9-21

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. LS w/RM

1. In vs. 1&2, Paul calls us to be living sacrifices w/renewed minds.
2. In the rest of ch 12, he describes what that *looks* like.
3. Last week in vs. 3-8 we saw that means we'll be *humble, harmonious, & effective* in the use of the gifts God has given each of us.
4. Today in vs. 9-21 we see that being a LS w/RM means being *virtuous*.

#### B. Virtue

1. Before we dive into the text, we need to begin w/a little reflection on the whole idea of *virtue* because it's fallen on hard times.
  2. Today for many, the word 'virtue' means *pure, chaste, virginal*.
    - a. It carries the sense of *innocence*, but not a positive freedom from guilt; no, today it means *inexperience*, even *naivety*.
    - b. Some think being virtuous means *lacking sophistication, class & style*.
    - c. They consider being "*worldly*" a *compliment*.
    - d. It's only been in the last hundred years or so that virtue has had such an unfortunate comedown.
  3. The word '*virtue*' comes to us from the Latin *virtus* which means *strength; moral strength & excellence*.
    - a. It spoke of a *trait* valued as *good*.
    - b. The *opposite* of virtue is *vice*, a *weakness* of character & *absence* of excellence.
  4. In the Classical world of the Greeks & Romans, *virtue* was one of the chief goals of life.
    - a. Philosophy & Science combined to one end – to produce a life that was *good because* it was *virtuous*.
    - b. Philosophers spent endless hours debating what virtue was & how to attain it.
    - c. They made up *lists* of virtues & described what they looked like.
    - d. Eventually, they settled on 4 main virtues – *Justice, Courage, Wisdom, & Moderation*.
    - e. During the Middle Ages, this list was expanded to include the *spiritual* virtues of *faith, hope & love*.
    - f. These 7 became the core of the *Age of Chivalry*, when the pursuit of virtue was enshrined as the goal of all culture & civilization.
  5. For both the Classical & Medieval world, virtue wasn't seen in a single act – it was a *trait* of character, a *habit* or moral excellence.
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6. Historians have found that generally speaking, when a civilization is *rising* & in the beginning of its Golden Age, *virtue is prized*.
  7. But when *vice prevails*, & greed, cruelty, injustice, & brutality become accepted as the norm, culture is collapsing in its death throes.
  8. A simple way to know whether virtue or vice prevails in a culture is to look at its heroes –
  9. Those who are being *honored*?

#### C. Our Time

1. Until just a generation ago in this nation, our heroes were people of virtue, of sterling moral excellence.
  - a. Men like George Washington, John Quincy Adams, Patrick Henry, & Abraham Lincoln.
  - b. Women like Florence Nightingale, Abigail Adams, Louisa May Alcott, & Clara Barton.

2. Even though their lives were often *mythologized*, the point is, they were *portrayed* as *heroic*; as virtuous role models to aspire to.
3. But about a generation ago, a revolution in thinking called the *Enlightenment*, born in Europe a couple hundred years ago—after a long battle with Faith, finally gained the upper hand in Western civilization.
  - a. *Faith* in God was rooted out & swept away.
  - b. With it went belief in real, objective, unchanging truth.
  - c. Truth was reduced to whatever the *majority* decided.
  - d. Then it devolved to whatever an *individual* want it to be.
  - e. Today, truth is whatever works.
4. So *virtue*, that which is *good* because it aligns with Truth, is now an old-fashioned, silly idea because there isn't any objective truth in this postmodern age.
5. **Good** is *whatever works*; Hey → It's **ALL** good. Anything goes – as long as it's good for you.
6. So, **vice** is today's virtue because it gets people what they want.
7. Popular media & culture are largely a *celebration of vice*.
8. For proof, we need look no further than to consider who today's *heroes* are.
  - a. And right off we have a problem because we don't even call them that – they're *stars, celebrities*.
  - b. And *who* are they? What have they done that's elevated them? Well, they're *entertainers*!
    - 1) They sing & act or dribble a ball.
    - 2) And countless others aspire to be just like them,
    - 3) Not in character, but in fame, finance & form.
    - 4) People want desperately to do what their heroes do: Slam dunk, play guitar, sing, or walk a runway in some hideous get-up called fashion.
  - c. The hit TV shows are *American Idol, Top Model, Project Runway*, & one called *The Biggest Loser* where the point of the show is to **lose weight**.
9. About the only time you hear the word “hero” today is in “*superhero*”; a *comic book* or *cartoon* character.
10. Who today says, “I want to be like so & so because they're so just, kind, generous, wise, courageous, good, loving?”
11. Ask 4<sup>th</sup> graders “Who do you want to be like?” And mostly what you'll hear is Hannah Montana & 50 Cent.
12. If one of them said, “Mother Teresa” or “Abraham Lincoln,” they'd be laughed at, *if* the other kids even knew who Mother Teresa & Abraham Lincoln were.

