

Love God By Loving One Another

DARRELL DELANEY

The Christian faith we are called to has always had two branches: Loving God and loving neighbor. We love God because he first loved us; we love neighbor inspired by the powerful example of how God loved us. But how do you do that in practical ways? In this episode of *Groundwork*, we are going to look at one of the ways the Apostle Paul describes in the last few chapters in the book of Romans. As we wrap up this series, we will find ways to show love and appreciation for God by loving one another as well. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in the final part of our six-part series on the book of Romans. It has been quite a journey to go through this book. It has been great to see the movements patterned after the *Heidelberg Catechism*: You've got misery, you've got deliverance, you've got service. In the first one, we talked about how sin has been brought into our lives, and we actually need to be justified and set free and forgiven; and then in the second part, we see the deliverance that happens in God's grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus—the great chapter of Romans 8; and then, starting with a previous episode in this six-part series, Darrell, we moved into, as you said, the service or the gratitude...the *now what* section of Romans...now that you have been saved, now what? In Romans 12 and 13, we saw the need for transformed minds, not conforming to the pattern of the world, submitting to the governing authorities, treating all of our neighbors with love, love, love; that is the summary of the whole law, Paul says.

Now, we are going to move into Chapters 14, 15, and 16. We will spend most of this episode in 14 and 15, and we see how Paul wraps it up in 16; and again, this is now ways by which we have to continue to live with each other as changed people.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, picking up in Chapter 14, it says: Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁵One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives for ourselves alone and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both

the dead and the living.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Paul is making a distinction, Scott, between strong and weaker believers. The strong believers can eat the meat; the weak believers are eating vegetable only. The issue isn't to eat or not to eat, the issue is they are judging each other because of that; and we need to understand that he is teaching that if you are a stronger Christian, out of love, you can choose not to eat meat for your weaker brother or sister; and this is not a salvation issue. So, there is room for difference here, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In theology classes in seminary, you sometimes hear the term *adiaphora*, which kind of means *indifferent*. Paul sees a lot of things as essential—things that are salvation specific: Jesus having come in the flesh; he died; he rose again. These things are essential to the faith; but there are a lot of things, Paul says, that are just kind of indifferent. They are an in-between category. *Adiaphora*—things indifferent. What views you take on these marginal matters, we could call them...these peripheral side matters...well, maybe it depends a little bit on your sophistication or he uses the terms *weak* or *strong*, and Paul seems to say here that the people who know it is okay to eat meat are the strong ones and those who think: Oh man, that might be wrong, that they are the weak, that is Paul's call. The problem here, Darrell...there are two problems here: the first one is: Nobody ever wants to be told: Oh, you are the weak one, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

Scott Hoezee: No, no, no; I am the strong one; you are the weak one. So, in practice, this can get a little dodgy.

DARRELL DELANEY

Also, he actually talked about stronger and weaker Christians over the issue of meat before in 1 Corinthians; and so, in Chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians he talks about the ones who are Jewish Christians, who have converted from Judaism; and he talks about the Christians who are Gentiles, who came from paganism and food sacrificed to idols. He addresses this and says:

⁹Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹²When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

See, that last line, he doesn't want them to fall. That is love in action. He will abstain from meat if he needs to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just respect the fact, if it is an indifferent matter...a marginal, non-salvation issue...respect them and don't tell them they are wrong; don't trip them up, you know; don't act like you are superior, like, well, I am smarter than you because I know it is okay to eat meat because idols are nothing and you don't know that, so ha; you know. No; give them respect. If you want to eat meat at home when nobody else is looking, fine; but in their presence say: You know what? I will eat vegetables with you because I love you, and it is not enough to fight over, right? This is not a big enough deal to fight over, and I don't want to trip you up. So, be loving; be deferential. Again, one issue here is that nobody wants to be the weaker party, right? So, that can get a little dodgy if you actually use that language in the church today. The other thing that gets a little dodgy is what is an indifferent or marginal issue? Paul is using meat and some other things here, or paying attention to certain sacred days, Paul says. The problem is that every once in a while, what I think is a matter of indifference the other person thinks is actually essential. So, in practice, this can get a little bit complicated.

