

# Morning Worship 2\_13\_2022

Mon, 2/14 11:02AM 29:30

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

god, paul, community, wrote, evil, jesus christ, christ, seeks, letter, section, people, verses, love, relationship, passage, counterfeit, life, hearts, gospel, genuine

## SPEAKERS

1

---

00:00

Let's take some time to get into God's Word together a little more deeply, though, as always, I hope that you will open up a copy of Scripture and have that out in front of you as we go. And there'll be once more in the book of Romans this morning, which is in the New Testament. So after the four Gospels and the book of Acts, you'll find Romans and we will be in chapter 12. This morning, Mark Twain is credited as saying, it's not the parts of the Bible, I don't understand that bother me. It's parts I do understand that bother me. We've been looking at his letter to the Romans that the apostle Paul wrote, and we've been studying some time in this over the last few months, and in recent weeks, we've worked through some sections that are pretty difficult, they can be kind of challenging. They have some very nuanced ideas, some rather hard things to interpret or to understand. And today, we're going to get into another section that said, the total opposite end of the spectrum. This I think, might be one of those passages where Mark Twain says I understand exactly what this is saying. And that's why it makes me a little uncomfortable. It's very direct, and what Paul is getting at here. And if we do understand that we realize that it places a pretty high demand on those who understand what it says, we're going to get into it here this morning. Before we do let me invite you once more, to pray with me. Great and gracious God, we thank you for this time that we have to be here together today. Lord quiet are distracted minds calm, are distraught hearts. Let us hear what it is that you have to say. And let us respond then in ways that demonstrate our love for you and our love for others. And Father, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts would be acceptable in Your sight for We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Last week, we moved into the second main section of this letter that Paul wrote to the Christians living in the ancient city of Rome and the first 11 chapters of this letter are full of this the lengthiest and most detailed presentation of the gospel that you're gonna find anywhere in Scripture, the final five chapters then are a little shorter. They're very direct. And it's all about how we are to live as God's people. In light of these things. They're all they are all about our deliberate response to God's decisive actions. It's all about our deliberate response to God's decisive and definitive actions. God has acted definitively for us in Jesus Christ to rescue and redeem His people. Again, Romans one through 11 is all about that. How we who were dead in our sins have been made alive together with Christ, that something that happens by grace through faith and in response to this, then there is a new life that we are to live out. And chapter 12 marks that turning point in the letter, if you were here last week, you saw that chapter 12 begins very explicitly by saying that Paul writes, I appeal to you, therefore, based on everything that God has done, there is a way that we are to respond and he speaks of offering up our bodies as living sacrifices, and is

offering up the gifts that we received in service to others. And it keeps going with that train of thought he builds off of that, and we'll pick back up in verse nine. This is Romans chapter 12, verses nine through 21. This is the word of the Lord. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit serve the Lord. rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you bless, and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. 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. We give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all, if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, believe it to the wrath of God. For it is written Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. 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. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good sections clear. It's pretty direct. It's very forceful. I want to use it with you though to consider two identities here this morning are two ideas here this morning. The first is this that our new identity in Christ should lead to a new community that reflects Christ. Our new identity in Christ should lead to a new kind of community that reflects Christ. And the second is to look at some of the deception and the dangers of counterfeit versions of this community. Our new identity in Christ ought to lead to a new kind of community that reflects Jesus Christ. Now, I know this is obvious, but this is not Romans chapter one that we read here this morning. Paul gets to this after spending all this time talking about who Jesus Christ is, and what he has done for us. And then he moves into the series of ethical teaching only after he has gone to great lengths to present this good news. That we are brought into relationship with God the Father, through the work of God, the Son, by the power of God, the Holy Spirit. And this new identity that we have in Jesus Christ then becomes the grounds for a new way of relating to others. This is picking up really on what he had first mentioned back in verse five, when he had said, there he said that so we though many are one body in Christ, and individually members, one of another. The Dutch Reformed theologian Herman bavinck, once wrote this, our relationship to our fellow humans and to all other creatures is the outflow of our relationship to God. The way in which we relate to other people, the way in which relate to everyone around us, he says, is an outflowing of the relationship that we have with God. And there's a reason that this idea of relational community is at the very heart of the Christian faith. I understand that community is something of a bit of a buzzword, and especially if you attach the adjective authentic community to it becomes even more so. But it's also something that we long for. Even the introverts out there. This is something that we long for relationships with others, and finding some way to connect with others is one of the deep drivers behind the allure of social media. We also like to get together to just jointly celebrate and experience things. That's why later tonight, the Super Bowl is such a big deal. People like to jointly experience and celebrate things together. And the absence of being able to commune with others in the way we should is one of the reasons the last two years have been so hard for so many people. What Why is this though? Why is relational community at the very heart of the Christian faith? Well, I'd suggested that we can go all the way back to Genesis one to see why we're said there that we are created in the image of God and that we are meant to bear this image of God in the world. And it's in Genesis one that God said, Let us make men and women in our image. Right there. Here are some of the whispers of the very foundations of the Christian faith that we believe in one God eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each distinct, and yet each imperfect union and love with the others, this relation of perfect unity, and love. Now, though this is absolutely unique, right there. There's nothing else that can imitate or replicate the Trinity it is absolutely unique. But still, there is a sense in which the very fact that we are able to be in relationship with others and the fact that we longed to be in relationship with others, bears witness to the fact that the God who breathes life into the dust is not some cosmic hermit, but one who exists in try unity. And being a Christian and beings in beings being in relationship with a relational gotten out of that relationship, out of flow, new ways of relating to others, in Christian community. Pastor and

