



First Presbyterian

ROME

Embracing Agape – part 2

I. Scripture Lesson

Romans 12:14-21 (ESV)

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰To 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.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

II. Introduction

“Since the early 2000s, Gallup has tracked American’s views on the moral acceptability of various issues and behaviors. The overall trend clearly points toward a higher level of acceptance of a number of behaviors that the Bible clearly condemns. In fact, Gallup notes, the moral acceptability ratings for eight of the 19 issues measured since the early 2000s are at record highs.”

- Joe Carter, *On Most Moral Issues Americans Are More Permissive Than Ever*

“If a religion isn’t different from the surrounding culture—if it doesn’t critique and offer an alternative to it—it dies because it’s seen as unnecessary...The early church surely looked like it was on the ‘wrong side of history,’ but instead it changed history with a dogged adherence to the biblical gospel.”

- Tim Keller

III. Big Idea

The centrality of love in the Christian life arises out of the Gospel and sets the stage for interactions with the world around us.

- Response of Blessing
- Response of Mutual Respect
- Response of Forward-Thinking Faith

IV. Response of Blessing

“It was Jesus himself who first enunciated this demand of the kingdom, and there is good reason to think that Paul deliberately alludes here to Jesus’ own saying...Jesus’ command that his followers respond to persecution and hatred with love and blessing was unprecedented in both the Greek and Jewish worlds.”

- Douglas Moo, *Romans*

“He extended his hand to me, and grasping mine firmly and looking right into my eyes, said, ‘My son. I hope you will soon be well.’ If I lived a thousand years I shall never forget the expression on General Lee’s face. There he was, defeated, retiring from a field that had cost him and his cause almost their last hope, and yet he stopped to say words like those to a wounded soldier of the opposition who had taunted him as he passed by! As soon as the general had left me I cried myself to sleep there upon the bloody ground.”

- Long/Wright, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee*

V. Response of Mutual Respect

“Democratic societies require the free exchange of ideas among a populace willing and able to make informed judgments about them. But if we fail to engage in the rational examination of ideas and seek instead to work our will through vilification and personal attack, the democratic process is subverted. We become less able to see the strengths and genuine weaknesses of alternative viewpoints...Emotionalism usurps reason; can’t and prejudice prosper — and democracy suffers a death of meaningful social dialogue.”

- Christopher B. Kulp

“Paul’s wording here suggests not so much a plea for Christians to ‘think the same thing *among* one another’ but to ‘think the same thing *toward* one another.’”

- Douglas Moo, *Romans*

1 Peter 3:15

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

VI. Response of Forward-Thinking Faith

“If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence – that God would not be worthy of worships...the only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God...my thesis that the practice of non-violence requires a believe in divine vengeance...”

- Miroslav Volf, Yale University

VII. Conclusion
