



LETTERS TO THE CHURCH [ROMANS 12]

Paul opens the final section of Romans by pushing back on the common view that Romans 1-11 is pure theology and 12-16 is 'practical application.' Instead, the whole letter is framed as one continuous story of God renewing and restoring all things through Jesus and the Spirit. With that lens, Paul's call in 12:1-2 to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice and be transformed by the renewing of our minds isn't a new topic, but the natural outworking of everything argued in chapters 1-11.

Paul then turns to the church as one body with many differently gifted parts (vv. 3-8), warning against both pride and undervaluing one's own role. The heart of this passage centers on verses 9-10, where Paul instructs the church to love one another with 'storge' affection — the kind of natural, familial love typically reserved for biological family. Drawing on C.S. Lewis's four loves and Tim Keller's teaching, the sermon argues this means loving fellow believers non-selectively, non-privately, and non-safely. A survey of Scripture's repeatedly broken biological families (from Cain and Abel through Absalom) — and Jesus's own redefinition of family in Mark 3 ('whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister') — argues that the church is meant to function as the new family.

The final 11 verses are Paul's rapid-fire instructions on hard work, hope, patience in suffering, prayer, hospitality, blessing persecutors, shared joy and grief, humility, and overcoming evil with good. These are distilled into three community-wide invitations: radical generosity (inside and outside the church), radical relational intimacy (primarily within the community but also beyond it), and radical formation through shared spiritual practice. The recurring emphasis throughout is that nearly all of Paul's instructions in this chapter are written in the second person plural — this is a call to a 'y'all-type' of community, not simply a set of individual dos and don'ts.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Romans 12-16 is not just 'practical application' tacked onto Romans 1-11's theology. How does understanding Romans 12 as a continuation of God's larger story of restoration — rather than a separate to-do list — change the way you read Paul's instructions in this chapter?
2. Paul says love among believers should look like 'storge' — non-selective, non-private, non-safe. Which of those three feels hardest for you personally, and why?
3. The sermon traced a long line of broken biological families through Scripture and points to Jesus redefining family in Mark 3. Where have you experienced the church functioning as this kind of new family — and where has it fallen short of that call?
4. Of the three community take-aways (radical generosity, radical relational intimacy, radical formation in spiritual practice), which one do you sense this group is currently living out well, and

which one needs the most attention right now?

5. Romans 12:14-21 calls believers to bless persecutors, live at peace where possible, and overcome evil with good. Is there a current relationship or situation in your life where these verses feel especially difficult to apply? What would it look like to take one concrete step toward that this week?