theologian named Erwin Ince wrote a book recently, it's called Beautiful, the beautiful community unity diversity in the church at its best. And this is the model he takes up to say, who is God? Who is the God that we believe in? And then what does that mean, for the ways that we relate to one another specifically around areas of racial or ethnic or economic diversity? It's all grounded in who we believe God is and what that means for us as His people we were made to be in this kind of relational community. And Paul is setting forth here some of the character and the characteristics of that, in this section, that's what he's getting at here. I'm just going to give an overview of some of the stuff that Paul said, but look, there's a lot in there. And it's, it's again, good to meditate on that. So spend time read over these verses throughout this week. Please do just meditate on some of these things. But I want to walk us through some of the overview of it. It begins with something of a thesis statement when he says Let love be genuine. That's like the title actually, if you that's the title of this section, let love be genuine. Tomorrow's Valentine's Day we know people have all kinds of ideas about how you should express love or what that means or if it's even significant at all. How is love described here? What does Paul say about it? He says, Let it be genuine. The word is translated genuine there very literally is an hypocritical, but that's a little cumbersome and a little clunky to say so genuine is very good. It's a very fascinating word though. We know the concept of a hypocrite or hypocrisy. That term though comes from classical Greek theater. It referred to an actor who would go out on stage and put on a mask so that they could pretend to be something and some that they weren't. Now this word and hypocrisy. We don't find that in Greek literature before the New Testament, but the authors were looking for something, there'll be a very easy way and very distinctive way of describing the kind of love that we should have for one another. In Christ. It's as if Paul was saying, Look, you all know how the actors will go out on stage and put on a mask to hide their true character, their true intentions, their true identity. Love is not at all like that. Let your love be genuine. He said. It's not about posturing for social approval. It's not about pretending to care as a way to demonstrate your enlightened moral superiority. The word there for love is agape, which, as many of you know is a kind of embodied enacted sacrificial love, but love be genuine. If that's the title, then the next part is kind of the subtitle for this section, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good, and he uses incredibly strong words there. He really means hate exceedingly all that is evil and cling intimately and tightly to that which is good. It's a bit reminiscent of the passage from Amos that Dan read just a little bit ago and he said, seek good and not evil. And then God said, This is good that justice and righteousness would flow down. Well, Paul here after this begins to list a whole bunch of other things that are good, particularly in verses 10 to 13. He talks about these are some of the good things to which you should hold fast and, and that section verses 10 to 13. It's very in the original language is very rhythmic. It's almost poetic. And one of the things you notice immediately when you read it is that everything in there all the actions are written as participles, which means they are ongoing, constant actions are not things that just happen one time, and we acknowledge as a momentous event. We like to do that though we like to find certain things that are one time singular momentous events that we can celebrate, maybe think of graduation or wedding or the birth of a child. Or that time you got word on your first guests right these these one time significant events. We like to celebrate and acknowledge those things. He says no, these are just constant, ongoing regular rhythms, and habits and practices of the Christian life. These are the things that have to characterize the relational realities of the redeemed, things like loving and honoring one another. Things like being fervent in your spirit and in your service to the Lord. Things like rejoicing in hope being patient in tribulation, constancy in prayer, contributing to the needs of others, he says, welcoming and showing hospitality. That's another really interesting word. That's another compound word. The word is Philo. Xenia comes from boreo fi loss love of but Xenia is stranger means a love of the stranger. That's what hospitality really means. Reaching out in love to others. And he's ascribing here these things that are to not just be one off events that you can point to a time and said that was that time I did that. But just the regular part of who you are and how we are together. And then he moves on to a series of further commands. And these are commands, these are instructions in verses 14 to 21. In particular, if you read through verses 14 to 21, you may notice you may hear some kind of background echoes of the