DARRELL DELANEY

It does, in the body of believers who are diverse and have different ideas; and it meets the road as well, especially like if we hang out and interact with other Christians like, let's say you have a different political view than I do...you voted for a different candidate than I did...how do we bridge that gap and remember our unity is in Christ alone, and not... We don't need to be divided by things that are not salvation issues. How do we keep the main thing the main thing?

SCOTT HOEZEE

The main thing is love. I mean, we saw that in Chapter 13 in the previous episode of this series on the letter to the Romans, Darrell. Love; and if you love somebody, then when you are with them, you don't want to mess them up; you don't want to tempt them to do something that violates their conscience, even if you think it shouldn't violate their conscience, it does. So, go with it...go with the flow, Paul says. I mean, sometimes going with the flow is a bad thing, but when it is in service of love over something that is not a big enough deal to fight over because it is not a salvation issue, just show love...show a little deference...be a servant to the other person. That is what Paul is saying here in Romans Chapter 14, but we want to go to Romans 15 next, and we will do that in just a moment, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; well, Darrell, we are in the middle of a deep conversation Paul is having in this letter to the Romans. Now that we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus, we have been justified, right? There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; nothing can separate us from the love of God; we live with a renewed mind by the Holy Spirit; love those around you even when you disagree with them over something that isn't a big enough deal to fight over, love them. So, don't go around in life, you know, acting superior to anybody; be a servant to all.

DARRELL DELANEY

And there may be situations where there are weaker Christians around you, but that is not an opportunity to be prideful...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is an opportunity to show humility. The world would tell you to judge that person; the world would tell you to ridicule and make fun of that person; but that is not the way of Christ, and that is not the way that we are called to live, especially when Paul makes this clear in Romans 15.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ²Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. ³For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." ⁴For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. ⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed ⁹and, moreover, that the Gentiles

might glorify God for his mercy.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see in this scripture passage, Scott, the theme of serving and accepting our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We serve them for their benefit, not for our benefit, just like Christ served us for our benefit and not for his. So, we are called to live in the example. I love when Paul says: Do it because Christ did it for you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Don't do it because you want to look good, or don't do it because you think you are going to get something back; but no; you do it because Christ has shown you love and served you for your benefit, and that is our example...Christ is our example in that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you know, it is sort of what Jesus did in the upper room in John's Gospel, where he washes their feet. Jesus says: See, I have left an example—I have left you an example. Really, Jesus said that his whole ministry. I mean, he didn't always say it in so many words, but every time Jesus was kind to a prostitute, reached out to an outcast leper, healed somebody, he could have said every time: I have left an example—I've left you an example—I've left you an example—be like me—be like me. That is what Paul is saying. Jesus is our example. He accepted you when you were totally unacceptable. If he could do that for you, you can turn around and do likewise, right? That shows that you get it, that you get it, you get the gospel. So, be like Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we do that by the power of the Spirit and not in our own ability. It just reminds me of, you know, just as an example, I think about when my daughter wants me to do a story time with her before bed, and she picks the same book every single time; and I say: Not this book. You want to read this other book? No; she wants to read the same book. We have read this book 1,395 times, and yet, she loves to see this book and hear this book and the stories in it; and I don't do that for my benefit, I do it for her benefit. She enjoys the book; she enjoys the time we have together; and that is the idea, to be able to serve for the benefit of the other person; and that is something that Paul picks up in Philippians, too, when he says: ^{2:3}Don't do anything out of selfish ambition or conceit, but consider in humility others better than yourselves. And he brings it practical in this passage, where...let's just say, you brought out your prize-winning pot roast and you were ready to have dinner, and your neighbor you invited says: Oh, wait; we don't eat meat...I am sorry; I cannot eat that; and they feel convicted about it. Now, you could, in anger, judge them or you could be critical or you could love them by saying: Oh, no; we have other options for you. That is what Christ has called us to do, to do that as a benefit for the other person and serve them in love.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You should always keep some tofu on hand, I say, because you never know when you might need it, but that is exactly right. You serve each other. You don't judge each other; you don't make fun of each other; you don't criticize each other, especially, again, as we saw in Romans 14 in a previous part of this program, especially when it is something that, finally, is not that big a deal. At the end of the day, is this worth fighting over? And most of the time, you know what? When you ask yourself that question, the answer is no, it is really not worth fighting over. Let it drop, you know. The Greek word for forgiveness—that includes in the Lord's Prayer, you know: Forgive our sins as we forgive... It literally means to just let something drop. It means to release...release it. Let it drop, you know.

