

Bible Study & Sermon Notes - August 20, 2026

Sunday August 30, 2026

14th Sunday After Pentecost: Romans 12:9-21

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Marks of the True Christian

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly;^[a] do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God,^[b] for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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After describing in detail what the new life in Christ is, Paul gives specific instructions that will be visible marks of a true follower of Christ. From these counsels, two themes emerge. First one is that Christians are to manifest genuine love, and the second are the obligations that one has towards our enemies.

Hank Langknecht¹ commentary to this passage says that this section of Romans comes across as a collection of proverbial or catechetical instruction. The words *love* and *hate* draw our attention and give some sense of organization, though it is more intuited than heard in the reading. Those who have been hearing the continuous reading of Romans

over the last several weeks may recognize that this way of “genuine love” is possible for us because we are redeemed sinners—whether we are Jews or Gentiles. Redemption rather than election or adoption is the ground for our discipleship. That is to say, the law here functions as gracious instruction, not requirement for salvation.

He continues to say that living sacrifice is a wonderful oxymoron. In the context of Temple worship, sacrificial victims die; we have died in baptism, have been resurrected, and live as echoes of the lamb who, though slaughtered, reigns. Congruent with the sacrifice metaphor is the call to present our bodies, an invitation to consider that we are talking about a spirituality of the whole of our beings. The invitation to be moved from conformation to the world toward transformation and renewal is not an invitation for us to focus on our lives in and of themselves. Rather, we trust that by being in the right places at the right times—the places where God has promised to be—God will transform. This “presenting” of ourselves might therefore be accomplished through the classic disciplines of the church (almsgiving, fasting, prayer) or their contemporary extensions (service, worship, daily devotion). This is hope for renewal on a different scope than simple resolutions or promises to do better because here the hope is not that our resolve will hold but that God’s resolve will hold.

This list of “to do’s” as described by Nancy Lammers Gross², are in many worship traditions as a litany of “charge” –a charge to the congregation to go out from worship and do the works of God’s love and mercy: rejoice, be patient, contribute, be hospitable, bless, live in harmony, and more. While we may not enjoy every one of these dimensions of faithful living, we can make sense of them according to the gospel logic of love. These are the ways we are called to exercise our gifts.

- Minister, tend the flock with genuine love; do not tolerate evil.
- Teach in love with mutual affection.
- Exhort one another with honor; in fact, seek to go above and beyond in showing honor as you exhort one another.
- Do not lag in zeal in your generosity.
- Be passionate in spirit as you serve the Lord.
- In your compassion, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.
- Prophecy without claiming to be wiser than you are.

She continues saying that the message is clear: **Present** ourselves as a living sacrifice to God; **choose** to be transformed; **discern** or test what is the will of God; **exercise** the gifts given for the ministry of Jesus Christ. How do we do all this? Read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

We should notice then that these exhortations or “to do’s” list is not for inner-Christian behavior. These are catechetical instructions foundational for Christian ethics. It is the “how we will live” in the world.

The discussion of the passage will guide us to ponder the following questions:

- What does belief in Jesus have to do with how Christians live?
- How do we figure out the will of God and then how do we do it?
- How does our faith show the relational nature of faith?
- In the context of our collective worship, how does it send us out to serve?
- What does it mean in everyday life to renounce the powers that defy God and rebel against God?

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- 1 Hank Langknecht, Sundays and Seasons, New Proclamation Day Essays
 - 2 Nancy Lammers Gross, Arthur Sarrell Rudd Professor of Speech Communication in Ministry, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey