

Apostolic One Liners 4-14-02

Romans 12:9-21

Last week's message was a particularly strong burden from the Lord. Monday I listened to a tape of a meeting of Pastors in Phoenix. The Speaker, who is the head of the Cali, Columbia Pastor's Association, was preaching the same message. I love God's confirmations! We need to seek the Kingdom of God first. Too often we seek the needs of an individual church first. The Kingdom way is to seek the Kingdom first and foremost and watch God add what we need. (Matthew 6:33) We need to appreciate our brothers and sisters in Christ in all of Sedona and work together for the glory of God. The speaker said the same move of God is happening around the world, churches coming together, honoring and loving one another. I truly believe it is a work of the Holy Spirit and we must cooperate.

Let us continue where we left off about one month ago in Romans 12. We considered being a living sacrifice, letting go of the steering wheel of our life and letting God take over. The following week we went over the pointers of discipleship in verses 3-8. I challenged you to find your calling, your place in the body. I did get a couple of calls – but I think too many of you think you are not needed. God has a calling for each of you. We who have found our place are handicapped without you finding your place in this body. Ask the Lord to show you how you can be a part. Take a stab at something you think the Lord may be leading you to do and see if God's blessing is on it.

The rest of this chapter of Romans 12 is filled with wonderful Holy Spirit one liners. As we look through them allow the Holy Spirit to focus your heart on which ones He may be speaking to you personally. You are here for a reason this morning, and the Lord has something to speak to your heart.

9a Love must be sincere.

I believe the opposite of love is not hate but apathy. The origin of the word 'apathy' literally means 'no feeling'. Paul is teaching that love is just the opposite. Our love for one another must be genuine and honest – not sloppy *agape*.

1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)²² *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

It needs to be the kind of love that will pay the price to be expressed. It is not just expressed in words but actions. It must be willing to feel with others who feel joy or pain. Love that is not sincere will never get down to work and get dirty. It will only pay what is comfortable. This kind of love hurts with those who hurt, and rejoices at the successes of others. Love that is sincere will overlook offenses and readily forgive. Insincere love will only express itself as long as others are agreeable and have the same opinion. Sincere love will love through thick and thin. It is the kind of love Jesus has for you, and the kind of love He expects you to have for others. Pray for God to add sincerity to our love. We must be willing to have that kind of a heart. It is not something we work up, but a yielding to the Holy Spirit over the old nature.

9b,c Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Strong words, but they are in sync with who God is. In fact, it comes naturally when you align your heart with God's heart. A Messianic Psalm ascribes this quality be one of the reasons that Jesus was anointed with such joy.

Psalms 45:7 (NIV)⁷ *You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*

Like Jesus, we are to hate what is evil. We often point to Jesus upsetting the tables in the Temple as an exception to His gentle demeanor. It is entirely in unity with the Spirit of God to hate evil. Evil is not a person or a personality, but the spirit and actions that turn people away from the Living God.

Psalms 97:10 (NIV)¹⁰ *Let those who love the LORD hate evil ...*

A love of all that God is, holiness, righteousness, goodness, etc. will naturally hate the opposite which is evil. You can't truly love God without hating evil. We can't be wishy-washy about deception and the tactics of Satan that turn people away from God. The way to fight spiritual evil is with prayer. Prayer may lead us to do some kind of actions in areas where we have authority. Jesus had the authority to turn those tables over because it was a Temple dedicated to Him. In your own home and life you have the right to toss out what is evil, and you should. Peter says to get rid of all moral filth (2Peter 1), and Paul tells us to do the same with anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language (Colossians 3). In all areas we must realize we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers of darkness. We need the intense hatred of evil that Jesus had, to confront the things that turn others and us away from God. We need to recognize how utterly destructive evil is. I will bring more on that next week. Consider John 10:10. We need to refuse any compromise or tolerance of evil in our own hearts!

9c Cling to what is good.

All that God is, is good. We need to grab hold of the Word of God through memory, through meditating, and through embracing godly habits. We need to cling to what is good because the world is always there to pull it from our grip. The author of Hebrews told us to cling to the profession of our faith. That is a good thing. Remember your conversion from darkness in to Light and hang onto it tightly. What other good things has God revealed to you and encouraged you to act on? Cling to them! We can do that by sharing with others the testimonies of those times in our life that we know God met us. It will remind us of why He met us and will keep our hearts focussed on God. Cling to what is good. Embrace goodness.