Sermon on the Mount. That's not accidental. Some of you were with us last winter, we did an extended study through the Sermon on the Mountain Jesus most famous teaching in Matthew five through seven and there's a lot of concepts, a lot of words, even an imagery that all was pulled from that. And Paul says things like Bless those who persecute you bless and do not curse them. Think of that maybe the next time before you hit send on that really biting response that you crafted to somebody. Bless those who persecute you bless and don't curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice weep with those who weep be with one another through the good times. And through the bad times. John Calvin once said that if we don't regard someone else's happiness with joy, that's a kind of an envy. And if we don't regard someone else's misfortune with grief, that's a kind of inhumanity says rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep certainly reminders that we need. The next section rarely, especially in verses 16 through 18. Those are just really reminders that we need in our particular cultural moments when he says things like live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty. Never think of never be wise in your own sight repay no one evil for evil, if possible, so far as it depends on you live peaceably with all. How we behave towards those with whom we disagree reveals a lot about our hearts. And Paul goes on then add a couple closing thoughts in verses 19 to 20 when he talks about not avenging ourselves, leaving that up to God says God is going to take care of those things. God will write the wrongs God will atone for the injustice is God will vindicate all those who have suffered evil and God will punish all those who have inflicted evil. And that's good news. It is good news. Everything is going to be brought to account in the end God is going to set the world to right. That's just not my job. It's not your job. God is going to set the world to rights. Our job is to announce that coming reality and to live in expectation of its arrival. He says a couple things that are pretty interesting in verse 20, verse 20, quotes from Proverbs 25, when he says there, if your enemy is hungry, feed him if he's thirsty, give him something to drink, that part's easy to understand, should be your enemies hungry, give him some food. If she's thirsty, give her something to drink. The next part, though, is a little interesting. We talked about heaping burning coals on your enemy, what is that all about? It's a kind of unusual expression. People debate exactly what it means there, it could mean that if we act rightly and kindly towards those who wronged us, then they will be ashamed of their own behavior. That's a possible meaning for it. There could also mean that if we act rightly and kindly towards those who wronged us, then it's going to highlight the fact that God's condemnation is coming eventually could mean either of those things is the kind of unusual expression there though, we can acknowledge that. But Danny ends with a very famous expression, verse 21, Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil, with good. Now evil is not meant to be reduced to the political candidate that you oppose and good is not meant to be reduced to the political candidate you support. It's a much bigger, bigger set of concepts than that. In fact, in this section, what Paul was saying is evil is the division that the enemy introduces into the body of Christ. And the way that it leads believers to turn away from one another or to turn against one another. That's what he's talking about is evil. sin in our own life, and in this world, it causes believers to turn away from one another or against one another. And he says, responding to evil with evil only increases the injury, and the injustice that they're overcome evil, with good. But once again, we need to let God define what is good. The good that Paul talks about here is the kind of love and peace that Christ has shown to us and that we ought to then extend to others even towards those with whom we find ourselves at odds. Paul saying don't be overcome by these things. Don't give way to these things. Understand that the enemy is looking to dismember the body of Christ. So don't be a part of that. Instead, overcome these things with the love and peace of Christ, something that seeks restoration, and reconciliation. He's talking about here, the character of the kind of community that believers ought to evidence when they are with one another. There was a survey that came out back in 2019 by LifeWay Research, and one of the things that noted was this that 65% of churchgoers, 65% of churchgoers agreed with the statement, I can have a relationship with God completely apart from other believers. 65% of churchgoers agreed with that statement, I can have a relationship with God without any other believers. Now look, on one hand, yes, it is true that you have a personal intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Yes, that is true. But we are unequivocally calling to

pursue that alongside of others. You can't get away from that. In Scripture. There's so much more that can be said about every one of these little sections here, I'm not going to do that. But these are, again, these are instructions. These are commands we can even say these are not. These are not optional suggestions. These are not the accessories that get added on to the Christian luxury package of things. This is what it should look like. So spend some time with them. Again, I hope you will read through these throughout this week, pray through these things. Read read through a few of those verses just before you log on to Twitter, or think about them whenever you're commuting into work, even if your commute now is just a walk into your dining room. If you're looking for a roadmap of how to navigate things, especially when it's so incendiary, and combustible, out there everywhere, this is it. This is what Paul's talking about. He says this is what it should look like when Christians live out their new life in Christ together, but it doesn't always look that way. And there are a couple of counterfeit versions that can easily lead us in the wrong direction. So that's what I want to look at with you here. Now, some of the deception some of the dangers that comes from these from counterfeit versions of community. And I'll give you two and they're really just meet you'll notice quickly. They're rare, they're really just mirror images, one of the other right one counterfeit version of a community is one that seeks to embrace these kinds of characteristics, yet rejects Christ to embrace these kinds of characteristics but to reject Christ look, a lot of the characteristics that we read in here, being peaceable honoring others loving one another's there's a lot in here that honestly we can say does not sound distinctively Christian in and of itself and would in fact, be embraced by a lot of people who do reject the Christian faith. So on one hand, we should appreciate the fact that if people are trying to live into these things mean they are good things to live into, but I really can't We've all there's two things, at least we've got to always remember. The first is this, when we're looking at terms in here are things like love or good or evil or hope. We've got to let God define what those things are. Those aren't just empty terms that we get to fill with whatever meaning we think is best, or whatever makes us the most comfortable. It's kind of like if you ordered a piece of pizza from Chicago, and you ordered a piece of pizza in New York City, those are not the same thing. Right? You can use the same terms for things you can call them the same things, but they're not always referring to exactly the same thing. So when we're talking about things like love, and good and evil and hope, we need to understand how it is that God has said those things before us. That's one thing. Another thing to remember, though, is this at any, any attempt to embody these things, or live into these things, even if that is a good attempt, but to do it apart from Jesus Christ really is an exercise in futility. Because you end up having to become your own savior, and you end up becoming responsible for making all things new. And none of us can do that. These are the characteristics that become impossible burdens for us. If we think it's all about doing it just on our own power, they actually deepen the problem because they try to make us the solution. So any community that claims to embrace or pursue these virtues apart from Jesus Christ, according to Scripture is what we could call a counterfeit community because even if it has very memorable slogans, and punchy taglines has no real foundation under it. It ultimately doesn't have the content that it needs. If it's just built upon us and our own good intentions. It has to be built upon Jesus Christ and His gospel. The other one is the mirror image of that, right the opposite. It's the kind of community that embraces Jesus Christ, but rejects these characteristics. And there are a lot of people who profess Jesus Christ but don't embody this vision they're not even willing to try to do so. We know this is sadly true a lot of people who would be ready or willing to denounce the sin that they see in this world and call people to faith in Jesus Christ, and yet think that trying to live into any kind of a vision like this inherently betrays some kind of politically liberal social agenda. Paul, though, is just echoing a lot of the things that Jesus himself said in the Sermon on the Mount and one of the more powerful sections of that letter. One of the more powerful sections of that passage is in chapter seven, when Jesus Himself said, Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. And he speaks often about how the fruits of a tree will reveal where its roots are anchored. We're told in Galatians, five, that the fruit of the Spirit is things like love and joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self control. All of those things are