#### **D. Called To Virtue**

1. As the followers of Christ, we're called to moral excellence.
2. We're called to virtue because we don't just know *what* truth *is*, we know Truth *Himself*.
3. Jesus said, “I *am* the way, the truth, and the life.”
4. Paul describes that way & life here . . .

## **II. TEXT**

### **A. V. 9**

#### **<sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy.**

1. In the early church, one of the first lessons believers learned was that love is the bottom line & chief virtue of the Christian life.
2. 1 Cor. 13:13 – “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the *greatest* of these *is* love.”

3. Several passages make it clear that love is the premier virtue & supreme ethic.<sup>1</sup>
4. So Paul begins with love & says it must not be tainted by *hypocrisy*.
  - a. And interesting word; it comes from Greek drama & the stage.
  - b. It meant '*beneath the mask*' because actors in a Greek play wore a mask whose appearance told the audience what kind of person the character was.
  - c. To this day the symbol for drama is 2 masks; one laughing, the other crying.
  - d. In Greek, the actor was a 'hypocrite' one who speaks from beneath a mask.
5. Paul's says we're not to *play-act* at love. We're not to *fake* it.
6. It's not enough to give lip-service to the primacy of love in the Christian life & faith – We need to *live* it.
7. Love here is *agape* – the love for others that seeks their best without no concern for self.
8. We can't sit around & *talk* about love, about how it's our chief virtue; we have to *show* it, *do it!*
9. But this love isn't without boundaries. It's shaped by truth, so -  
**Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.**
10. The object of love is God & people.
11. And if we genuinely love them, we'll loath what harms & be stoked about what blesses.

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12. Returning to our earlier topic of virtue & vice, think of the *evil* Paul mentions here as vice & the good as virtue.
13. While the *world exalts vice & demeans virtue*, we need to go the exact opposite direction.
14. Christian, be careful about drawing entertainment from that which is evil.
  - a. I'm not saying throw out your TV & don't go to the movies.
  - b. If that's what *God* tells you, then by all means do it.
  - c. What I *am* saying is that we must be discerning about what we call *good* & allow ourselves to be entertained by.
  - d. There was a TV show I recently had to turn off because it was a depiction of evil that was meant to entertain & the Spirit simply said, "Nope."
  - e. If you're watching or listening to something & the Spirit prods your conscience, don't sit there & argue; be *prompt* to turn it off.
  - f. Most Christians wish the Lord gave clearer direction to them & spoke to them more often.
  - g. He does, but they too often *dispute* what He says.
  - h. Be swift to comply to the Spirit's leading when watching TV or listening to the radio.

## B. V. 10

### <sup>10</sup> Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love,

1. Paul piles up *warm words* describing family & friends as he speaks about *how* believers are to treat one another.
2. We're to be kind. Affectionate. Pals, buds, brohs, bruddas.
3. Some of us grew up in really messed up homes.
  - a. Others didn't even have a family but were raised in foster-care; bounced around the system from house to house.
  - b. They don't have a good example of a healthy family.
  - c. Even so, we can *imagine* what one looks like. We know what our hearts *yearn* for.
4. What we want is for people to be kind to one another; to look out for & take care of each other.
5. We want to be open & honest with one another & accepted as we are, *while* we grow in grace.
6. Here's how this would look if it were fully in play here –

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. 1:5 Gal. 5:22 1 Pet. 4:8

- a. No greeters – because people would just show up early and pass out bulletins & stand at the doors to greet their family & friends.
  - b. No ushers, because when took a seat would think about others & would watch out for them when they came in to make sure they got one themselves.
  - c. Announcements in the bulletin for rides to church or help in the nursery, only once, if ever, because people would be standing in line waiting to take a turn in the nursery & teaching class.
7. And there'd be a whole lot more hugging & signs of affection.
- in honor giving preference to one another;**
8. When we're in a group, how much of our time is spent waiting for others to recognize & affirm us?
  9. We need to turn that right over on its head & show that much attention to others, making sure *they're* recognized & affirmed.

**C. V. 11**

**<sup>11</sup> not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;**

1. The key here is "serving the Lord." The first 2 phrases tell **HOW** –
  - a. We serve God with *diligence & fervency*.
  - b. Or, we could say, with *purpose & passion*.
2. Paul uses interesting words here.
  - a. "**Not lagging in diligence**" is "*not slothful in earnestness.*"
    - 1) The sloth is someone who's perpetually lazy & sluggish.
    - 2) They have no interest in anything. They're *bored*.
    - 3) With all 3 of our kids, there was a phase they went thru when they'd mope around, complaining about being bored.
    - 4) Lynn & I never tolerated it because it was so silly.
    - 5) There were an endless number of things to do, but they'd made a choice not to but to instead lament their sad, sorry lives.
  - b. A bored believer is an oxymoron!
  - c. There's work to be done in expanding the Kingdom of God.
  - d. There are dragons to slay, battles to fight, souls to win, lives to be saved; wild, exciting adventures to embark on.
3. The Greek word '*fervent*' means to be hot, to boil!
4. It's a passion word. Our faith ought to be passionate, fervent, hot.

**D. V. 12**

**<sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope,**

1. Hope is that quality of faith that has *confidence* in God to bring us safely home.
2. It's a rock solid assurance that it's all going to work out & heaven is our destiny.
3. That hope instills a *deep joy* in our present.
4. The first time I read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, I was filled with apprehension because I didn't know how the story ended & there were times when Frodo & Sam faced ordeals that seemed way beyond their capacity to endure.
5. But the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> time I read it, I didn't have the same concern because I knew the end.
6. Now I was *rooting them on* BECAUSE I KNEW WHAT WAS COMING.
7. We know our end – GLORY! So let's root ourselves & one another on while we're in the midst of our story.

**patient in tribulation,**

8. Because faith tells us all things are working together for good, we can patiently endure difficulty.

9. Nothing can come into our lives that doesn't first have to pass through the hands of God, & He only allows it to work some greater good.
10. So we patiently endure, looking to Him for the way *through*, not just any old way *out*.  
**continuing steadfastly in prayer;**
11. In this context of virtue, Paul means we must be consistent in prayer because it reminds us of our dependency on God, which forms the core of our virtue & strength.

**E. V. 13**

**<sup>13</sup> distributing to the needs of the saints,**

1. Charity, being sensitive to the practical needs of other believers is evidence of being saved.
2. Here again, Paul picks words that make his intent clear.
  - a. It's literally – “entering into a *mutual sharing* of the needs of the saints.”
  - b. We ought not see charity as a benevolence from those who are lofty *to* those who are low.
  - c. We don't hand the gift *down* – *we come down* to share not just a gift but ourselves.
  - d. We identify with the needy personally & *see their need as our own* because we're one Body.

**given to hospitality.**

3. Hospitality is a practical concern for the welfare of those within one's reach.
4. It means using your daily resources of food & shelter to help those you encounter without them.
5. Throughout history, hospitality or its lack have always been seen as the most obvious evidence of a culture's grip in virtue.

**F. V. 14**

**<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.**

1. Most of what Paul has written so far deals with relationships among believers.
2. Now he turns to deal with virtue as it touches our contact with the world.
3. The world's rule is to do unto others before they do unto you.
4. Christian ethics says to not return evil for evil, but to abhor evil & cling to what is good.
5. So when we're persecuted, mocked, scorned, belittled & cursed, we're not to return in kind but are to speak blessing.
6. Hey—the only way we can do this is if we're walking in the Spirit.