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

That sincere love expresses itself in devotion to one another in brotherly love. Most of us are devoted to our families. In the culture in which this verse was written family devotion was a way of life. Paul is saying we need to treat one another as if we are family. Is there a need? We should meet it as if it was a family need. The church took care of the widows and those who were orphaned as if they were literally a family. When a brother was in jail they would feed and care for him as if he were family, risking their own imprisonment. Today we have such a watering down of this spirit of brotherhood that it is hardly discernable. We need to truly be a

family. If we had some persecution we would find out who was willing to act as family. I hope we don't need to go down that road of persecution. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Spirit of God would convict us and we would just live in the spirit of the last half of this verse?

"Honor one another above yourselves."

That is what it takes, humility.

I heard a Spanish speaking pastor express it quite succinctly. He told a group of about 350 pastors, "Our problem is presumption! We think we are the best, the most anointed, the special one, the one God favors." Presumption! God is just as willing to speak to, direct, bless and love me, as He is anyone. Anyone includes the brother I have been refusing to honor. Why should I honor him? If Jesus loves him enough to die for him, he is greatly loved of God. He has entered into a relationship with God. I don't have to like his style or personality, but God loves him so I must honor him. He is not perfect, but neither am I. If I honor him I won't speak evil of him. *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.* You can only do that when your love is the love of God.

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

The Greek word for fervor is *Zeo*. It is used of water boiling over. I love to see Christians that have spiritual fervor, who are not lacking in zeal. This verse is an interesting expression because we could apply it to the above verses of hating evil and clinging to the good, and also to being devoted to one another. The person that is zealous, who has spiritual fervor, is seeking after God with his whole being. He wants to know God's will right now in his given situation so he can jump in with both feet. They are not asking how little they can do to fulfill their duty, or begrudgingly giving of their time. With excitement, they are continually asking God, "What next?"

If you have lost your spiritual fervor, or never found it, I know where you can find it. Communion with God and then acting on His instruction and directions. When you are willing to hear and act on what you hear – you'll know God is real, alive, and involved in your life. It gets exciting. It is not always easy or victorious but it is always exciting and fulfilling. Get some spiritual *Zeo*! God is zealous for you. Will you allow yourself by the Spirit to be zealous for Him? The world needs to see Christians that are zealous in the Spirit.

12a Be joyful in hope

Our joy isn't in our present circumstances, but in the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. We are seated with Him in the heavens, but our experience on this earth is a process of transformation as we go through struggles and challenges, learning to trust in Him completely. Our joy comes from that hope that says the process will be completed. We will stand and worship before the throne of God without shame or guilt. He will finish the work He has begun. He is the Master Craftsman and he never leaves a job unfinished and never quits before His masterpieces are complete. That assurance should give you a sense of joy deep down in your heart. It is a joy that stays in spite of the present conditions because it is a joy in hope.

12b Patient in affliction.

Affliction always seems to last too long. Did you ever hear a prayer request for a little longer affliction? We must trust God in affliction, that He knows how and when to deliver us, that it will work out for our good. The Psalmist said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." Have patience. One way or another, the LORD will deliver you in His time. His presence with you will help you through the affliction and mature you in the process.

12c Faithful in prayer.

In Colossians 4:1 Paul tells us to be devoted to prayer. In 1Thessalonians 5:18 he tells us we are to pray without ceasing. EM Bounds had a very successful Christian ministry, but in his later years he realized that more could be accomplished in prayer than all the physical work and speaking he could ever do. He decided to devote the later years of his life mostly to prayer. He spent the last 17 years of his life rising at 4AM to be sure he had plenty of quiet time to be with the Father in prayer. Only when we get to heaven will we see how much was accomplished for the Kingdom of God, through this man, who lived so much of his life on his knees. I think as we grow in Christ we find this to be an increasing part of our daily life and the vehicle through which real changes are accomplished. Someday I will do a whole series of sermons on prayer, but for now I just want to say, the bride desires to hear the heart of her husband. What kind of a relationship would she have if she refused to take time to share her heart with Him and hear His?

13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

If you have more than you need, it is so you can share with those who are not having their needs met. America has been so blessed and has been very generous. We need to continue the tradition led by the Spirit of God, to give to the needy around the world and in our community. That is why we have the benevolent fund and why we will have love offering envelopes in the pews. If you want to give to the needy in our own community you can place your donation in one of these envelopes and the elders will distribute it as needed. If you know of someone in need, please let us know.