You talk about kids and reading stories over and over, how many times do we have to say to our kids sometimes: Just let it drop, you know; just forget about it now; just let it drop. Stop fighting with your sister. Just let it drop! The truth is, we have to say it to ourselves as adults a lot, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is true; and Paul knows that fellowship will break down if we are not able to love one another. If we continue to judge one another, if we continue to make the little things the big things, if we continue to hold our convictions as if they are the standard for everyone else to live by, we actually fall into what Jesus calls: Plank eye syndrome...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

We have what we think our way is the best way, and we think someone else's way is not very healthy; and God is calling us to make the non-salvation issues as unimportant and not central; and he is calling us to keep Christ's example as the one that is central.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now, as we round out here in Romans 15...we are going to look in Romans 16 in the final part of this program...Paul turns to some more practical matters. We mentioned in the very first episode of this series that Paul had never been to Rome. He had been trying to get there for years, and every time he tried to get there, the doors seemed to close. So, he writes here in Romans 15, as this letter is coming in for a landing, that he is still planning to come to Rome: ²³But now, there is no more place for me to work in these (other) regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, ²⁴I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

So, he goes on to say what his travel plans are. This doesn't fully work out either. Paul, as near as we can tell, never does make it to Spain. He does make it to Rome, only after a shipwreck happens, as we read about it at the very end of Acts, right? The ship that he is traveling on goes down. He ends up washed up on the island of Malta, but from there, he is able to get a lift to Rome. He eventually gets put under arrest, kind of house arrest in Rome, and he never leaves. He never does get to Spain; he never gets out of Rome again. They let him preach for a couple of years, and finally, I don't know, some authority figure, or maybe some new Caesar came along...it is not totally clear...but they hauled him out of town one day and lopped off his head. But he does...he does make it there, and you know, we are really thankful for that, because he has such genuine love for these people.

DARRELL DELANEY

Paul is making it clear that even though he is miles and miles distanced away from these Romans, that he is spiritually connected to them. So, he wrote this letter before he was able to even get to them, but he wanted to show that he loved that they were showing their love for Christ; and he wanted to help them to grow deeper as disciples in Jesus, and so, he wrote this letter to go before him; and we accept the fact that this letter is still speaking to us today. So, as we wrap up this episode with Chapter 16, we are going to talk about some practical implications. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and we are wrapping up our six-part series on the letter to the Romans. This has been a great, great series, Darrell; and we have really...again, as we have often encouraged people, you know, read the whole book of Romans in conjunction with this radio series and this podcast series, because we barely scratched the surface; but it has been great to hit the highlights. Now, we are going to come to Chapter 16, and what is very interesting about Romans, Darrell, is that, and I think we said this in an earlier episode, it is so easy to read Romans like it is a catechism or a theology book, right? Some of its theology is thick and it just kind of reads like a book, not a letter. In fact, we said that in an earlier episode. We usually call it the *book* of Romans. No, it is a letter—it was a letter—and as Paul concludes this, he reminds us of that.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, he is actually going to be able to greet his people and his friends and those who are partners in the gospel, and he starts with this: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. ²I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then he goes on, and we get this list...almost two dozen names. We won't read them all, but we just... Then he says: greet, greet, greet, greet...³Greet Pricilla and Aquila... ⁴Greet the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus... ⁶Greet Mary... ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia... ⁸Greet Ampliatus... Urbanus, Apelles, the house of Aristobulus... ¹¹Greet Herodion... Narcissus... Tryphena and Tryphosa... ¹³Greet Rufus...

And he goes on and on: ¹⁵Philogogus, Julia, Nereus...Olympas... almost two dozen names, and what is so interesting is this reminds you this is a letter. These are the people who Paul had before the mind and the eyes of his heart as he wrote this whole thing. He wrote it all in love to people he knows by name and loves.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when I was younger, they used to have DJs on the radio, and there would be a time where you could actually call into the station and you could shout out people who you knew; and so, there would be friends on who would get on the radio and shout out the friends' names and loved ones, and things like that; and then when you got to school the next day, the buzz would be: Did you hear your name on the radio? Somebody shouted you out. And so, it is really cool to see that the person who is shouting the name out...it is not just a list of names for that person, it is people they care about...people they are friends with...people they are actually connected to. Reverend Fred Craddock, in his sermon called: *When the Roll is Called Down Here*, he talks about this very passage, and he says: Don't call this a list, because it wasn't a list for Paul. These are real lives, real people who are connected to him in the Spirit, and they are special to him; and I have people who are in my life that I consider role models that I would put on my shout-out list if I would, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we can talk about that in a moment. This reminds me a little bit, when at Calvin Seminary where I teach, when we began our distance learning program, where students would, you know, be on the computer and watch our lectures, we were told by an expert in distance education that when you record your video lectures that will go online, right behind the camera you use on your computer, put the picture of a loved one. Put a picture up of your wife, your son, your daughter, your grandma...put a picture of somebody you love, so that when you look at the camera, you can look past it and it personalizes it. You are talking, not just to a dead camera lens, you know; you are talking to the people. You know, during the pandemic and the lockdown, we saw this, too, right? Where pastors had to preach to empty churches for a while...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

During the COVID lockdown; and some of them started to put blowup pictures of the congregation right where they always sat so that they were looking at the people. For Paul, this whole letter...these were the people who were just beyond his line of sight: Rufus and Tryphena and Tryphosa and Mary and Olympas. These are the people whom he loved and he wanted to do a shout-out for.

DARRELL DELANEY

I actually...I would consider it to be an exercise if you could take a list of people...maybe ten names...the people who are special to you. Like for me, I mean, I could say my first spiritual mentor is Dr. Ron Frieson; and Rev. J. R. Pitman is one; and my friends: Al, Glen and Andrew; these are people around me... Of course, my parents, but they actually would be in my shout-outs because they are people who are connected to me;

they are who helped me to keep my faith; and I pray that I am an encouragement to them as well. I know you have people, Scott. You are also on my list of people, as a co-host here. I have seen how you help people to be trained to be preachers as well. So, there are a lot of people on the list. I could go on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There are; and you would definitely be on my list, as was your predecessor on this program, Dave Bast, with whom I worked on *Groundwork* for many years. Friends and pastors I have had, like Lew Vandermeer or Dale Cooper; Neal Plantinga, and my best friend and mentor whom we lost a couple of years ago, Wally Bratt. These are the people who form us and shape us, who taught us how to love. People to whom you and I preached when we were pastors of the regular congregation week after week. These are the people you see, even as those were the people who Paul saw there in Rome. It is just a reminder, again, Darrell, that the gospel is never just about dry theology, right? It is never about facts and, you know, the Bible isn't an encyclopedia of doctrine, or a dictionary or something like that, or a glossary of terms. No; the Bible is a story...it is a story to the people God loves...and all of the letters in the New Testament, not just Paul's letters, but John's letters and Peter's letters, and James' letter...you know, they are all to real, living, breathing saints who care for each other. So, when Paul wrote all those things that we have looked at in this program...this very episode...about loving each other, serving each other...these are the people he had in mind. You cannot do that in the abstract; you have to love, not just people, you have to love Mary; you have to love Joe; you have to love unpleasant neighbor Bill who can drive you nuts when his kids play their music too loud...you gotta love Bill. That is where the gospel hits the road.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful picture of... If you look at Paul's shout-outs in Chapter 16, you will see that there are different kinds of people. You have older people; you have younger people; you have males and females; you have singles; you have marrieds. It is just a diverse group of people who are intergenerational, and they are also, you know, Jews and Gentiles coming together. It is the Church; and Paul is showing that the gospel that he gave his life for, this is the Church of the new humanity with Jews and Gentiles coming together. There is no more male, there is no more female; there is no more slave, no more free; but the new humanity that is bound together by one Lord, one faith, and one gospel of Jesus Christ is the new humanity we are called to; and that is why he ends in worship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And indeed, as we end Romans here in Chapter 16, we end with a doxology...a doxological blessing from the words dox and logic, that means a glory word...a doxology is a glory word; and here is Paul's glory word that wraps up Romans: ²⁵Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith— ²⁷to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee; and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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