**G. V. 15**

**<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.**

1. The tendency is to rejoice when our enemies weep & weep when they rejoice.
2. But what kind of a testimony is that? All it does is prove we're living by the same rules they do.
3. The life we claim we have in Christ is really no different from theirs.
4. But when those who've set themselves to be our undoing see us happy at their promotion & sad in their grief, it totally messes them up.
5. That's NOT what they expected & they can't figure it out.
6. It proves the life we have **IS** different from theirs. And it's that difference that will attract them.

**H. V. 16**

**<sup>16</sup> Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.**

1. He comes back to our relationship with believers & repeats the call to humility & harmony we saw in vs. 3-5.
2. He repeats it in this list of Christian virtues because humility was considered by the Greeks & Romans as *no virtue at all*.
3. They said humility was for slaves & outcasts, unfit for people of dignity.

4. But as lofty as their philosophy was it did not realize that the root of evil was the exaltation of self.
5. It took the Gospel to supply philosophy with the realization that denial of self lies at the heart of all true virtue;
6. That the first battle virtue wages is the battle with self.
  - a. He who is weak *exalts* self.
  - b. Only the strong can conquer *that* fortress.

**I. V. 17**

**<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil.**

1. Paul knows how *quick* we are to dish out what we've been served.
2. We tend to react without thinking to the crud people hurl at us.
3. We must not return evil for evil.
4. Instead, use it as an opportunity to overcome evil by doing good. It really messes people up.

**Have regard for good things [virtue] in the sight of all men.**

5. Let your rep be that you're a person of virtue.
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6. This is a battle most of us face –
    - a. We go to church & small group, read the Bible & pray.
    - b. Listen to KDAR or Worship 101.
    - c. When we're with our family & church friends, we do pretty well.
    - d. But then we go to work or school, or hang out with the lost, & slip so easily into speech & conversation that's just like theirs.
    - e. And it really bugs! We feel terrible about it as we're on our way home.
    - f. The reason why we struggle is because of the desire to fit in and be accepted.
    - g. We have to decide, *before* we insert ourselves into those sitches, that our acceptance by God trumps the world's opinion by light years!

[LOTR – Inn scene at end]

**J. V. 18**

**<sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

1. I'm so thankful for the *qualifier* Paul gives here.
2. After reading all of this we might wonder if Paul lived on the same planet we do.
3. I mean, some of this looks impossible, unrealistic.
4. V. 18 proves Paul knew there are some people, no matter what you do, they'll just continue to be difficult.
5. We're going to have strained relationships; just make sure it's not coming from you.

**K. Vs. 19-21**

**<sup>19</sup> Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.**

1. When we get back at others, we're short-circuiting God's justice.
2. How much better to let Him take care of it because He does everything perfectly.

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3. Now Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22

**<sup>20</sup> Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."**

4. Then adds -

**<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

5. This is something he's already said but repeats himself because it's so contrary to human nature.
6. We're not to fight fire with fire, use water.

7. When the enemy throws stones, build a road with them.
  8. We're not to fight evil with evil, we're to do good & by doing so, prove ourselves the people of God.
  10. Every once in a while, you hear a Bible teacher say the coals on the head thing was an ancient practice in which when your fire went out, you went to your neighbor & they would put coals from their fire into a pot which you then carried on your head back to your house.
  11. That may be, but that's *not* what Paul is referring to here.
    - a. He uses the word "*heap*" – this isn't a couple coals you give a friend.
    - b. This is a *pile* of heat that's too great to bear.
    - c. The word means an *overwhelming amount*.
  12. The idea is—when you do good to your enemies, they'll feel the heat of conviction & may ultimately repent & come to faith.
  13. This is what God did with us: It was good & kind to us and it won our hearts.
  14. It's the goodness of God that leads us to repentance.
  15. Listen - the *sweetest revenge* of all is to see a sinner saved & an enemy made a friend.
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A LS w/RM is *virtuous*.