In the days of the early church there were few hotels that weren't brothels. That was one reason it was so important to practice hospitality, but it does not negate the need today. When we have others stay in our homes, we get to know them and we can serve them. A qualification of an elder was that he be hospitable. It shows a generous and loving spirit.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Here is that upside down world of the Kingdom of God. Without Christ in our lives we respond to people in the same way they are toward us. Jesus said sinners are nice to people who are nice to them. That's nothing. It is when you are treated like dirt and respond with the love of Christ, that people will understand you are different and that you have something they need. That is the response of a new creation. Only a changed heart can respond in love toward the abusive and cruel. Be determined to let Jesus respond through you.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

If you truly love one another then their joy becomes your joy and their sorrow becomes your sorrow. We are willing to pay the price to enter into their feelings. Jesus does it with us. I hope you know that. He cries with us when we cry and rejoices with us when we rejoice. We are to be like Him with our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

16a Live in harmony with one another.

Remember from last week's message, harmony is a variety of notes that blend. We need to strive for ways to make our differences blend, not clash. Easier said than done, but **the humble will find a way**. The next sentence tells us how.

16b Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

If you are not proud, not thinking of yourself as better than others, you will listen to what they have to say and not insist on being the only one that is right. Every life is special to God and has something to add. The wonderful thing about true Christianity is its lofty evaluation of every human life made in the image of God. In the upside down world of the Kingdom the least represent Jesus. If you've paid attention to them, Jesus says, you've paid attention to Him. The last shall be first.

17a Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

In the Kingdom of God, 'turn about' is not fair play. If evil is done to you, forgive. A Christian does not answer in like kind, but responds with the love and forgiveness of Jesus, knowing that they have been forgiven a much greater debt.

17b Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

It's not always possible, but as much as lies within you, make the effort for the sake of your testimony. We are too often ready to flaunt our freedoms, offending for the sake of demanding our rights, but the testimony of Jesus Christ is at stake. If I can surrender my rights and privileges so that someone may have a better impression of Jesus, I should be ready to lay down my will and my ways. It is a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord.

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

You can't control others peoples' lives and hearts but you can deal with your own. The Apostle is telling us that strife should never continue because we are holding on to a grudge. We can't help it if someone else does but we shouldn't. The author of Hebrews warns us that a root of bitterness will trouble and defile many. Refuse to nourish it! Root it out!

19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

The thought is really continuing from verse 16. When we are wronged or offended we need to leave it in God's hands. We try to reconcile, we forgive, and then we put it in God's hands. If there has been an injustice done we must trust God to be a just judge. Too often we want to see things dealt with just to pacify our desire for justification. Jesus justified you with the Father, don't worry about your reputation

on earth. Jesus didn't. The word says He made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2).

20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

A quote from Proverbs 25:21,22. I think this means you will cause his conscience to trouble him. He will be convicted. His mind will burn. To feed an enemy meant to make a short-term truce. One tradition is that if you eat together you cannot fight that day. Be kind to the one who offends or wronged you. That is Jesus' way of dealing with it. How unlike man! That is exactly what God has done for us. He has blessed our lives, even while we were in rebellion against Him. That kindness should cause our consciences to burn with conviction, so that we repent.

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Again, how Christ like. His goodness has overcome the evil in our hearts. His love for us has caused us to love Him in return. God has placed us where we are to do the same. The evil around us should not cause us to conform to it, but instead it should be transformed by the presence of Christ in us. We are called overcomers. We are not just to hold down the fort till Christ comes to rescue us, we are to be on the attack with love and goodness. But how are we going to do that if we can't begin at home. Let us make every effort to love one another, and to show the love of Jesus. Let us be loving and forgiving to those who have wounded us. Have that *zeo*, that spiritual fervor that refuses to conform, but instead is transforming you and the world around you, with the presence of Christ. Will you be overcome by the world or will you be an overcomer that lives these instructions? The Apostle Paul paints in black and white. We would love to reason out some shades of gray, but it just isn't that way. Let us decide we will be overcomers, full of zeal, love and humility, by His grace.

1John 5:4 (NIV) *...everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*

When I was sixteen, I read from a passage like this in an evening Bible study. There were about five other boys there. We all had a sense that what the Scriptures said was so very different from the way we were living. Together we decided to pray and ask God what was missing, why weren't we like this. As we quietly asked God the room was filled with His presence and we were filled with His Spirit. That was it. That was what we were missing. We had been trying to follow a book of superior ideas, when what we needed was the very presence of Christ living His life in us. There may be someone reading this, who feels the same way. I invite you to invite Jesus to fill you with His life – His Spirit, to empower you to live in the newness of life.