actually disgusting. This passage, all those kinds of characteristics are described in this passage, but a community that claims to believe in Jesus and yet shows no evidence of these characteristics, is also a counterfeit community. It could be one that is full of people who say, Lord, Lord, and you're not done yet they're not doing the will of our Father in heaven, who has told us what is good. Here's the danger. And here's the challenge for both of these things, both of them, isolate and separate love of God, from love for others. They both isolate and separate those things. The former seeks to love others without being first grounded in our love for God and the love that God has shown for us. The latter seeks to love God, while rejecting this call to extend a love to others, both of them divorce what Jesus himself united. When he said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength in mind, and love your neighbor, as yourself. So the character of a true Christian community, what makes it distinct from any of these counterfeit models is that it refuses to separate love of God from love of others, it refuses to separate them. Remember, we've talked about recently in this section, what we call the grammar of the gospel moving into this part of Romans, it's because, therefore, because God has brought us in the right relationship with Himself, therefore, we live in ways that bear witness to that you you heard that also in the assurance of pardon just a little bit ago, first, John, for beloved of God so loved us what we also want to love one another, it doesn't separate these things. As Christians, we don't steward the relationship in our lives well, because we're trying to earn God's love or we're trying to merit our place in his kingdom, or we're trying to usher in some period of social utopia by enacting the right policies, we steward the relationships in our lives well, because we have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, because we are being remade by His Spirit. Because we have an opportunity to bear witness to that through the way in which we live in love with one another, you see the difference there to see what makes us distinct. That's why this is not just a call to compassion or civility or respect in the abstract. There are a lot of those out there. But this is about the specifics of what we do because of what God has done for us. It's a portrait of what life should look like when it is transformed by God's grace and anchored in Jesus Christ. And the call was to go and live this out. That's what it is if you if you were just to take this passage on its own. Again, if you just divorced it from everything else pulled it all out of its context, if you just took a passage like this, you might be tempted to think that it is a naive or impossibly idealistic view of the world, therefore, it's not even worth your effort. On the other hand, you might be tempted to think that you can create these things and nurture these things, as long as you try hard enough, and that if everyone else did the same, then everything would be better. But neither one of those are responses that are actually grounded in the Gospel. And we need to say this again. And again, and again, because we so often forget it. The Gospel says, You cannot heal the deep brokenness in your own life, or in this world, just by trying harder to be nicer. That might produce a superficially shiny veneer for a little while. But real heart change, real world change we could even say, can only come when the Spirit unites us to Jesus Christ, by grace, through faith, transforming our hearts, and our minds, and our lives. And the Gospel says these are impossible ideals, if it were up to you to create them and maintain them on your own. But that's not how it works. You've been redeemed by Jesus Christ, you're being renewed by His Spirit, so you can go and pursue these things. So go do it. I suppose getting out in this particular section. Yet, it's pretty clear. But the implications are very, very significant. I saw a story in the news, Alaska this past week. Some of you may have seen this, about Charles Dickens, Charles Dickens is you know, he's most famous for his classic novels, like a tale of two cities or Oliver Twist. He was also famous, because he kept a lot of notes and journals, full of this really unusual kind of personal shorthand. That's a little example of it up there. It doesn't make any sense. That's not a blurry picture. There's aren't real symbols. He just had his whole Personal System of notes that he kept and nobody ever understood what they meant or how to decipher them. The most famous of them was this letter that he wrote in 1859, called the Tavistock letter, and it's been kept in a museum for the past few decades. But some company recently decided to put out a challenge. And they said, if anybody can decipher this, there's a small monetary reward for it was a guy named Shane bags, who admitted that he'd never read anything that Dickens wrote, but he's a computer technician support guy, and he's deployed some coding principles to it. He was able to

figure a lot of this out just recently. So we've had, you know, 163 years of suspense, and what does it say? And what does it mean, and what a Dickens leave behind here? And the contents are pretty, pretty underwhelming. Right? It turns out that he just kept a personal copy for his own records of a letter that he wrote into the newspaper saying that they were wrong to reject this one advertisement and they should run it again the next day. That's all this is. After 163 years of what does this letter say? What's it all about? It's that's all it is. Right? pretty underwhelming, right? Paul's letter here we can see it is not written in some kind of mysterious code that nobody can decipher. What is Paul getting out? What is this say? He wrote it I think as clearly indirectly as he can. But what he did have to say has far more significance. And just which advertisements a local printed press should or should not run his letter presents the gospel, and then the template of the lives of those who have been transformed by the gospel. This is what I want us to remember as we go out from this place, because look, tomorrow, we're not going to all be here together like this, we know that. Some of you will be reading syllabi. Some of you will be changing diapers or lecturing students or treating patients or managing projects, cleaning homes or sitting in meetings, maybe you'll be drafting blueprints or cooking meals, revising policies, or enjoying your hobbies, or even just volunteering our time, we're not going to be together just like this. But still, we are called to hold fast to what is good, and to bear witness to the new identity that we have in Christ in all the places that God has called us to be because that is the character of Christian community. Let's pray together. Eternal and ever present God give us new eyes with which to see your world. Give us new hearts with which to love You and to love the neighbors with whom you surrounded us. Give us energized and steadfast hands to serve you by living and loving in ways that bear witness to the saving death of our risen Lord for it's in his name we pray. Amen.